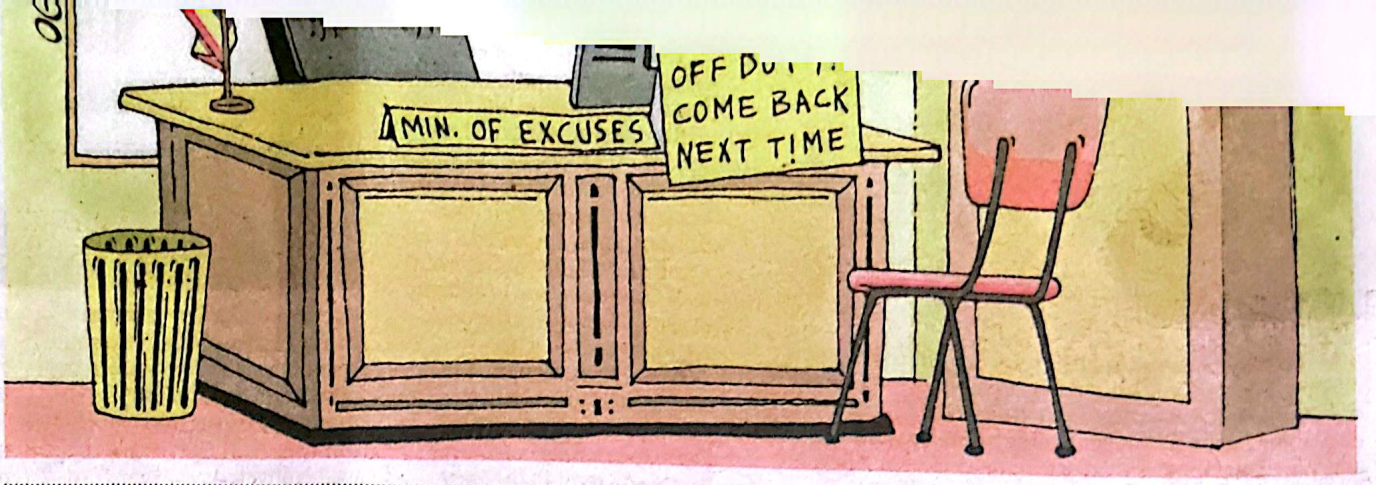


Race for Speaker: Restoring decorum, impartiality, and gravitas to the office

On January 4, 1642, King Charles I of England stormed the House of Commons with about 400 soldiers to arrest five Members of Parliament (MPs) he accused of treason. Sound familiar? As King Solomon said, there's nothing new under the sun! But unlike in the Uganda scenario, the speaker of the House of Commons, William Lenthall, stood up to the king without fear or favour. When the king demanded that the speaker disclose where the MPs were, the latter said, "I have neither eyes to see nor tongue to speak…except as the House directs."

In other words, he told the king: "I serve parliament, not you." That moment became one of the foundational statements of parliamentary independence. That single act established a crucial constitutional principle: The speaker serves the House, not the ruler or government. It became a defining example of institutional courage and neutrality that serious democracies expect from anyone who occupies the office of speaker.

Lenthall's refusal to budge caused public opinion to turn against King Charles I. The king was later tried for treason and hanged. Turning point! Today, the British monarch cannot enter the legislative chamber anyhow, just because they are king or queen. No way. When (in this case) the king arrives, once a year, at the State Opening of Parliament, the door is literally slammed in his face. His messenger, the Black Rod, must knock – three times – before it is opened. This is not drama; it is serious political symbolism - the Legislature asserting its independence. There is a reason the West – read the Whites – rule the world! They don't tolerate disrespect for institutions.

As debate hots up on who the next Speaker of Uganda's Parliament should be, this country must decide to grow up. After studying governance trends over the last 40 years, I say it is time to raise the bar. We've played with institutions much too long. The Speaker of Parliament must, of necessity, tick certain boxes, especially decorum, impartiality, independence, and gravitas.

> The Speaker of Parliament must, of necessity, tick certain boxes...
>
> Tegulle Gawaya Objection



Decorum: when the Speaker behaves poorly, Parliament begins to resemble a partisan battlefield rather than a deliberative body. People lose confidence in Parliament – they begin to see it as meaningless theatre. The Office of Speaker itself becomes diminished, even if the individuals temporarily benefit politically – and financially. We need to see self-restraint, measured speech, respect for opponents, and fidelity to institutions over personalities. We need to give the right example to our young people if we want this nation to grow.

Impartiality: once elected, the Speaker must rise above party politics, act with neither fear nor favour, and avoid fraternising with the Executive.

Independence means the Speaker doesn't take instructions from anyone; their core duty and focus is to maintain order, enforce rules, and ensure fair debate. Gravitas speaks to seriousness, dignity, and a sense of responsibility appropriate to high office. It can – and should – be seen at face value.

A Speaker damages the office when they weaponise their office against opponents, attacking them openly or manipulating behind the scenes, and/or behave like a party activist rather than a referee. In classical parliamentary tradition, the Speaker is supposed to behave like a judge in court. Ahem! Er…not Ugandan courts, it must be said!

In modern governance, in the Westminster tradition, there is a famous unwritten principle: "The office must always be bigger than the person who occupies it." That's why its occupant must respect it! And for good measure, the Speaker is one of the key diplomats of any country. They determine how seriously we are taken in the international community. So, the Speaker's chair is not merely a prize in a political contest; it is the guardian of the dignity and integrity of Parliament and our democracy. As a mathematical expression, therefore: unserious MPs = an unserious Speaker.

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On a more serious note, I'm pleased to announce that my novel *Fate Doesn't Even Blink* is now available on Amazon. The pricing is both democratic and strategic. Everyone can afford it – even King's College, Budo. But the Weevils of St Mary's College, Kisubi will buy at double the price, until they write their own. Busoga College, Mwiri… *oba* we'll arrange free copies? The cowherds of Ntare School need not bother – this is serious business, please.

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