

House Oversight



Uganda's main Opposition party, NUP, announced a sweeping reshuffle of its oversight team in Parliament, retaining Joel Ssenyonyi as the Leader of the Opposition. PHOTO/FILE

What next after Opposition names its House leadership?

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BY DERRICK KIYONGA

Details have emerged about how political players in Busoga Sub-region aligned with the National Unity Platform (NUP), Uganda's leading Opposition party, fronted Paul Mwiru to replace Joel Ssenyonyi as the incoming Leader of the Opposition in Parliament (LoP).

Weekend Monitor understands that the Busoga leaders were intent on their sub-region being rewarded for the strong performance it exhibited during the 2026 parliamentary elections that culminated in seven candidates being sent to the 12th Parliament, Mr Mwiru inclusive.

It remains unclear whether NUP's decision to retain Mr Ssenyonyi as the LoP while naming Mr Mwiru the Opposition's Chief Whip will assuage a sub-region that has hitherto endeared itself to NUP. This is after President Museveni named five ministers from the sub-region to his Cabinet for the 2026-2031 elective term.

Before, NUP had fronted Mr Mwiru for the House Speakership role in the 12th Parliament during Monday's vote in a move observers say set out to appease the Busoga that contributed only one legislator in Manjeri Kyebakutika (Jinja City Woman MP) during the 2021-2026 term. Mr Mwiru was soundly beaten by

the ruling NRM party's candidate, Jacob Markons Oboth, in Monday's speakership race after polling only 60 votes.

Speaking on condition of anonymity, leaders who are part of NUP's top brass told *Weekend Monitor* that it is easy to see why the party decided to continue hedging its bets on Mr Ssenyonyi in the LoP role.

"We couldn't change the captain of our team because he has been doing a good job," one of the NUP leaders said, adding: "It has been an obvious choice for us."

Ssenyonyi, again

NUP's choice to retain Mr Ssenyonyi now looks set to come under some level of scrutiny. Observers say the choice carries the danger of entrenching the view that NUP is a Ganda-based political party. The choice will also differ starkly from that of the Forum for Democratic Change (FDC) when it was Uganda's leading Opposition party from 2006 to 2016.

During that decade-long period, the FDC appointed LoPs from all four corners of the country. These included: Morris Ogenga-Latigo (Acholi), Nathan Nandala Mafabi (Bugisu), Wafula Ogutu (Samia), Winfred Kiiza (Bukonzo), and Betty Aol Ochan (Acholi).

Mr Ssenyonyi's strong hand, we understand, was fortified by his standing as part of Robert Kyagulanyi's inner sanctum. Mr Kyagulanyi, alias Bobi Wine,

currently exiled in the US, is NUP's principal. Sources familiar with the thinking within NUP's top echelons told this writer that there was an almost uniform satisfaction with Mr Ssenyonyi's performance.

This performance was gauged against that of his predecessor, Mr Mathias Mpuuga, who was let go after one term in office, after being stained by the so-called service awards that saw him and other former parliamentary commissioners—Solomon Silwany, Esther Afeyochan, and Prossy Mbabazi Akampurira—share Shs1.7 billion.

Mr Ssenyonyi, also the Nakawa West lawmaker, was also the first person to reveal that the same four commissioners secretly channelled another Shs400 million apiece (totalling Shs1.6 billion) to themselves, allegedly through the Parliamentary Savings and Credit Co-operative Organisation (Sacco). These latest claims were fiercely denied by Sacco management and parliamentary leadership.

Also, in his former role as the chairperson of the Committee on Commissions, Statutory Authorities and State Enterprises (Cosase), Mr Ssenyonyi led a heavily publicised probe into Uganda Airlines. His investigations—prompted by Auditor General reports—uncovered massive financial losses, procurement irregularities, and questionable executive appointments at the State-owned airliner.

The Cosase report detailed steep financial losses and recommended that both past and current executives be held accountable for flouting procurement regulations. The committee notably concluded that Jennifer Bamuturaki, the former chief executive officer of Uganda's flag carrier, was unfit for the role. Though Ms Anita Among, the House Speaker in the 11th Parliament, blocked the report from being debated, citing that the document had prematurely "leaked" to the public, Mr Ssenyonyi felt vindicated. This came after Ms Bamuturaki was fired by President Museveni earlier this year, citing alleged incompetence and corruption.

Running into speed bumps

Notwithstanding, Mr Ssenyonyi ran into speed bumps of his own during his tenure as LoP in the 11th Parliament. Critics say while his approach has not quite been akin to political grandstanding, it has lacked the rigour that Mr Mpuuga's detailed legislative agenda brought with it. The agenda illuminated issues such as electoral reforms, which Mpuuga had promised would be key, and they would channel their efforts towards passing the Constitutional (Amendment) Bill 2019 that was presented by Ndoorwa West MP Wilfred Niwagaba.

Mpuuga insisted that Uganda lacked what he called a clearly defined transitional procedure of both leadership and operations of government.

"It's only presumed under actions such as swearing-in and approval of appointments," Mpuuga's legislative agenda read, pointing out the need to curb the President's influence, more so during election cycles.

To cure such anomalies, the agenda wanted to resurrect the Presidential Transition Bill that was presented by former Buyikwe South legislator, Dr Michael Lulume Bayigga, in 2014.

Among other electoral reforms that the Mpuuga-led Opposition wanted to advance were provisions that would further guarantee the independence of the Electoral Commission (EC) through pursuing amendments that would ensure public selection of the electoral

body's members and commissioners through a process initiated by statutory bodies such as the Judicial Service Commission, Uganda Law Reform Commission, Uganda Law Society, and Law Development Centre.

During his first spell as LoP, Mr Ssenyonyi focused mainly on corruption allegations against the House leadership that emerged following the online Parliament exhibition propped up by activists. With Mr Mpuuga implicated for pocketing Shs500 million as a service award, Mr Ssenyonyi was among the NUP leaders who insisted that the former LoP be booted as a commissioner. Though Ms Among told Mr Ssenyonyi and the entire NUP leadership that it was not legally possible to get rid of Mr Mpuuga by just writing a letter, they still insisted that Mr Mpuuga was no longer a commissioner.

During his time as LoP, Mr Ssenyonyi wrote to the anti-graft government agencies such as the Inspectorate of Government, the Financial Intelligence Authority, the Office of the Director of Public Prosecution, and the Office of the Auditor General to investigate Ms Among, and the Clerk to Parliament, Mr Adolf Mwesige, on grounds that they were involved in the questionable expenditure of billions of public money for personal gains. Ms Among is currently under investigation but has always denied any wrongdoing.

Budgeting queries

Mr Ssenyonyi wasn't, however, spared in the corruption scandal after it emerged that he had requisitioned per diem of a five-day trip to Kenya's capital, Nairobi, totalling \$4,250 (Shs16.3m) and yet he was out of the country for one day. Mr Ssenyonyi seemed to have got himself out of the mess by quickly refunding the money, saying it had been irregularly allocated to him for his trip to Nairobi to see then ailing Kawempe North lawmaker, Muhammad Ssegirinya, who has since passed on, without his knowledge.

"I saw a reflection on my account. They had processed money for five [days] instead of one day, which I had indicated I was going for, but I was told they were processing for others," Mr Ssenyonyi said. "I was there for one night, so I shouldn't have been paid for five days. But the process was delayed, so the money wasn't deducted from the March 2024 emoluments, and I was told it would be deducted from the April emoluments."

Despite the vehement denials, the documents this newspaper got from the Speaker's office indicated that Ssenyonyi had requested to be away for five days. In a request to the Clerk by Ssenyonyi, a copy of which *Weekend Monitor* has seen, the Nakawa West lawmaker had requested \$4,250 and \$900 for a Business Class ticket. Having refunded the money, Mr Ssenyonyi was never reprimanded by his party like Mr Mpuuga was.

Yet with Parliament being accused of not just corruption but also wastage of taxpayers' money, the LoP's office has come into the limelight for having an annual budget to the tune of Shs4.2 billion. In his defence, Mr Ssenyonyi has repeatedly said he has no hand in the budgeting process.

"The Speaker controls the budgets of all departments and committees of Parliament. Even when committees have money budgeted for them, many times the money is used elsewhere by the institution and, therefore, not availed to the particular committee. Likewise, the LoP's budget is not under the LoP's control," he said.

GRAFT SAGA

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