

Petitioned. The meeting comes after nine NRM legislators petitioned the President over proposed amendment of Article 102(b) of the Constitution.

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Age limit: Museveni to meet NRM Caucus

PARLIAMENT. As the battle over the removal of presidential age limit shifts to Parliament's Legal and Parliamentary Affairs Committee, President Museveni will on Friday meet MPs of the ruling NRM in a party caucus meeting to discuss the subject.

The Caucus meeting comes on the backdrop of a petition by nine NRM MPs who have challenged Mr Museveni to convene the party's top organs, including Central Executive Committee, National Executive Committee, National Conference and other special organs to consider and adopt a common position on amending the Constitution to lift the age limit.

The nine MPs said their petition to Mr Museveni is supported by 27 other legislators of the NRM, highlighting the wedge that is widening in the party over the contentious proposal to amend Article 102(b) and delete presidential age limit to give Mr Museveni a chance to contest for presidency again in 2021 when he will have overshot the current 75-age ceiling.

Article 102(b) bars a person aged below 35 or above 75 from standing for president. Mr Museveni, now 73, will be ineligible to contest against in 2021 under the current Article.

Petitioners

The NRM MPs who have petitioned Mr Museveni are: Patrick Nsamba Oshabe (Kasanda), Monicah Amoding (Kumi District), Barnabas Tinkasiimire (Buyaga West), Felix Okot Ogong (Dokolo South), Mbwaterkamwa Gafa (Kasambya), John Baptist Nambeshe (Manjiya), Alex Ruhunda (Fort Portal Municipality), Theodore Ssekikubo (Lwemiyaga) and Dr Sam Lyomoki (Workers).

The Constitution Amendment Bill, spearheaded by Igara West MP Raphael Magyezi, has already been tabled in Parliament for first reading and referred to the Legal and Parliamentary Affairs Committee for further consideration.

The nine NRM MPs branded the decision by the government to leave the contentious Constitution Amendment Bill to a private member as "a vote of no

confidence" in the President and Cabinet, warning that it "is not only horrendous but unacceptable."

The Caucus meeting on Friday was initially set to be held today, but was deferred at the last minute as sources say the NRM Parliamentary Caucus leadership continued to try and convince Mr Museveni to attend the meeting.

The meeting will discuss facilitation for MPs who will traverse their constituencies to consult for views on removing the presidential age limits, the methodology the consultations will follow and the time the consultations will last.

The Government Chief Whip, Ms Ruth Nankabirwa, said she convened the Caucus meeting to discuss modalities on the consultations, but insisted Mr Museveni will not attend.

"I have called the caucus for Friday. We are just going to talk about how we are going to consult, within the time we are given and how are we going to carry out meaningful consultations," Ms Nankabirwa told *Daily Monitor*.

The Parliament commission will sit to determine how much money each MP will receive as consultation facilitation regarding the Constitution Amendment Bill.

However, impeccable sources familiar with the ongoing discussions on facilitation of MPs for the age limit consultations said the commission is considering giving each MP Shs20m.

"We are not going to discuss facilitation; Parliament is going to take care of that. That is baseless, at least I have not communicated to that effect. I can even invite you to that Caucus; I am not going to talk about money,"
RUTH NANKABIRWA, GOVERNMENT CHIEF WHIP

Sources within NRM have been talking of giving the party MPs additional facilitation, after a section of the legislators were reportedly unhappy with the contemplated Shs20m.

Ms Nankabirwa, who at a recent news conference, promised to adjust their membership in the Legal and Parliamentary Affairs Committee, now says "that is not going to happen".

The NRM Caucus vice chairperson, Mr Solomon Silwany (Bukholi Central), yesterday

confirmed the Caucus will discuss a proposal for MPs to conclude the consultations in two weeks and report back to Parliament.

"We cannot escape talking about the Constitution Amendment Bill. We want to agree on the timeline of the consultations. We want consultations to take two weeks and we report back to Parliament," Mr Silwany said.

Senior presidential press secretary Don Wanyama declined to comment about attempts to convince the President to attend the Caucus meeting, referring the inquiries to the NRM Caucus.

Ms Margaret Muhanga (Burahya County MP) could not confirm Mr Museveni's attendance of Friday's NRM Caucus.

"I am not sure whether he will attend. He does not usually attend Caucus meetings held at the Office of the Prime Minister. He has only attended the one where we elected leaders. He just came in, greeted members and left," Ms Muhanga said.

The Friday Caucus meeting will be the second regarding the removal of the presidential age limit after the first one which ended in acrimony with MPs opposed to the removal of Article 102(b) storming out amid rowdy scenes.



Meeting. President Museveni addresses an NRM Caucus recently. He is expected to meet NRM MPs on Friday. FILE PHOTO