

# THE STAGE MEDIA-LIBERIA

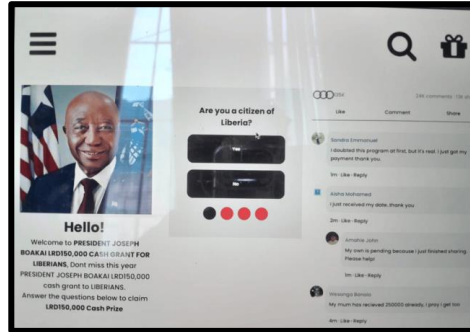
## NEWSLETTER - EDITION FOUR



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## Editor's Note

**The Stage Media (TSM)**, Liberia's first fact-checking media institution with the overarching vision of mitigating misinformation and disinformation was established in 2020 to tackle misinformation and disinformation while bringing to light untold stories of survivors and ensuring that the powerful and elites are held accountable.

With the wide spread of misinformation and disinformation across various social media platforms in Liberia, it has been an amazing journey providing verified content for Liberians over the last four years.

To ensure our fact-check cuts across every sector irrespective of educational background, our content with support from the International Fact-checking Network is translated into pidgin and aired on local radio stations in the counties. Those pidgin contents are also published on our YouTube channel and other social media pages.

**TSM** has promoted media literacy to enable citizens to become knowledgeable about the danger of information disorder to have the public participate in decision-making processes from an informed background. Also, we strongly believe that educating the public will make them verify content before sharing it on various social media handles.

At **TSM**, we believe that providing verified information to the public and having them participate in information verification improves accountability, good governance, respect of the rule of law, and promotes a responsible society.

In September, we published five explainers and eleven Fact-checks.

We urge you to always follow our social media pages and website to get verify content.





**Explainer:** No, Senate Pro Tempore Karnga-Lawrence did not suffer stroke

**Verdict:** False

**By:** Augusta Lafalay

On October 31, 2024, Gedehhard GHT Talkfm, an online news platform, reported that Senator Nyonblee Karnga-Lawrence, President Pro-Tempore of the Liberian Senate, had suffered a severe stroke and was in critical condition. The report claimed that doctors advised against moving her and that efforts were being made to medically evacuate her.

Karnga-Lawrence, a two-term Senator from Grand Bassa County, was reportedly in dire condition according to the platform's sources. The post received considerable attention, including 53 reactions, 104 comments, and 27 shares.

To verify the claim, TSM contacted Henry Karmo, the Public Relations Officer for the Pro-Tempore's office, who confirmed that Karnga-Lawrence was "okay" and only needed bed rest. Karnga-Lawrence herself later clarified that while she had felt unwell on the evening of October 30, 2024, she had visited the hospital for a check-up and her condition was stable. Her official Facebook page also posted a clarification, and her special assistant confirmed that she was unwell but not suffering from a stroke.

TSM's investigation concluded that the report by Gedehhard GHT Talkfm was misleading. Senator Karnga-Lawrence did not suffer a stroke, although she was unwell and had sought medical attention.



**Claim:** "Representative Clarence G. Gahr received a \$100,000 district development fund without holding a district meeting to discuss its allocation, undermining transparency and accountability."

**Verdict:** Misleadingly

**By:** The Stage Media-Liberia

D. Willie's Jomah, the communication director for a defeated representative candidate and current chairman of Lango Town Community, wrote an open letter to the U.S. Government alleging that Representative Clarence Gahr received \$100,000 for district development without holding a district meeting to discuss its allocation. The letter was addressed to various local and international organizations, including the U.S. Embassy and the French Embassy in Liberia. The post was later published by DN-NEWS Liberia, receiving 35 likes, 40 comments, and 7 shares.

TSM reached out to Nelson Tamba Walker, a political officer in Representative Gahr's office, to verify the claim. Walker clarified that the funds in question are allocated for district development projects, not for individual lawmakers. He also stated that the funds would be distributed through the Liberia Agency for Community Empowerment (LAC) and not directly to any lawmaker. Regarding the district meeting, Walker explained that Gahr had not yet received the district development funds, which is why no meeting had been called.

TSM's investigation revealed that Representative Gahr did not receive the alleged \$100,000 for district development, and the claim about him failing to organize a district meeting is misleading, as the funds had not yet been disbursed.

**Claim:** “The Supreme Court has placed a stay order on the so-called majority bloc.”

**Verdict:** Misleading

**By:** The Stage Media-Liberia



On October 25, 2024, Aloysius Howe claimed in a Facebook post that the Supreme Court had issued a stay order against the majority bloc in the House of Representatives, halting their proceedings in the removal of Speaker Fonati Koffa. The claim came amid ongoing efforts by 43 Representatives, led by Samuel G. Kogar, to remove Speaker Koffa. The post attracted 65 reactions, 117 comments, and 11 shares.

In reality, the stay order was issued by Yamie Quiqui Gbeisay, Jr., the Associate Justice presiding in Chambers of the Supreme Court, and not the full Supreme Court. The Justice-in-Chamber issued a directive for a conference on November 4, 2024, following a petition filed by Speaker Koffa for a writ of prohibition to halt the removal proceedings. A writ of prohibition is a legal instrument used to prevent or stop judicial proceedings.

According to the New Judicial Law of Liberia, the power to issue writs, such as prohibition, resides with the Justice presiding in Chambers, not the full bench of the Supreme Court. Cllr. Jimmy Saah Bombo explained that decisions made by the Justice-in-Chamber are not binding until reviewed and affirmed or reversed by the full bench of the Supreme Court.

TSM’s investigation revealed that the stay order was not issued by the Supreme Court but by the Justice-in-Chamber, and thus, the claim made by Howe is misleading.



**Explainer:** What we found in the claim that LDEA officers kill 22-year-old boy

**Verdict:** False

**By:** Augusta Lafalay

On October 16, 2024, Melisa Weefur shared a video on Facebook claiming that her 22-year-old son, Dennis Smith, was murdered by officers from the Liberia Drug Enforcement Agency (LDEA) and thrown into the water. She explained that on October 12, 2024, after leaving her son at home, she received a call from an LDEA officer about a raid. Weefur later learned from another officer that Dennis had been killed, and his body was later found with signs of head trauma. While the LDEA initially claimed he drowned, Weefur insists he was murdered.

The incident occurred near an unfinished building where Dennis and his friends gathered, often using drugs. Eyewitnesses stated that Dennis tried to escape by jumping into the water when LDEA officers arrived. His friends jumped in too, but Dennis struggled to swim and eventually drowned. The officers allegedly threw stones at those in the water.

An investigation by the Liberia National Police (LNP) is ongoing, but as of now, there is no official conclusion. The Ministry of Justice has called for a thorough inquiry into the incident. However, community members revealed that Dennis had used cannabis, which contradicted his mother's claims in the video that he did not use drugs.



**Explainer:** Who are the lawmakers behind Speaker Koffa's removal?

**By:** Hannah N. Geterminah

Stanton Witherspoon, the lead host of Spoon Talk, claimed that most of the lawmakers calling for the removal of Speaker Fonati Koffa were from the Unity Party. This claim was made during a special edition of the show on October 22, 2024, which aired shortly after a resolution to remove Koffa was introduced in the House of Representatives.

Witherspoon's statement suggested that the majority of those advocating for Koffa's removal were from the Unity Party, which is a prominent political party in Liberia. His claim was made in the context of a growing political conflict surrounding Koffa's leadership, following a resolution signed by 43 lawmakers calling for his ouster.

While Witherspoon mentioned the Unity Party, he did not clarify that the Unity Party includes not only its grassroots members but also those from allied parties, specifically the MDR. If the MDR members are counted as part of the Unity Party alliance, the total number of Unity Party-allied lawmakers supporting the removal of Koffa rises to 13, not just the 9 from UP itself.

Witherspoon's claim is partially correct but misleading because he failed to distinguish between the Unity Party's core members and its allies in the MDR. When including the MDR, 13 lawmakers from the Unity Party alliance support Koffa's removal, not the majority of the 43 lawmakers as Witherspoon implied. Therefore, while the claim is not entirely false, it is incomplete and lacks the necessary context to provide a full picture of the political dynamics behind the resolution.

**Explainer:** What we found on Koffa violating ECOWAS Protocol

**By:** Augusta Lafalay



The claim that Speaker J. Fonati Koffa "single-handedly selected" Liberia's representatives to the ECOWAS Parliament and falsely stated that an election occurred is substantiated.

Evidence shows that Koffa appointed representatives without holding the required election, as stipulated by the ECOWAS Protocol. His actions violated Chapter III of the protocol, which mandates elections to ensure representatives reflect the political diversity of the state.

However, this practice was not exclusive to Koffa. Previous Speakers, such as Bhofal Chambers, also made similar appointments without elections, establishing a precedent.

Critics, including lawmakers and analysts, highlighted discrepancies in Koffa's communication to ECOWAS, which misleadingly referred to an "election."

Thus, while Koffa's actions mirrored past practices, his claim of conducting an election misled ECOWAS and violated established international protocols.

**Claim:** “ArcelorMittal Liberia is seeking qualified and competent candidates for the position of Light Duty Driver (Phase II Project).”

**Verdict:** Correct, ArcelorMittal Liberia is seeking a qualified and competent light-duty driver at the company.

**By:** Ayeason Yeeba



**Claim:** Journalist Jallah Grayfield is receiving US\$700 from the House of Representatives every month.

**Verdict:** Correct,


**By:** Ayeason Yeeba

On November 7, 2024, journalist James Samuel Goodday Flomo posted on his official Facebook page that journalist Jallah Grayfield is receiving US\$700 monthly from the supplementary payroll at the House of Representatives, despite not being officially employed by the entity. Flomo challenged Grayfield to explain why he is allegedly receiving this money.

Grayfield has served in various public media roles, including Deputy Director General for Public Affairs at the Liberia Broadcasting System under President Weah's administration. He currently works as a talk show presenter at Voice of Liberia.

TSM (The Stage Media) sought to verify this claim by reaching out to Flomo, who provided information about the House of Representatives' payroll but did not share specific documentation. TSM also contacted Robert Haynes, Director of Communication for the House of Representatives, but was directed to the finance office for details. TSM reached out to Grayfield for a response, but he responded with insults, refusing to provide further clarification.

TSM's investigation confirmed that journalist Jallah Grayfield, along with another journalist, is indeed listed on the House of Representatives' supplementary payroll, receiving US\$700 per month, validating the claim made by James Samuel Goodday Flomo.



Nimba D-9 TV, an online television station based in Nimba County, posted on its Facebook page that ArcelorMittal Liberia, a mining company, is recruiting for the position of Light Duty Driver for its Phase II Project. The post included a link directing interested applicants to the company's online recruitment platform.

This claim was brought to the attention of *The Stage Media* (TSM) through a WhatsApp community member. To verify its authenticity, TSM contacted Gbatemah Success Kolee Senah via Messenger, who confirmed the post as legitimate and directed them to ArcelorMittal's official Facebook page.

Upon reviewing the official page, TSM found the exact recruitment announcement confirming that ArcelorMittal Liberia is indeed hiring for this role. The job posting was accompanied by a link to their online recruitment portal, further validating the claim's accuracy.

Based on verified information from ArcelorMittal's official Facebook page, Nimba D-9 TV's claim is accurate. The company is actively seeking applications for the Light Duty Driver position for its Phase II Project.



**Claim:** “LNP officers fight over seasoned pork at GSA Road Police Station.”

**Verdict:** Misleading

**By:** Augusta Lafalay

On November 7, 2024, journalist Lewis S. Teh and ViewNet TV reported a fight among Liberia National Police (LNP) officers over seasoned pork on GSA Road in Paynesville. This claim spread on social media but was later debunked.

TSM contacted Cecelia Clarke, LNP spokesperson, who clarified that the incident occurred on Duport Road, not GSA Road. The altercation involved a confrontation between a Police Support Unit (PSU) officer and a Paynesville City Police (PCP) officer, not over pork. The conflict arose from a jurisdictional dispute when the City Police attempted to arrest a motorcyclist, and a PSU officer intervened. The disagreement escalated due to confusion over authority, leading to injuries.

Jeremiah Dikken, Director of Communications for the Paynesville City Corporation, confirmed the details, stating that the PCP officers were enforcing parking ordinances when the incident occurred.

The claim about a fight over seasoned pork is misleading. The altercation was due to a jurisdictional dispute between City Police and LNP officers, not related to food.

## Explainer: What To Know About Koffa's Removal

**By:** Hannah N. Geterminah

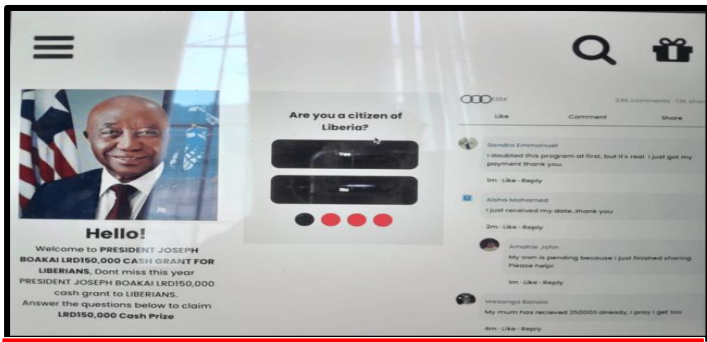


The William R. Tolbert joint chambers of the legislature, officially used for joint sittings and the State of the Nation Address (SONA), have become the center of contention in the ongoing battle over the removal of Speaker J. Fonati Koffa. Over 43 lawmakers, claiming a majority, have expressed a vote of no confidence in his leadership and now regularly meet in this chamber to conduct legislative business.

Journalists covering the legislature offer various perspectives. Gerald Koinyeneh, President of the Legislative Press Pool, describes the situation as a deadlock, with both sides claiming legitimacy. The majority block argues they meet quorum and should be able to conduct business, while Koffa's team insists that only a two-thirds majority, as stated in the rules, can remove him. Koinyeneh highlights that while a simple majority can constitute quorum, it cannot impeach the speaker.

Prince Mulbah, a legislative reporter, asserts that the majority block's move to hold separate sessions in the joint chamber undermines the speaker's legitimacy. Winston Blyden echoes this, suggesting that while past speakers were pressured to resign, Koffa may not easily concede due to his legal background.

Despite attempts by an ECOWAS delegation to mediate the crisis, the legislature continued to experience two separate sessions as of November 19, 2024, highlighting the ongoing political stalemate.



**Claim:** President Joseph Boakai L\$150,000 Cash Grant for Liberians.

**Verdict:** False

**By:** Augusta Lafalay

A link circulating in WhatsApp chatrooms claims that President Joseph Boakai is giving away L\$150,000 grants to Liberians.

The website linked in the claim asks people to click a button to "withdraw" the grant and provides a form to fill out. It also instructs users to share the link with 20 people to qualify.

The website displays an image of President Boakai and has gained significant attention, with 135k reactions, 24k comments, and 13k shares.

When examined, the website displayed a message saying "Congratulations! You qualify for President Joseph Boakai LRD150,000 Cash Grant for Liberians."

Clicking "OK" led to a form asking for personal information and sharing the link. A Scamdok search revealed that the website is untrustworthy, having been created only recently with an expiration date set for less than six months. Additionally, a Facebook post from the Executive Mansion debunked the claim.

This is a scam. President Boakai is not offering any such grant to Liberians. The claim is fake, and the website is not legitimate.



**Claim:** "Liberia hosts more than 40% of the remaining forest in West Africa."

**By:** The Stage Media-Liberia

On November 14, 2024, Emmanuel Urey Yakpawolo, the EPA Executive Director, stated during the BBC "Focus on Africa" program that Liberia hosts over 40% of West Africa's remaining forest cover. He emphasized that Liberia is uniquely positioned for climate adaptation and environmental preservation.

We contacted Paul Kanneh, lead focus person of the Liberia Forest Media Watch (LFMW), who confirmed that Yakpawolo's claim is correct. He stated that Liberia indeed holds about 40-41% of the Upper Guinea Forest, a critical forest ecosystem in West Africa.

Additional research confirmed that Liberia's forest cover is approximately 43% of the country's total land area, making it one of the most forested countries in West Africa. Liberia is home to a significant portion of the Upper Guinean Forest, a biodiversity hotspot.

Based on available data, the claim that Liberia hosts over 40% of West Africa's remaining forest is accurate. Liberia's forest cover is around 43%, making it a key player in the region's environmental preservation.





TO READ THE FULL STORIES GO TO OUR WEBSITE:



**ALSO IF YOU SEE A CLAIM AND YOU WANT US TO  
FACT-CHECK IT SEND IT TO +231 77 593 7658**

