

Majodina is ready to whip, dressed to kill

Lester Kiewit

She's loud, she's proud and she's the ANC's new chief whip in Parliament.

Pemmy Majodina, the former Eastern Cape public works MEC, was the surprise choice by the ANC's national executive committee (NEC) to replace Jackson Mthembu as the leader of the party's parliamentary caucus.

Her job is primarily to hold party discipline in Parliament and ensure the ANC MPs attend sittings, participate in committee meetings and vote according to party lines.

Those are tasks she says she's up to.

"No one knew who was going to be presiding in which position up until Monday. When they presented the names [at the NEC meeting] it was like a bombshell that was dropped on me. I froze a little bit because I understand what goes with the package of being chief whip," she told the *Mail & Guardian*.

Majodina returns to the parliamentary precinct after having served as a member of the National Council of Provinces between 1999 and 2004. She also has MEC portfolios of sport and social development under her belt.

Majodina will have to oversee a caucus that has often been accused of having the interests of Luthuli House — and not those of the country — at heart.

She reiterates the call by the ANC for renewal and to seek to restore the trust of voters in the party. The ANC



Headdress for success: Pemmy Majodina (centre) has been appointed the new ANC chief whip in the National Assembly. Photo: Esa Alexander/Sunday Times

got 57% of the vote in the general elections, its worst result in South Africa's democratic history.

"We must play our oversight [role] over the executive," she says. "Parliament on its own does not deliver services, those get delivered through Cabinet. And therefore you need strong chairpersons of committees, you need strong whips who understand the manifesto of the next five years."

In a Parliament where controversy continues to swirl around appointees with questionable histories — from allegations of ineptitude and corruption to murder — Majodina is not without her own controversial past.

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In 2015, the public protector found she had misappropriated public funds for travel and allowances on a trip to New York. She was forced to pay back about R15 000, but she did blame the incident on an oversight.

Majodina will have to square off with returning Democratic Alliance chief whip John Steenhuisen. He is known for his stinging heckling and sharp knowledge of parliamentary procedure.

Although they are opponents across the aisle in the National Assembly chamber, they will have to work together in the chief whips' forum. This sets the agenda for the parliamentary programme and the running of the legislature.

Majodina says she wants to change the tone of debate in the National Assembly from one of conflict to one of co-operation.

"I'm not looking forward to the battles, I'm looking forward to engagements ... When we tabled our manifestos we said we want to

improve the lives of our people for the better. So we expect that maturity of engagement, not toe-to-toe immature fights. But, politics is politics."

Steenhuisen says he was surprised by Majodina's appointment: "It was a very odd choice for the chief whip. I thought they missed a trick in Doris Dlakude, who has been the deputy to the last two chief whips and who would have made an excellent chief whip. But, I was wrong about Mr Mthembu. Hopefully, I'll be wrong about the new chief whip as well."

Majodina, who is known for her larger-than-life fashion, says she's ready to dazzle Parliament with her sartorial choices.

She says she will lay low for now but has some surprises in store for President Cyril Ramaphosa's State of the Nation address in June: "I'm known for portable fans and big hats. But the State of the Nation is still coming. We dress to kill! Watch this space!"