Call and Post Contributor Ike Mgbatogu holds conversation with State Rep. Barbara Boyd, Ohio House of Representatives, representing District 9

Ike Mgbatogu – Let me start by asking you to introduce yourself to our readers – your hometown, your background, the district you represent, and of course, whatever else you would like to say about yourself.

Rep. Boyd – My name is Barbara Boyd. I reside in Cleveland Heights, Ohio. I was born in Flori da
with a
West Indies
heritage. I was elected to public service in 1983, serving from 1983 to 2000, and then worked for the Department of Job and Family Services as the assistant to the director before running again for the House in 2006 and have been serving since then.

Mgbatogu – The governor recently signed the $55.8 billion bi-annual budget, cutting funding to education, local government, school districts, and others. What's your general take on the governor's budget?

Rep. Boyd – I serve on the Finance and Appropriation Committee of the House. I did not support the budget. It does harm to a number of people in my district and in the state of Ohio. I was there to vote against the budget.

Mgbatogu – Do you think that a Black person can win a U.S. Senate seat in Ohio?

Rep. Boyd – It is a possibility but I don't see it happening in the near future. The election of Barack Obama as president shows that the country is ready but it will be a difficult race in Ohio. But based on what happened in the presidential race, it is a possibility with the right candidacy.

Mgbatogu – Growing up, did you aspire to be a politician or did you consider going into a different career?

Rep. Boyd – I got my degree in elementary education from St. Paul's College in Lawrenceville Virginia in 1965. I am a not a politician. I am a public servant.

Mgbatogu – Outside of folks in your family, who would you consider your hero(s), living or deceased?

Rep. Boyd – I would say the president (Barack Obama).

Mgbatogu – Should Blacks do more to acknowledge and salute the life and work of Minister Malcolm X?

Rep. Boyd – Yes. I think that we have over the years, as we got to know Malcolm X better, people became more admirable around his vision. Some knew him more than others. As time evolved, we understood him better than we did at the time.

Mgbatogu – Have you been to Africa?

Rep. Boyd – No. I have not. I have a first cousin who lived in Nairobi (Kenya) for 47 years. Her name is Genevieve Shuma. Her husband (from Kenya) attended Syracuse University and she went back with him to Kenya.

Mgbatogu – It's been quite an interesting 100 days for Governor Kasich. During the campaign, he did say he would pursue some of the policies he is pursuing today and yet folks voted for him, including some who are now angry about his policies. Certainly, the governor did not get a huge mandate but he won. What's your reaction to that and what message do you have for the people of Ohio in the next election?

Rep. Boyd – Either they didn't listen to his [Governor Kasich] speeches or didn't understand it. We must get out and work the grassroots and the community to encourage people to come and reelect President Obama. We have to find someone willing to take on the big money that Republicans will put forward. It is important for us to get out and vote based on what we are now seeing in the state of Ohio (with governor Kasich).

Mgbatogu – Ohio law requires the state to set aside 15 percent of its contracts for minority

businesses. Recently, Kasich hinted he is thinking about raising that number. One thing is very clear. The goal of 15 percent is not currently being met. What should the administration do to meet that goal, which by the way wasn't met in the Strickland administration, either?

Rep. Boyd – During the Strickland administration, the Ohio Legislative Black Caucus insisted that every department provide a report card showing how they are meeting their obligations and follow the law. The governor insisted that (his directors) will have a report card, but nothing in government moves fast.

Mgbatogu – Governor Kasich appointed the first 23 members of his cabinet before naming one African American. That didn't sit well with you and the other Black lawmakers. But since then, he has named two African Americans to the cabinet, Michael Colbert in the Department of Job and Family Services, and Harvey Reed to run the Department of Youth Services. How would you assess the governor's mindset when it comes to question of inclusion and diversity?

Rep. Boyd – We have to see what the governor is going to do to maintain the diversity in his administration. I know of Governor Kasich, but I don't know him. We should have expectations of how he should govern. He has 3 and a half more years to serve as governor of Ohio. We should have expectations and be watchful. I have not spoken to the governor but have heard some of the things he said. I have spoken to the director of Job and Family Services but have not talked to the director of Youth Services. I fully intend to.