State Representative Vernon Sykes took the same view, saying that diversity “Is not important to him…

COLUMBUS – After swaggering into office as a tough talking governor a couple of years ago, it didn’t take long for the hawkish Kasich administration to collide with African-American lawmakers, a wreckage caused in part by questions over diversity.

And, in many respects, the relationship between both sides has remained frosty ever since.

A rabid Governor John Kasich deeply angered African-American lawmakers during the early days of his administration after appointing the first 23 members of his cabinet without naming an African American. These legislators fiercely assailed the governor for assembling a cabinet they complained was Whiter than an Idaho picket fence and called for a more inclusive citizenry representation in a state where 18.2 percent of its population is minority.

Apparently, some in the state had problems with these Black lawmakers badgering Kasich about his diversity shortfall.

One of them is a Medina area man, who unfortunately, expressed his beef over this the unlawful way, resulting in him recently landing in trouble. Last week, the man was charged with making threats against State Representative Sandra Williams, who is also the president of the Ohio Legislative Black Caucus (OLBC), a group that led the way in pestering Kasich for lacking diversity in his cabinet.

The man has been identified but his name was not made public as at press time. He allegedly made several haranguing calls to Williams' office and to her personal cell phone, kvetching about her group's activities in pillorying Kasich over the issue of lack of diversity in his cabinet. Williams reported the incident to police, telling them that the caller spewed harassing racial vitriol on the phone.

The Ohio Highway Patrol investigated the incident, which happened back in January, and recently filed charges of telephone harassment against the man.

Williams is pleased.

"I am relieved that this caller has been identified and will be brought to justice. The political climate has become too polarized," said Williams. "There is no room for intolerance in the democratic process."

But, for her and her colleagues in the caucus, there's also no room for marginalizing any group deserving involvement in the government and the political process.

Lack of diversity in Kasich's cabinet spurred fierce disapproving reaction from OLBC, which eventually succeeded in getting the governor to appoint two African-Americans: Michael Colbert with the Department of Job and Services and Harvey Reed at the Department of Youth Services.

"He [Kasich] was looking for the best and the brightest and through his view, no African American male or female came up to his idea of the best and the brightest," said State Representative Roland Winburn.

In a recent interview, Winburn told the Call & Post that “Women and minority people have the quality to be managers and directors.” He expressed disappointment that “initially [Kasich] didn’t think that people of color and African Americans were part of the best and the brightest.”

“He hasn’t been around or doesn’t seem to know that African Americans are capable of filling these jobs,” he said.

State Representative Vernon Sykes took the same view, saying that diversity “Is not important to him… it is not an issue with him. It doesn’t matter to him. We live in a representative Democracy. The quality of that Democracy depends on the quality of the representation.”