This is a conversation with State Rep. Alicia Reece, Ohio House of Representatives, representing District 33. She represents the 33rd district from Cincinnati, Ohio and has previously served as the Vice Mayor and City Council member for the city of Cincinnati from 1995 to 2005. Her skill set includes marketing and ad promotion. She also worked in her family's business several years back and served under the Strickland administration as the assistant director of Tourism for the state of Ohio, rebranding and marketing the state for Tourism.

By IKE MGBATOGU

Contributing Writer

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. Reece –The budget basically balances the budget on the backs of the middle class and other working poor. They are the ones who are going to absorb all of these major cuts, cuts in Daycare services, cuts in health care services. We also give a bad impression that Ohio is in trouble because everything is for sale, almost like a yard sale. We are privatizing prisons, selling it without given appraisals for what the prisons are actually worth. We are talking about leasing out the turnpike. So, all of our assets are at risk in this budget. It is just a bad budget.

Mgbatogu – Opponents of SB 5 will try to overturn the law in the November Ballot. How would you assess the chances of SB 5 being struck down by Ohio voters?

Rep. Reece – I think it has a strong chance of being repealed. I am confident that we are going to have a strong showing. It is a matter of turnout. But also understand that it's going to go up against big money. So you are going to have what I call David Versus Goliath [fight]. And I certainly think that the will of the people will prevail.

Mgbatogu – Governor Strickland lost the last election to Republican John Kasich by 2 percentage points. Strickland being the incumbent, that's rare. What happened? What went wrong? Why did the governor lose?

Rep. Reece – Turnout. Too many folks had gotten out in big numbers for the presidential race. We are still clapping our hands, understanding that the presidential race is important, but you also have to have your local government. And so the job didn't get done with turnout. We had a

lot of apathy, and quite frankly, folks are experiencing some hard times.

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. Reece – I think this is a wakeup call because you are right. Governor Kasich, when he was running, he told us exactly what he was going to do and he is doing it. So, I am not shocked about it. Citizens should not be shocked about it. I think it's a wakeup call. There were some who voted for the governor who are getting hurt right now and they are having a change of heart. And, then, there were some who did not come out and just stayed home and they are being affected. So, now, they know it's a wakeup call.

Mgbatogu – Ohio law requires the state to set aside 15 percent of its contracts for minority businesses. Recently, Kasich hinted he is thing 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. Reece – One, we got to look at having support from the top. That's number one. Number two, we have to look at what are the barriers. What are the barriers that are stopping us from getting to these numbers? I think we also have to expand beyond just construction. The third component is what I call personal and professional service contracts. These are the things that don't get out for competitive bids. For example, the gaming component, nontraditional things, like legal, staffing.

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. Reece – As you know, OLBC spoke out against this. We met with the governor. Since that

time, two have been appointed. I think that he realizes that we are going to be watching this and we are going to be vocal about it. This is a diverse state with diverse tax dollars. Therefore, diverse people should have an opportunity to lead this state, to be in leadership role in terms of the state and its direction and should be able to get return on their investment. That's been my message and that will continue to be my message.

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

Rep. Reece – Well, we have an African-American president. That's the highest office, which lets us know that anything is possible. President Obama won a U.S. Senate seat in Illinois where no one said an African-American could not do it. After Carol Mosley Braun did it, they said it would be tough but he did it. And then two, saying there could never be an African-American President. So my philosophy is, if we can have an African-American president, we certainly can have a U.S. Senator or African-American governor at some point in the state of Ohio.

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

Rep. Reece – No, I did not consider being a politician. My goal was to start a communications company. My thought was I would be Oprah one day, not on the TV set, but behind the scene in terms of owing a media house. That was what I thought I would do. But I got involved, ran into Congressman Maxine Waters, and she encouraged me to run for office. I ran for city council and I have been in it and out of it ever since, and now back in it.

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

Rep. Reece – That's a tough one. I would have to say Congresswoman Maxine Waters. She and Shirley Chisholm. And, I had a chance to meet both of them. They were both very encouraging. I met Shirley Chisholm before she passed and I was just in awe of her.

Mgbatogu – Have you been to Africa?

Rep. Reece – I have not. I want to go but I haven't been.

Mgbatogu – If you get a chance to go, what country would you like to visit?

Rep. Reece – South Africa, obviously. I would love to one day just rub shoulders with Nelson Mandela because I feel like this is the closet I would get to Dr, King. I can only read about Dr. King and his struggles. I only can read about Ghandi and his struggles. But, to rub shoulders with someone who kept the faith and had a vision and is still living, that would be awesome if I ever get a chance to do that and experience and smell the air of what I am reading about.

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

Rep. Reece – That's a good question. I do think that Malcolm X and a number of others don't get the just due of where they fit into history. My philosophy is always that no one is perfect but I think what we miss as African Americans is that we look for the perfect hero, no blemishes. We have this, it's either Malcolm or Martin or it's either WEB DuBois or Booker T. Washington. It's always this either or and I think we miss out on our history because we do either or. So, I guess I would say that in some regard Malcolm X does not get his just due in terms of his place in history and what he represents.

Mgbatogu – Kind of a curious question. If Governor John Kasich decides to offer you a lofty position in his administration, will you accept it?

Rep. Reece – Wow. That's a good question. I don't see that actually happening. If he were to come to something like that, then that means that all the pressures we are doing on the outside is working.

Mgbatogu – After this gig, what's next for you as a politician? Are you eyeing any higher office? What's in the future for you?

Rep. Reece – What I have learned in my life is preparation and prayer. I think preparation is the key. For me, if I can contribute something and make a difference, then I am interested. But if I can't contribute something, then I am not interested. So, I don't rule anything out. I think now, we have President Obama the sky is the limit and any and everything is possible. He made the impossible possible through the grace of what God set out for him to do. I am just going to keep preparing, do the best job I can right now for my district and the best job I can for Ohio. If those opportunities were to present themselves, pray about it. And, if that's what God wants me to do, I will do it.