State Representative W. Carlton Weddington is an outspoken defender of African-American interest in the Ohiolegislature.

By IKE MGBATOGU

Contributing Writer

COLUMBUS – State Representative W. Carlton Weddington is an outspoken defender of African-American interest in the Ohio legislature. He has always pressed the issue of funneling more state contracts to minority businesses, at the very least, to comply with the 15 percent set-aside mandated by law.

So, when Governor John Kasich hinted last week that he might even bump up that level of mandated set-aside, you would think Weddington would erupt in a wild agog.

But, he was not impressed.

"Talk is cheap," said Weddington. "Real action," he continued, "is what's needed."

"If he [Governor Kasich] was really interested in raising the minority set-aside, he could have done that within his first 100 days in office. He could have done what's already stated in the law… Put out an executive order requiring that the state meet the 15 percent mandate."

And there's a reason for the Columbus lawmaker's pessimism.

Weddington, one of Kasich's harshest foes, is still flabbergasted about the lack of diversity in the governor's cabinet, which sparked furor among Black lawmakers in the early days of the Kasich administration and got their relationship with the Republican governor off to a rocky start. Kasich did not name a minority in his first 23 cabinet appointments.

Of course, the governor, after a barrage of criticisms from Democrats, named two African-Americans to his cabinet, Michael Colbert, 44, as the Director of the Department of Job and Family Services and later, Harvey Reed, 57, to run the Department of Youth Services.

Of course, Weddington welcomed the move, telling the Call & Post shortly after Colbert's appointment, "he finally got a clue." But, at the same time, he said it was only because, "we put his feet to the fire and called him out on the subject." For Weddington, it was obvious where Kasich stood on matters of diversity and, that is, the governor loathes inclusion.

Weddington offered this advice.

"It is time for Governor Kasich to show a level of business acumen by embracing diversity and bringing people to the table who really know about increasing minority-owned business relationships with the state, something it appears his current confidants are not doing."

And he offered to assist.

"I would be willing to help him if he asked and I am quite sure other members of the Ohio Legislative Black Caucus (OLBC) would be happy to lend a hand as we represent the majority of those minority-owned businesses seeking contracts with the state," he said.

"What I want to see from the governor is to make the good use of the Ohio Legislative Black Caucus," said Weddington. "Bring us [people who know about minority business] to the table."

The 17 members of the OLBC "would be more than happy to give him insight into how to increase minority contract, at the speed of business," indulging in a bit of sarcasm there by referencing Kasich's wish to move decisions and accomplishments in his administration at the speed of business.

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