

Hon. Magnus Ngei Abe is the current Secretary to the State Government (SSG) in Rivers state. He had served as minority leader in the state's House of Assembly before defecting to the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) where he was appointed commissioner for information under former Governor Peter Odili's administration. Abe, who is one of the leading lights in the Amaechi administration, wants to displace the current Senator, representing Rivers South-East, Senator Lee Meaba. At the Rivers Correspondents' Chapel Forum last week, he bared his mind on his current ambition, the need to change the leadership and followership focus in the polity, the nagging apprehension that the Rivers administration is tilting towards Atiku Abubakar and other issues. Joe Ezuma was there. Excerpts:

What's your view on the apparent disenchantment among the people with the National Assembly members over what the public has come to tag as misrepresentation and poor representation as well as the ragging controversy over the statement that the legislators consume 25 per cent of the overhead of the national budget?

The legislators deserve comfort to a reasonable level. Our legislators need to be comfortable but there is a bit of difference between what you have been asked to do and having the tools to do it. For example, if I have an oversight function over an institution, the place should not turn to my own store because once you begin to reap benefits from what you are supervising, your respect and integrity as a supervisor will drop.

I am not an advocate of legislators working for free. Everybody needs to be comfortable. Also, there needs to be some relationship between what you receive as a legislator and what is happening in the society around you. I think we can still run our legislatures more efficiently and less burdensome to the tax payers. Efficiency means running the system with less wastage so that resources will cater for the greatest good of the greatest number and therefore, the issue is not about the legislature alone as people tend to focus more on legislators. We need to run every facet of governance efficiently. Efficiency should be our national mantra.

This is what we have applied in Rivers state under the current administration that is now a success story. The administration came, reviewed the past ways of doing things and tried to harness the available resources, cut down channels of wastage and directed them to the provision of infrastructure and improvement of lives generally with minimal expenses and getting maximum result.

Why then is there this apparent disconnect between the people and the representatives?

The power relation and dynamics in the country is faulty vis-a-vis the expectation of and demand from the people. We are not tasking our capacity to create. We are not tasking our environment to contribute. Rather, people are interested in the community, the local government, the state or zone as the legislator, governor, senator or president comes from and the question of what project a legislator has brought to his area. I think if we change the way we relate to power, we will deemphasize a lot of these things in the polity and rather emphasize on ideas, policies and leadership.

If we change the dynamics of power relation and politics, we will start getting the right results of governance and remove unnecessary skirmishes in the polity. The time has come for us to change the dynamics of the errand that we give to the people in governance.

What then is the motivating factor for your desire to be a Senator in 2011?

I want to be part of those who will redefine the power relation and dynamics of politics in the country and that is why I want to run for the senate. Leadership should be about ideas and policy formulation and execution. The resource of a nation is its people and their ideas and any quality leadership is supposed to harness these resources for the fostering of egalitarian society.

I don't want to join those legislators who will be rated by whether they built boreholes in their communities or not. A legislator is supposed to set agenda for the country and define policy. The recent appointment of two serving commissioners in Amaechi's administration, Chief Davies Ibiamu-Ikanya and Mr. Osima Ginah as Chairman and Secretary, respectively of the campaign team of former Vice President, Alhaji Atiku Abubakar in the state has raised fresh doubts about the genuineness of Amaechi and his administration's support to Goodluck Jonathan/Sambo presidency especially as the two commissioners were from the stable of Atiku's known loyalists, Prince Tonye Princewill. How is government addressing the apprehension?

Rivers state and indeed this administration is solidly behind Goodluck Jonathan in his presidential ambition in 2011. The people of the state decided to support the aspiration of President Jonathan based on several things. He grew up in the state, worked in this state and married in this state. In fact, he is a citizen of this state. I don't know how long you people will want us to say this.. We are solidly behind the aspiration of President Goodluck Ebele Jonathan to occupy the Presidency in 2011.

The two commissioners being referred to were formerly members of the Action Congress (AC) before their appointments as commissioners in the Amaechi's cabinet and have publicly resigned their appointments into the Atiku Campaign Organization. We all should remember that the two commissioners were appointed while they were still members of the Action Congress of Nigeria. They came into the Amaechi-led government as members of the opposition. But we all know those who are members of Amaechi's political team. They are those to watch. So, you cannot use the activities of two men to judge the position of the state government on President Jonathan.

Secretary to the Rivers State Government (SSG), Hon. Magnus Ngei Abe on Monday declared that the people of the state are not going back on its support for election of President Goodluck Jonathan come 2011.