Weeks before that verdict, the U.S. District Judge Peter Economus issued a similar ruling,

By IKE MGBATOGU
Contributing Writer

COLUMBUS – When, in August, the Ohio Secretary of State Jon Husted fired two members of the Montgomery County Board of Elections for opposing his decision to cancel early voting on weekends, Democrats decried his action as an outrage and urged him to reverse his stance and put them back on the board.

But Husted refused to do so.

As a result, the two men, Dennis Lieberman and Tom Ritchie, Sr. filed a lawsuit against him for wrongful termination of their jobs.

In the lawsuit, they sought to gain back their job, claiming that their fundamental rights were violated when all they were doing was protecting the right of Ohioans to vote.

They lost the battle.

Last week, U.S. District Judge Walter Rice ruled against Lieberman and Ritchie, declaring that both dismissed election workers were unable to show how their “fundamental rights” were violated by their termination.

Husted was pleased with the decision.

“Today’s decision is a victory for accountability in our elections system,” said Husted, in a statement released to the media. He warned that “rules must be followed and I will continue to hold individuals accountable who fail to do so.”

Husted explained that he fired Lieberman and Ritchie because both men “knowingly and willfully violated Ohio election laws by not following [my directive], which Ohio law requires you to follow.”

But Lieberman and Ritchie disagreed, saying Ohio election laws are supposed to encourage more people to vote and arguing that eliminating weekend voting hours would disproportionately truncate opportunities for minority and elderly voters.

“If there is an overriding policy concern that should be placed on the scale, it should be a policy of enfranchisement, not disenfranchisement, as the right to vote is fundamental and preservative of all other rights,” they said.

They expressed disappointment at the ruling and are deciding their next course of action,

including whether to continue with the lawsuit, having indicated their unwavering commitment to safeguarding the people's right to vote.

"Our goal was to be put back on the board during this election so that we would be able to continue to protect what we view is the rights of our community against voter suppression," said Lieberman.

Ohio House Minority Leader Armond Budish agreed.

He expressed the view that Lieberman and Ritchie "are being punished for standing up for the right" of Ohioans to vote. The ruling comes just about a week before the election and hands a rare victory to Husted who for several months has been embroiled in a number of election year battles and losing many of them.

Last week, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that Ohio must allow early voting during the last three days before the Election Day, reversing Husted's order which eliminated those days as additional opportunities for Ohioans to vote. That ruling was a monumental triumph for Democrats and the Obama campaign and a colossal setback for Husted. Democrats had argued that eliminating those days would favor the GOP at the polls.

Weeks before that verdict, the U.S. District Judge Peter Economus issued a similar ruling, declaring it unconstitutional to deny Ohioans the right to vote during the last three days before the Election Day, and ordering Husted to restore those eliminated voting days.

Those three days have now been restored.

Mgbatogu is a freelance writer and editor of Onumba.com based in Columbus. He can be reached by email at Onumbamedia@yahoo.com.