Husted, through his spokesman, said he will review the ruling and decide how to respond. Needless to say, Democrats and Judge Economus are hoping that he would simply comply.

By IKE MGBATOGU
Contributing Writer

COLUMBUS – This election may be all about the 'economy' as politicians and political pundits always like to say.

But in the eyes of Democrats in Ohio, for now, it's all about a federal judge by the name 'Economus' who got them and the officials of the Obama campaign smiling again after howling and kvetching all week—and for weeks before—decrying a decision by the Ohio Secretary of State, Jon Husted, to disenfranchise Ohio voters.

Recently, U.S. District Judge Peter Economus ruled that it is unconstitutional to deny Ohioans

the right to vote during the last three days before the Election Day.

The ruling came after weeks of brickbats by Democrats against Husted for canceling voting on the last three days before the Election Day. That electoral tinderbox had loomed in Ohio since last year after the Republican-controlled legislature approved a law ending mail-in voting on the last Friday before the Election Day (except for military personnel and civilian Ohioans living overseas). That law set the stage for the recent decision by Husted, also a Republican, to order the cancellation of the last three days before Election Day, 2012.

Following that decision, Democrats stewed in outrage, calling the move blatant partisan activism designed to disenfranchise Ohioans targeted mostly against Blacks, minorities, elderly folks and student voters. They essentially complained that Husted's action would create a wasted weekend that would deny these folks an additional opportunity to vote.

The Obama campaign got involved, filing a lawsuit in a federal court seeking to restore the three days eliminated by Husted and extend early voting opportunities for all Ohioans, not just for military personnel and Ohioans residing abroad.

Democrats, led by House Minority Leader Armond Budish, applauded the lawsuit and followed that up by sustaining a furious volley of criticism against Husted. Last week, he used previous ballot data to explain how Husted's decision would benefit Republican leaning counties at the expense of urban areas where historically Democrats have gained a lot of their political support in elections.

Judge Economus ruled that the right to vote during the last three days, including the weekend before Election Day, should be granted to military service men and women and other Ohio voters residing overseas but also to all Ohio voters.

Husted had refused all calls to reverse his decision, declaring last week that "The rules are set and are not going to change," and arguing that because of his directive "Voting in Ohio is uniform, accessible, fair and secure…Ohioans will have more access to voting than ever before."

But, in his ruling, Judge Economus said that he expects Husted to reinstate the voting days and direct all election boards to allow all Ohioans to vote during the last three days before the Election Day, arguing that it is the only way to ensure that election in the state is "uniform, accessible for all, fair, and secure."

Democrats, who had argued that 93,000 Ohioans voted during the last three days before the Election Day in 2008, hugely applauded the ruling.

“Today’s decision reinstates fairness for Ohio’s busy working voters," said Budish, from Beachwood. "Weekend voting has been a success in Ohio and helped us recover from the failed election in 2004 when long lines caused tens of thousands of voters to leave the polls without casting a ballot. Some 93,000 voters came out to vote on the final 3 days before the election in 2008 and the court has refused to allow these days to be cut off by partisan legislative trickery,” he said.

State Representative Sandra Williams from Cleveland equally applauded the ruling.

“Judge Economous’ injunction correctly pointed out that that there was no compelling reason for the Ohio Secretary of State to prohibit county boards of elections from allowing early voting for the three days before election day, especially when most county boards were open for early voting during those times in 2006, 2008, and 2010. Reversing Secretary Husted’s decision will level the playing field as some 93,000 Ohioans took advantage of early voting to avoid long lines in 2008. The people of this state are well-served by having more time to vote, rather than fewer days and shorter hours to cast a ballot,” said Williams.

Not surprisingly, Republicans are rabidly swinging back, vowing to fight the ruling. Just hours after Judge Economus' ruling, Ohio Attorney-General said he will appeal.

"We believe states should have the right to set the hours of election and the time of election," DeWine said, adding that there's "ample opportunity for everyone to vote."

Husted, through his spokesman, said he will review the ruling and decide how to respond.

Needless to say, Democrats and Judge Economus are hoping that he would simply comply.

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