State Rep. Michael Stinziano, a Democrat from Columbus, summed up the benefits of early voting to the Democratic process.

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COLUMBUS – Ohioans have in the past voted early on Saturday, Sunday and the Monday before the Election Day.

But they won't be able to do that in the upcoming election because early voting in Ohio has been officially yanked.

Last week, Ohio's Chief Election Officer, Secretary of State Jon Husted, announced the cancellation that ended early voting during the last weekend before the Election Day.

He explained why.

"Today I am leveling the playing field on voting days and hours during the absentee voting period in each of the 88 counties – rural, urban and suburban. All Ohio voters will have the same amount of time, 23 days or 230 hours, to vote in person prior to Election Day. And let's not forget that we still have Election Day, when polls will be open from 6:30 a.m. to 7:30 p.m.

"As Ohio's chief elections officer, I have sought to create an environment where the election can be about candidates and their ideas, not the process for electing them. I will continue to do my part to ensure a smooth election in Ohio in which all voters can have confidence."

Democrats are stewing over this and have been ever since it became clear that Husted was planning to do away with early voting opportunities. They are decrying the move as a blatant partisan activism designed to disenfranchise some Ohioans, targeted mostly against Blacks, minorities, the elderly population and student voters.

In their view, Husted's action would create a wasted weekend that would deny these folks the additional opportunity to vote.

Husted disagrees, arguing that "All voters can and should be confident that the Presidential Election in Ohio will be uniform, accessible for all, fair and secure."

For Husted, it is all about achieving a fundamental quest for uniformity in the electoral process. But for Ohio House Democratic Leader Armond Budish from Beachwood and State Rep. Sandra Williams from Cleveland, it is something else – denying Ohioans their right to vote.

In a joint statement released last week in response to Secretary Husted's decision, both

lawmakers said, "The decision made by Secretary of State Jon Husted to take away our last three in-person voting days is an infringement on our basic voting rights. It does not make sense to say that each county should have the same voting window when a projected 93,000 voters in Cuyahoga County showed up to the polls during those last few days.

"This measure enabled students, senior citizens, single parents, and low-income individuals an opportunity to take advantage of a more flexible schedule. We saw the result of that effort when more than 1.4 million voters took advantage of Ohio's five-week early voting period in 2008."

They continued, "Secretary Husted's decision is detrimental as it clearly disenfranchises a large number of voters in Democratic counties, especially. We're going to have to do everything in our power to make sure those voices are heard without those last three days, that includes getting registered and voting absentee in-person early."

Rep. Vernon Sykes from Akron took the same view, denouncing Husted's decision as being against efforts to encourage voter participation.

"I am extremely disappointed with Secretary Husted's decision to limit early voting hours across the state. Often we talk about striving to make voting an easier and more streamlined process, making it more accessible so all who wish to participate in this honored democratic tradition can do so. However, now with this decision, Secretary Husted is limiting that opportunity for thousands of Ohioans, and effectively making it more difficult for citizens to have their voice heard, not to mention adding strains to voters and pole workers on Election Day who, as a result of this directive, could experience longer lines and more stressful conditions at poling locations. In this crucial election year the people of Ohio need extended hours to cast their ballots and deserve a user-friendly voting system!"

The Democratic kvetching over this action is more than likely not going to bear any fruit. But there's still lingering hope, though it's just a dollop of it, that Husted's decision could be successfully challenged in a federal court where the Obama campaign recently filed a lawsuit to kibosh the decision.

The lawsuit is seeking to restore the early voting right of Ohioans.

State Rep. Michael Stinziano, a Democrat from Columbus, summed up the benefits of early voting to the Democratic process.

"As the former Director of the Franklin County Board of Elections, I have seen and experienced firsthand the importance of an efficient early voting period," said Stinziano. "In 2008, almost roughly 93,000 voters appeared at their early vote center during the last three days of early voting prior to Election Day. Unfortunately, instead of building on this success and a desire for a smooth election day, there are apparently policy makers who prefer the long election lines encountered in 2000 and 2004 and are fighting to limit voting rights instead of expanding them."

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