

The Columbus Dispatch

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Voting in Ohio | Fight over poll hours isn't just political

By **Darrel Rowland**

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Comments: 34

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One of Deidre Reese's most precious childhood memories is going to the polls with her family.

"It was a hard-fought-for right," she says. "There was a time that we certainly could not do that."

That's one reason why Reese and many other African-American leaders across Ohio remain at the forefront of an uphill struggle to restore early in-person voting hours on weekends and later on weekday evenings. They plan to march to Monday's special meeting of the Franklin County Board of Elections and ask for the additional hours.

Many probably thought this battle ended last week when Secretary of State Jon Husted, after encountering harsh criticism from sources as varied as *The New York Times* and *The Daily Show With Jon Stewart*, directed Ohio's 88 county elections boards to keep uniform hours for early in-person voting. He ordered the boards to stay open to 7 p.m. the final two weeks before the election but nixed weekend hours.

Reese, coordinator of the Ohio Unity Coalition, a voter-advocacy group, said she appreciates Husted's even-handedness in fixing a situation in which most GOP-dominated counties could add extra hours for early voting but Democratic areas could not.

However, Husted's decree does not accommodate the schedules of many working people, she and other black leaders say. And while they applaud his move to mail absentee-ballot applications to all eligible Ohio voters, African-Americans are more comfortable echoing the civil-rights-movement mantra of "voting with their feet," as Franklin County Elections Director William Anthony put it.

Husted said he based his decision to bar weekend hours after consulting with local elections officials, many of whom were concerned about cost. But Aaron Ockerman, executive director of the Ohio Association of Election Officials, told *The Dispatch* that "we would make that work" if directed to stay open until, say, noon the Saturday before the election.

Of course, such decisions are at least as much about politics as policy.

"You would almost have to be as blind as a bat not to see the politics," said Anthony, former chairman of the county Democratic Party. "Listen, call it what it really is."

"What it really is" to many Republicans is simply an attempt to help President Barack Obama win re-election.

"I guess I really actually feel we shouldn't contort the voting process to accommodate the urban — read African-American — voter-turnout machine," said Doug Preisse, chairman of the county Republican Party and elections board member who voted against weekend hours, in an email to *The Dispatch*. "Let's be fair and reasonable."

He called claims of unfairness by Ohio Democratic Chairman Chris Redfern and others "bullshit. Quote me!"

For his part, Redfern called Husted's actions "borderline criminal" in moving to oust the two Democrats on the Montgomery County Board of Elections for attempting on Friday to defy the secretary of state's directive and open up on weekends for voting.

A hearing is set for Monday in Columbus on whether the two Democrats will be booted from the board.

Ohio Republican Chairman Robert T. Bennett said the Montgomery County dispute shows "the Democrats are being exposed for what they're really for — confusion, chaos, and separate standards."

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At the time, the Ohioans are voting on a Sunday in a free day set by Democrats, including the Obama campaign, seeking to restore early in-person voting on the three days before Election Day, a period in which nearly 100,000 Ohioans voted in 2008. The Republican-controlled legislature decreed that only active military personnel or their families could cast in-person votes that final Saturday-Monday.

Ockerman said elections officials strongly oppose bringing back voting on the Sunday or Monday before Election Day. He noted that the line to vote in Franklin County didn't end until Monday evening, making it difficult to get accurate poll books showing who already has voted out to hundreds of polling locations by 5:30 the next morning. (Voters can cast a ballot if they are in line when the polls close.)

Still, one argument to restore early voting hours in Ohio keeps reoccurring: They worked in 2008, so what's the rationale for removing them?

"As a result of historical discrimination against African-American voters, in addition to the recent wave of suppressive voter laws being enacted in statehouses across the country, African-American voters are skeptical of any laws aimed at limiting the opportunity to vote," said NAACP Ohio Conference President Sybil Edwards McNabb. She and other black leaders have asked to meet with Husted.

A study by Northeast Ohio Voter Advocates says that even after Husted's directive last week, the hours when more than 200,000 Ohioans voted in 2008 have been wiped out. The group and others such as the League of Women Voters are calling on Husted to restore voting on at least two weekends in late October.

In Florida, a judge already has halted a plan to take away voting hours in counties with heavy African-American concentrations.

The continuing pressure to add in-person voting hours is a bit of a mystery to those in the secretary of state's office, who point to Husted's historic initiative to enable all Ohioans to cast an absentee ballot through the mail. Adjoining states such as Michigan, Pennsylvania and Kentucky don't have any early voting, they point out. Any Ohio voters reluctant to put their completed absentee ballots in the mail can personally drop them off at a county elections board or voting center.

"Your kitchen table is your polling place," said Husted spokesman Maggie Ostrowski.

But from a political and perhaps cultural standpoint, not all absentee ballots are created equal. Republicans are much more likely to mail their absentee ballots, while Democrats (and African-Americans) prefer to cast their absentee ballots in person.

Thus, when Husted expands absentee balloting by mail but shrinks the opportunity for in-person balloting, most Republican party leaders are happy but many Democrats howl.

A study by the Franklin County Board of Elections shows that 48 percent of early, in-person votes in 2008 were cast after hours on weekdays, on weekends or on the Monday before the election — almost none of which is available to 2012 voters.

And those late ballots came predominantly from blacks and Democrats, the research shows. In all, 8 percent of whites cast early in-person ballots, while 13.3 percent of blacks did, said the study, which used census data to estimate the racial breakdown of voters.

In-person voting was popular even though Franklin County was one of the few in Ohio to mail absentee ballot applications to all voters in 2008.

Reese remembered how some Columbus churches bused members to Veterans Memorial, the county's early-voting location, four years ago in a program called Souls to the Polls.

"You saw hundreds and hundreds of people going from different congregations to vote together as a community," she said. "Many people want to actually show up at the polls; they want to be there with their friends and neighbors ..."

"We have a system that works. We're just kind of turning the clock back."

Dispatch reporter Jim Siegel contributed to this story.

drowland@dispatch.com

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COMMENTS

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BOB LONG (LONGBOB)

NOTE TO DIMWITS: Voting in the General Election is Tuesday November 6, 2012. If you cannot vote on that day, please apply for an absentee ballot. The liberals do not consider personal responsibility as a virtue to vote. We have more than enough early voting dates and absentee works 100% of the time.

2012-08-19 08:00:13.0

flag

JEANETTE BELZ (EVERYONE)

This story about voting poll hours should have run above the fold where the Columbus City Schools story was placed. Voting affects us all. As we saw with the last Presidential election, there were not enough machines to cover all the people turning out to vote, lines were too long to wait- some waited many hours. People who want to exercise their right to vote take this issue seriously. They are not dimwits.

2012-08-19 08:18:33.0

flag

BRIAN HIGGINS (CMHCOW)

Franklin County Republican Party's Chairman, Doug Preisse said, "I guess I really actually feel we shouldn't contort the voting process to accommodate the urban -- read African-American -- voter-turnout machine" How the heck am I supposed to interpret that?

2012-08-19 11:43:16.0

flag

JOHN BURIK (JOHN_IN_CINNATI)

Good article with salient points covered! I've always been fortunate enough to have the kind of professional position -- and transportation -- to vote before or after work, or just take off for a few hours. That's not the case for everyone. I'm for all registered voters having ample opportunity to vote.

2012-08-19 12:40:14.0

flag

MAX BLACK (MAXBLACK)

Note to Racists: Please stop trying to interfere with Americans' voting rights. If you can't win elections without denying citizens their right to vote, then you shouldn't win anything. If the concept of "one person one vote" doesn't matter to you, then I'd suggest moving to Iran or Somalia, where the laws are much more to your liking.

2012-08-19 14:17:29.0

flag

DAVID BROWN (JOSEPHUS)

Thank you, Bob Long, for keeping this discussion civil. Calling people you disagree with "dimwits" says much about you and of your argument. As for the times we are allowed to vote in this great state, I say extend the hours, the dates, and the places where we can vote. Make it easier, not harder. Anyone who wants to limit voting rights should be fired. Any politician who wants to limit voting rights should resign or be thrown out of office never to be allowed to hold public office again.

2012-08-19 15:17:58.0

flag

BOB LONG (LONGBOB)

Jeanette and David, apply for an absentee ballot and the problem is solved. However if you are too ill prepared to do so, and you think you may not have time to vote in person then that again is a personal priority. Nobody is being denied a vote. And I stand by the comment that you are a dimwit if you cannot figure it out. flag

2012-08-19 17:57:12.0

STEVE BRACK (SSBOHIO)

200,000 people voted in 2008 during the evening & weekend hours which are now outlawed by Secretary of State Jon Husted. It matters not WHY those people voted on those evenings and weekends: They are the voters, and it is their will that they vote during an evening or weekend. We are a Republic, and in a republic, the people are the sovereign. 200,000+ of the People of Ohio wanted the opportunity to vote during evening & weekend hours, and they presumably still do. Why are we even discussing dishonoring the will of the people when it comes to voting? flag

2012-08-19 18:57:59.0

MIKE GOFFEE (MIKEGOFFEE)

Bobbie Long-only dimwit I see in these posts is you. Some of us like to vote in person. Unlike you , we have jobs and lives and will like to vote on weekends. flag

2012-08-19 19:19:26.0

JASON BAKER (JAKER441)

@Steve Brack. Slight reworking of a sentence from the article provides your answer: "What it really is" is simply an attempt to help prevent President Barack Obama from winning re-election. flag

2012-08-19 19:20:51.0

JOSEPH MANDL (JMANDL)

It's amazing to me that whites, asians, Indians and others are not concerned or demonstrating. I guess it's because they have figured out how to vote during the ample available hours and don't have any problems figuring out how to vote. Kind of makes you wonder if this issue is an artificial one--especially given the fact that the exception was to accommodate our military who have legitimate reasons to need the accommodation. flag

2012-08-20 08:51:50.0

ALLEN WARREN (OSUBUCKEYES9)

I spent the first 25 years of my life in Ohio, but have lived in Oregon since '89. Several years ago Oregon moved to 100% vote-by-mail. No more voting stations. We all receive ballots in the mail weeks ahead of the voting day and can either drop them off at voting boxes (look similar to mailboxes) or, of course, mail them in. The process here in Oregon works. In the comfort and privacy of my home I fill in the boxes of the candidates already on the ballot or have the option to write-in a candidate. I then place my ballot in one of the envelopes provided, seal it, place this envelope in a larger envelope, seal, sign and either mail it in or drop it off at the curb-side voting box. What's to prevent someone from stealing my ballot in my mailbox? Not a thing. My ballot could indeed be stolen, filled out and mailed in. And I'm guessing voting officials aren't cross-checking signatures on file. Oregon's system isn't perfect, but what system is? At least we aren't arguing over voting station days & hours. flag

2012-08-20 16:48:01.0

BRAD WALKER (BRADWALKER)

"I guess I really actually feel we shouldn't contort the voting process to accommodate the urban -- read African-American -- voter-turnout machine ... Let's be fair and reasonable." Extracts from the Doug Preisse Dictionary: "contort" - "verb. restrict deliberately for personal gain" "accommodate" - "verb. disenfranchise" "fair" - "adjective. discriminatory" "reasonable" - "adjective. bigoted" flag

2012-08-20 20:21:30.0

PAMELA TUCKER (PAMT)

@Bob Long: Such a sad comment by you. Let me see if you really know what personal responsibility means: When my two uncles were lynched in Georgia for trying to vote; is that enough personal responsibility by your measurement. When my grandfather fled out of South Carolina to Pennsylvania to have the right to vote; is that enough personal responsibility for you? When I retired after working for 30+ years, paid taxes, raised my children, sent them flag

both roles (Citizen and non-citizen). Do not enjoy the rights as a citizen of the USA to make my ballot and vote. Just enough personal responsibility for you? See, when you paint people with broad brushes, you end up looking and sounding rather foolish. People such as yourself always end up catching fish in your net that don't fit your racist menu for the day. "We" have more than enough....who died and made you the Great Vote Master? I am the "We" -- you are not. YOU are the "They"! I always make certain that my family, and anyone else that I can impact, minimize the racism of the "Theys". "They" are a poison to a free, democratic society.

2012-08-21 07:18:25.0

WAYNE WILLIAMS (WAYNE)

flag

so how much are our fiscal conservatives spending to create these new regulations.

2012-08-21 08:23:12.0

LOUPE VAZINK (LOUPE)

flag

I think people should be allowed to walk in and vote anytime of the year. What happen if somebodey cant afford a stamp to mail in their votes?

2012-08-21 10:17:22.0

JEN COLVILLE (GHETTORAT)

flag

Talk about a bunch of CRYBABIES!!!! --- All you whiners out there need to get a life and move on --- how hard is it to get your butt over to a voting site when bosses are mandated to allow time for employees to vote during working house????!! ---- Again we see a "special interest group" demanding SPECIAL privileges just for themselves --- BooHoo --- what's so hard about playing by the rules??? --- and as for you, Miss Loopy-Lou LOUPE VAZINK (LOUPE) - how about let go of your mom's apron string long enough to ask her to give you a stamp!!! Tell her you'll take the trash out in exchange for the donation - HAHAHHA!!!

2012-08-21 11:41:29.0

BEN G (BEN_G)

flag

I like the extended voting hours. I voted on Sunday last time and that left my Tuesday free to drive to Toledo for work.

2012-08-21 11:52:40.0

MARIA MAYLE (MM55)

flag

Bob long and others that seen to think that cutting access and controlling hours to vote is not only unconstitutional, but just plain wrong. The civil rights movement cuts a lot of tears to allowed everyone to vote. "one person one vote". If candidates can't win in issues and have to resort to blocking the vote to win an election they don't need to be running. This is embarrassing for all, imaging the United States trying to be the icon for democracy around the world, and here at home trying to block the vote and fix the election. The republican candidates lie, if they lie they will cheat. Everybody knows the agenda, voucher medicare, tax for the rich, and balanced the budget in the back of the middle class to pay for the rich tax cuts. We don't forget the war on woman and unions, and their resolve to tare down safety nets. They can spin it anyway they like it , the only way to win the election is to cheat and don't let the citizens vote. Ohio should not be in the news for this embarrassing issue. Vote, help someone else to vote, fill those lines in the polls and show them, that we maybe down because their archaic policies and obstruction but we are far from out They want the country back to the 18th century, we the people want the country forward. VOTE, VOTE, AND MAKE SURE YOUR HELP SOMEONE TO VOTE. GET EVERYBODY TO THOSE POLLS IN ELECTION DAY!!!!!!!

2012-08-21 13:22:38.0

LOUPE VAZINK (LOUPE)

flag

My mother live in Grease with my brudder and seesters. Their very poor their!

2012-08-21 14:15:16.0

CASUALITA STAUB (CHUMALUM)

flag

Maria Mayle....we know what Democrats mean by "one person one vote". Democrats have no distinction between citizen or non-citizen, felon or non-felon, adult or child, dead or alive, imaginary or real, Mickey Mouse, Goofy or Donald Duck....let 'em all vote, as many times as they can get away with! See, we are tired of the games Democrats play when it comes to voter fraud. Voter fraud is the only way Democrats can win. And the people -- THE PEOPLE -- are incensed!! You lying, cheating Democrats have played your corrupt games for far too long and come November, there will be a pushback the magnitude of which you have never seen.

CASUALITA STAUB (CHUMALUM)

If Democrats were so excited about their candidates, especially Obama, there would be no barrier too high or too wide or too early or too late or too lonely to get their vote cast. There is nothing but excuses, from Obama down to his supporters over why they can't get something done, but they never look at the real problem...themselves.

2012-08-21 15:30:49.0

CASUALITA STAUB (CHUMALUM)

Pamela Tucker, I am sure that your congenial, rational, and thoughtful manner sways many people to lift their heads out of their daily struggles and discover that they are struggling because there is a racist in everyone and everything keeping them down. Everyone is a racist except a Democrat. No, the Democrats that instituted all those Jim Crow Laws in the South weren't racists. Or the Democrat governors and that refused to let blacks go to school with whites..that wasn't racist at all. Or the Democrats that refused to vote for Civil Rights legislation and nearly caused it to fail...no those Democrats were not racists. Or the Democrats that want to keep blacks bound and dependent on them for handouts, Or the Democrats that want to funnel more and more money ostensibly into improving inner city schools when the money is really there to line union bosses pockets and bloat school administrator staff. Where are the teachers??? More and more money and no more teachers??? But that's not racist to keep the black kids in dysfunctional classrooms while union leaders and administrators laugh all the way to the bank. I am sure Democrat masters are so very grateful for people like you who remain content to stay on the Democrat plantation and persuade others to do so as well.

2012-08-21 15:31:49.0

CASUALITA STAUB (CHUMALUM)

BRIAN HIGGINS you wonder how you are supposed to interpret "that"... "that" being; *"Franklin County Republican Party's Chairman, Doug Preisse said, "I guess I really actually feel we shouldn't contort the voting process to accommodate the urban -- read African-American -- voter-turnout machine"* You don't need to interpret "that" since the reporter, Darrel Rowland, already handed you the interpretation he wished you to have when he interjected *"read African American"* into the statement. No bias there, uh uh. But since we've gone there, if I was Franklin County Republican Party Chairman, person, whatever, I would have said the same thing (minus the biased interjection of the alleged "reporter" Darell). Thing is, there is nothing wrong with calling out differences in IDEOLOGY which has absolutely nothing to do with skin color (until Leftists get a hold of it). And a subset of the IDEOLOGY of the "urban voter turnout machine" includes "win at all costs"-- even if it means lie, cheat, steal, duplicate, conjure, obstruct, and intimidate.

2012-08-21 16:31:20.0

JEN COLVILLE (GHETTORAT)

CASUALITA - CHUMALUM writes: -- "... that's not racist to keep the black kids in dysfunctional classrooms while union leaders and administrators laugh all the way to the bank." -- BRAVO for setting the Lefty delusionist Pamala Tucker straight with the facts --- but too bad we know that Lefties are blind to facts and construct their own fuzzy-wuzzy reality. --- We also know that they believe in the Tooth Fairy who will pay their mortgage and buy them a new car, and that they believe in unicorns that fly through the air on magic carpets. --- Because of this, our nation is self-imploding and the brain dead reality constructionists don't notice that they are drilling huge holes in their OWN ship!!!! How brilliant is that????!! Give Pamela a Nobel Peace Prize right now... she earned it.

2012-08-21 16:32:09.0

JEN COLVILLE (GHETTORAT)

LOUPEY V LOUPE -- call your mother in Grease and ask her to send you a stamp. Don't be helpless. You sound like an Obama acorn to me.

2012-08-21 16:35:26.0

LOUPE VAZINK (LOUPE)

Maria, i have sester name Maria. tHe ferst time I vote i have much help. The peeple give much. Botle of vino and cigarettes and can of tuna. All this for helping me and my family vote.

2012-08-21 16:36:57.0

CASUALITA STAUB (CHUMALUM)

flag

Question to Rowland Darell Rowland. Since he's tall, he's got to be a fraud here, and since he's got the need to interject the inflammatory words "read African American" into Franklin County Republican Party's Chairman, Doug Priesse's statement, do you have a brother Darell and another brother Darell? Or is that perhaps just how many times you use that persona to vote? And is that enough to overcome the FLOOD that is coming November?

2012-08-21 16:42:40.0

CASUALITA STAUB (CHUMALUM)

flag

Jen Colville, you said, "Give Pamela a Nobel Peace Prize right now... she earned it." Well the thing is Jen, I don't know her, and she may very well have done something in her life that really did contribute something to world peace....which would then automatically disqualify her.

2012-08-21 16:55:16.0

X ALLEDONIAN (ROCKE)

flag

Since the "Fight over poll hours isn't just political" and the two Montgomery County Democrat election officials suspended by Husted are the same officials who busted him for claiming residency there while he lived in Columbus, and which bust was upheld by the SoS until Husted invoked the wrath of the GOPeer Supreme Court to overturn the ruling..well since it "isn't just political" I have no comment then I guess.

2012-08-21 22:45:33.0

BEN G (BEN_G)

flag

I agree with the posters who say that this is definitely "political". And in more ways than one.

2012-08-22 09:19:04.0

TRIP TRIP (TRIP)

flag

With all due respect to casualita staub (chumalum), I don't think that Rowland inserted the phrase "-read African-Americans-"into the sentence. It's still inside the quote marks, so it is a direct quote from Priesse. I agree completely with you that it was an inflammatory remark, but I think he did that all on his own. Join me in writing him a note about it.

2012-08-22 21:26:53.0

NOAH BODY (CONFUTED)

flag

Lest ye forget, the United States Constitution says "The Congress may determine the Time of chusing the Electors, and the Day on which they shall give their Votes; which Day shall be the same throughout the United States." Congress has enacted legislation requiring that presidential elections occur on the Tuesday following the first Monday in November every four years. Anything else is a bonus!

2012-08-22 21:57:00.0