

Louise Slaughter co-sponsors weekend voting bill

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New York Reps. Louise Slaughter and Steve Israel announced legislation Wednesday that would move Election Day from the first Tuesday in November to the first full weekend.

The two Democrats said the idea is to make voting more convenient and increase voter turnout.

“Voting should be easy and accessible,” said Israel, who represents a district on Long Island. “This is why, in 1845, Congress decided that voting on a Tuesday made sense. It was the easiest day for farmers in our agrarian society to get to the polls. But times have changed, and Tuesday voting just doesn’t make sense anymore.”

Slaughter, of Fairport, said, “Instituting weekend voting would make it easier and more convenient for Americans to exercise their right to vote, and would help reduce lines at the polls and increase voter turnout.”

[The Weekend Voting Act](#), H.R. 1641, would allow national polls to be open from 10 a.m. Eastern time on Saturday to 6 p.m. Eastern time Sunday in the 48 contiguous states. Election officials would be permitted to close polls during the overnight hours if they determine it would be inefficient to keep them open.

Israel and Slaughter are among five original cosponsors of the legislation.

A similar bill died in committee last year.

Republican Rep. Chris Collins of Clarence, Erie County, said he thought the legislation was unnecessary and potentially dangerous.

“I oppose the Weekend Voting Act as yet another unfunded mandate and as a flagrant attempt to damage the integrity of the voting process,” he said in a statement. “We should be looking at ways that protect our elections from fraud and abuse, such as looking to require photo identification at polling sites, instead of attempting to expand the duration of an election at the expense of the integrity of the outcome.”

Kathy Smith, director of advocacy for the Rochester League of Women Voters, could not speak specifically to the bill, but said the league is strongly supportive of measures that would increase voter participation.

“We feel if there are more days, options and hours, voter turnout will be higher. The last several years in New York state the numbers have been really low,” Smith said.

The League is also supportive of a bill from Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver, D-Manhattan, that would require each county to open at least five polling places for early voting 14 days before general elections and seven days before primaries. These polling places would need to be open from 8 a.m. to 7 p.m. each day, including weekends. That bill is still pending.