

Voting confusion:

Mandate 2 election days every year

Voters in some parts of Lansing are in for a busy day Tuesday, Dec. 11. There is a vote for a library tax at the school district (though not tied to the school) and a vote to elect commissioners for the Lansing Fire District.

It's understandable if residents in Lansing are experiencing voter burnout. Depending on where they live, they may have had to vote in town or village elections this year, and on a school budget, the board of education and a proposed bond project (that failed), and they already defeated a library tax once. Then, less than two months later, they'll head to the polls again to vote in the presidential primaries, which are scheduled for Feb. 5.

We lament about low voter turnout, as do most politicians and government officials. But the election calendar in New York is structured to make it as hard as possible for people to turn out to vote since it allows all of the elections to be held on different days. The state Legislature should demand cooperation from everyone who runs an election in a calendar year to help shrink the number of days people have to come out to vote each year.

At most, there should be two full elections, with school districts and any special elections tied to their voting base, in the spring and a general election in the fall that combines government and fire district elections. The primary elections should continue to be held in September. We'd like to see villages join in the fall elections rather than hold theirs in the spring. It will take massive coordination among the people who run elections, but it will ensure the possibility for higher

participation." While the strong words from the comptroller and Legislature are nice, state law also allows the elections to be held on a Tuesday that is not a holiday. Without mandating a date, it allows what many call the "stealth" election to take place without maximizing public input and participation. For instance, if you live in the Lansing, Danby, McLean, Brooktondale or Slaterville fire districts, did you know those elections take place Tuesday?

School districts are no different. The state education department sets the date for an election for school board and budget but allows districts to allow for votes on capital projects to take place on different days and times. This serves to confuse and frustrate voters, something that was discussed following the Ithaca City School District budget and capital project votes earlier this year (which were held months apart).

If Lansing voters are confused about the library tax, we understand their plight. They defeated the tax when they voted in school elections on March 15 but now find it up for a vote again. Chances are most people don't even know the fire district election is the same day — of course, that's if they knew there is a library tax vote scheduled in the first place.

Let's make it easier on voters to educate themselves and turn out to vote. The state should mandate two election days per year, plus a September primary. That will allow for a maximum turnout and do away with cries of stealth elections.