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Thursday, January 18, 2007 East Central Illinois

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## Group seeks to slow down fast-track legislation

By [Kate Clements](#)

Thursday, January 18, 2007 7:21 AM CST

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SPRINGFIELD – A new group wants a constitutional amendment to end fast-track legislation in Illinois.

Democracy Project Chairman Jim Broadway said state lawmakers are increasingly being forced to take action on budgets and other lengthy, complicated bills with less than a day to review them. The result is lawmakers who don't always know what they are voting on and a public that has no time to ask questions or provide input.



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"The people are being left out of the legislative process," he said.

There is currently a six-day posting period before new bills can be heard in committee, but an amendment that completely guts an existing bill and replaces it with new language can be heard on just one hour's notice.

The Democracy Project's proposed constitutional amendment would require every bill to be in its final form for at least 21 days before it can be called for a vote. The proposed amendment would allow exceptions only for emergency bills, as determined by the leaders of both chambers and a new committee of randomly selected state representatives and senators.

Cindy Davidsmeyer, spokeswoman for Senate President Emil Jones, D-Chicago, said she did not believe the proposed amendment was needed. Though the budget and the wording of some major bills sometimes are not finalized until the end of session, there typically are weeks of extensive public hearings on those issues, she said. Audio and video of floor proceedings are posted live on the Internet, and the statehouse press corps tracks the action.

"We feel we have adequate notice," she said. "And certainly from the amount of e-mail, mail and phone calls, as well as meetings in districts with constituents on legislation and other issues that are of concern, I think that's testimony to the adequacy of the system."

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State Rep. Bill Black, R-Danville, said he thinks some change is needed, but said requiring a three-week waiting period for every bill could become "a logistical nightmare."

"I'm not throwing cold water on Jim Broadway's concept," he said. "I know where he's coming from because we often act too quickly ... I don't know if we can do the 21 days, but I sure think on budget bills we need to take more time than we do."

Black said he was working on legislation to require all budget bills to be posted in final form for three working days before a vote.

"I think that would eliminate a lot of the problems we've had, where people go home and say, 'I didn't know that was in there, I wouldn't have voted for it,' " he said. "It would certainly give our appropriations people, our staff enough time to go through it with a fine-tooth comb, and it would give legislators time to make sure they knew what the heck was in it."

The delay would also give the media, the public and agencies reliant on state funding time to examine the proposed budget before the final vote.

While the prospects for Black's bill are unclear, the Democracy Project faces even longer odds. Of the hundreds of amendments proposed since the 1970 constitution was adopted, fewer than 20 made it onto the ballot, and 10 received the required voter approval. The 1980 cutback amendment, which ended cumulative voting and reduced the size of the Illinois House, is the only one that was the result of successful petition drive.

Just to get on the statewide ballot, the Democracy Project's proposed amendment needs nearly 280,000 valid signatures – and hundreds of volunteers to help collect them. The movement is in its infancy but already claims more than 200 supporters, including former Green Party gubernatorial candidate Rich Whitney, state Rep. Roger Eddy, R-Hutsonville, and Kenny Schwengel, superintendent of the Atwood-Hammond school district.

"Our elected officials should have the opportunity to fully understand proposed legislation, and to hear from their constituents on important legislative issues," Schwengel stated in a written release.

Information is available at [www.showus.org](http://www.showus.org).

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