Statement of Rep. Louise Slaughter for Wednesday, July 27, 2005 – Rules Subcommittee on Legislative and Budget Process Hearing

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, Mr. Hastings and other members of the Rules Committee. This subcommittee has held many hearings on the issue of biennial budgeting, and it's an issue about which many members, from both sides of the aisle, have strongly held views. Today's hearing on the budget experience of Germany and the UK adds an international dimension to this question, but my concerns about the efficacy of biennial budgeting remain the same.

We have only to look at this week's consideration of the conference report for FY2006 Interior Appropriations bill to see that $1.5 billion in veterans funding which was not anticipated for this year had to be added as emergency spending to that bill. Although Democrats accurately predicted that such additional veterans funding would be necessary, this incident only highlights the uncertainty that occurs when putting together an annual federal budget.

It's impossible for Congress to know what's going to happen 30 months in advance, which is what a two year budget proposal would require. Even with an annual budget process, Congress constantly considers supplemental appropriations bills to deal with unexpected domestic and international problems. A biennial process would only exacerbate this existing problem.

In addition, the annual threat of closing the purse strings is often the only way for Congress to get the attention of the Administration. What members of the Appropriations committee constantly tell me is that the annual review of appropriations requests is the only way to keep agencies responsive to members of Congress and their constituents. If you remove the control over their funding, it will become more and more difficult for Congress to provide effective oversight.

One of the points I made last year when we considered budget reform was that the House already has a number of budget rules in place that are routinely waived by the Rules Committee. There is not a single conference report that we will consider in the House this week that will be open and available for Members to consider for the three days that is called for in House rules. Any discussion of changing our nation's budget process is useless without the political will to see it through.

As a former state legislator and a former member of the House Budget Committee, I recognize that budget and spending battles can be long and time consuming. However, I don't believe the solution to that is to abdicate our responsibility under the Constitution to determine the federal budget. I'm sure that our witnesses and colleagues will provide a number of different viewpoints on this issue and I look forward to their testimony.

Thank you.