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Hicks column: When you mess with time, South Carolina, it tends to mess back

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Before we ditch Eastern Standard Time forever, let's take a minute.

Contrary to popular belief, the alternative may not be all sunshine and light.

The Legislature has passed a bill that, pending congressional approval, would put the state on permanent daylight saving time. With Gov. Henry McMaster's signature, which is forthcoming, South Carolina will become one of more than a half-dozen states officially petitioning to end twice-a-year time changes.

This is as safe a position as anyone can take in politics today. There is no more popular, bipartisan cause ... because everybody and their brother hates resetting their clocks twice a year. Losing an hour in the spring, getting it back in the fall, leads to nothing but confusion and erratic sleep patterns.

Of course, people gripe mostly because they don't get off work until dark several months a year — and the afternoon commute is depressing enough without having to do it in the pitch dark. Most people say they would prefer to have a little more light at the end of the day.

Fair enough, and perhaps that's even a good enough reason to do it. But don't expect this to solve much of anything.

People have complained about this since the dawn of time ... well, at least since we started changing the clocks, on and off, more than a century ago. The internet has amplified this unrest and, well, here we are.

Time was, everybody just wanted to ditch daylight saving and stick to Standard Time. But that sentiment has passed. Like South Carolina, states such as Florida, Tennessee, Nevada and Oregon want to adopt year-round daylight saving time. That's sort of like changing time zones, hence the need for Congress to OK it.

Trouble is, **we actually have no control over the sun. We aren't really getting more daylight**, only choosing when we get it. That's great for extended evenings, but morning folks are in for a rude awakening.

For instance, sunrise in Charleston today is 7:20 a.m. **If we were on DST, the crack of dawn wouldn't come until 8:20, well into a rush hour already in progress.** It would be even worse in Greenville, not coming until after 8:30.



Do we really want to wait until 8:30 a.m. for this? That's the question behind permanent daylight saving time. Matthew Fortner/Staff

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That could be a problem. **The National Parent Teacher Association is on record opposing the switch for safety reasons**, as if kids aren't catching the bus in the dark as it is. But that's a good indicator of the new complaints that will crop up if this change comes to pass. Just look at South America.

Brazil recently eliminated daylight saving time because, yes, everyone complained about changing their clocks. Now it's daylight on Rio beaches at 5 a.m. ... and of course, the tourists aren't out at that indecent hour. So businesses are fuming about lost profits, and everyone else grouches about sunlight blasting through their windows when they're still trying to sleep.

South Carolina wouldn't see problems that extreme, because we are tucked pleasantly in the middle of the Eastern Time Zone. But it would become an issue in other states. **In Chattanooga, Tennessee, the sun wouldn't rise today until 8:46; in Detroit, it wouldn't show until 8:55.**

In other words, we'd likely have a whole new group of potentially disgruntled citizens.

Permanent daylight saving time is the rare idea with no ideological bent — both scientists and President Trump see the value in ditching time changes and going pure DST. Yet Congress won't touch the "Sunshine Protection Act" with a 10-foot pole. Why is that?

Part of it is because the number of states clamoring for this hasn't hit critical mass, and it's impractical — if not a logistical nightmare — for people to change their clocks from state to state along the East Coast. Even South Carolina's proponents for year-round DST say if North Carolina and Georgia aren't in, it's likely a nonstarter.

Ultimately this is only going to trade one angry constituency for another. **People who don't like getting off work when it's dark probably won't be much happier to go before sunrise.**

And that's the only constant in this universe: People will complain, no matter what.

You can set your clock by it.

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