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Kids walking to school in the dark? Year-round daylight saving time in California makes no sense

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SACRAMENTO — You still want daylight saving time year-round? California voters answered an emphatic “yes” last year. Well, look outside these chilly mornings about 7 o’clock.

It’s practically still dark over much of California, especially in the north. But that’s fine. It’s winter solstice time. It’s what we’re used to.

But what if we did have our way and it really was daylight saving time? **It would be 8 a.m. and barely light in Southern California and still gloomily dark in San Francisco and Sacramento.**

That’s **uncivilized** and **dangerous**.

Little kids would have waited for buses or walked to elementary school in the pitch black with flashlights, shivering. Many of their parents would be driving to work before sunup.

OK, everyone would get an extra hour of sunlight in the early evening. It wouldn’t get dark until around 6.

So what? It’s cold outside, maybe even rainy. **This isn’t a balmy summer evening.** The pool doesn’t beckon. There’s little appetite for barbecuing. Maybe golf fanatics could get in an extra three holes — but morning tee times would be harder to get.

These days, with standard time, the sun is rising at 6:55 a.m. in Los Angeles and setting at 4:48 p.m. Add one hour to those times under daylight saving and the sun rises about 8 a.m.

In San Francisco, the sun isn’t rising until 7:20 a.m. So under DST, it wouldn’t be up until 8:20. Same with Sacramento.

And what’s with this “saving” nonsense? No law can change Earth’s rotation around the sun. We’ll get the same amount of daylight no matter how we set our clocks. The only question is whether we want more at the start of the day or toward the end.

The way I see it, the sun is for warm months. It’s fine to extend daylight into the gentle summer evenings. We can savor the outdoors. But **when it’s cold and drizzly, provide me more morning light to get the day started.**

That’s why they call it “summertime” and “wintertime” besides DST and PST.

But I was overwhelmingly outvoted last year.

Proposition 7, which paved the way for eventual year-round daylight saving time, passed by a landslide margin, roughly 60% to 40%. It carried 51 of 58 counties.

Six of the seven counties that voted against the measure were in the San Joaquin Valley farm belt. Farmers apparently don’t like milking cows and gathering eggs in the dark. The seventh county was Del Norte in the far northwest, where there’s lots of commercial fishing and logging.

The bill placing Proposition 7 on the ballot was passed lopsidedly by the Legislature and signed by Gov. Jerry Brown, who enjoyed his usual fun with Latin in a signing message. “Fiat lux,” Brown wrote, meaning, “Let there be light.”

But not until 8 a.m. in winter.

The measure's author, Assemblyman Kansen Chu (D-San Jose), said his main goal was to eliminate the nuisance of having to change clocks twice a year. He wanted to adopt either daylight saving or standard time permanently and didn't care which. But he also said people seemed to prefer daylight saving.

So the ballot measure encouraged the Legislature to adopt daylight saving all year. That would require a two-thirds majority vote. This doesn't seem to be a major problem. But there's trouble in Washington.

Congress and the president must approve a switch to permanent daylight saving time, although California could move to all-year standard time on its own. Arizona and Hawaii did that long ago.

Washington's principal problem is that politicians there have much more pressing things on their minds: impeachment and the 2020 elections. Anyway, it's not likely the Republican-controlled U.S. Senate and President Trump will be enthusiastic about anything California desires, even though Sen. Marco Rubio (R-Fla.) has introduced a bill to make daylight saving permanent nationally. **The bill hasn't budged.**

Four states have enacted laws to adopt daylight saving year-round pending federal approval: Oregon, Washington, Tennessee and Florida. So if California also went to all-year daylight saving, the entire West Coast would be in the same time zone. Thankfully.

But despite the overwhelming vote of Californians, things are moving rather lethargically in Sacramento. There are much higher priorities such as wildfires, power outages, homelessness and affordable housing.

Chu's implementation bill, AB 7, breezed through the Assembly with only one "no" vote in a committee. It passed the Assembly 72 to 0, then stalled in the Senate.

Sen. Ben Hueso (D-San Diego), chairman of the Senate energy committee, has concerns about whether the time change could complicate cross-border commuting between the U.S. and Mexico.

But Chu says he'll ask for a hearing in Hueso's committee soon after the Legislature reconvenes in January. And he's confident of passage.

Chu calls changing clocks twice a year "archaic" and "harmful." When we're on daylight saving time, he says, there are fewer evening robberies. There's also a "significant increase" in heart attacks on the day after clock-changing, he asserts. And more people die in car accidents.

But how about those children walking to school in the dark? Aren't they in danger?

"That's a concern," Chu acknowledges. "But we can make sure there's adequate lighting en route to school. And it'll only be dark for a few weeks."

It just seems illogical to put up with 60 mornings of stumbling around in the dark in order to avoid two days of taking five minutes to change some watches.



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