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OPINION ANALYSIS

# The Reasoning Behind Changing Daylight-Saving

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Heard on All Things Considered

The upcoming shift in the daylight-saving time change is designed to help retailers — and is a substitute for a genuine energy policy, says author Michael Downing. Congress moved the time shift up this year. Melissa Block talks with Michael Downing, author of *Spring Forward: The Annual Madness of Daylight Saving Time*.

MICHELE NORRIS, host:

From NPR News, this is ALL THINGS CONSIDERED. I'm Michele Norris.

MELISSA BLOCK, host:

And I'm Melissa Block. You can feel and see the days lengthening now as we head toward spring, and we're going to get an extra bump of evening daylight starting this weekend. Daylight Saving Time will begin three weeks earlier than in the past - not the first Sunday in April, but the second Sunday in March.

And Daylight Saving Time will end one week later than it used to, so we won't be falling back until November 4th. This shift is all because of the energy bill that Congress passed in 2005. In a moment, we're going to hear about some technical troubles this change may cause. But first, we're joined by Michael Downing, who has written a book on all this. It's called "Spring Forward: The Annual Madness of

Daylight Saving Time." And call me crazy, Mr. Downing, but I get the feeling you are not a fan of Daylight Saving Time.

Mr. MICHAEL DOWNING (Author, "Spring Forward: The Annual Madness of Daylight Saving Time"): Well, I'm certainly not a fan of the idea that it saves energy.

BLOCK: Well, that is the idea, right? That if you turn on your lights later at night, that you're going to save some energy? It maybe a small increment, but over time, it'll add up. You don't think so.

Mr. DOWNING: Well, it turns out every time Congress has studied it, it's been told that we haven't saved anything. And in fact the best we have is from the Nixon era, when he went on a desperate attempt of year-round Daylight Saving as a result of the OPEC oil embargo. And he came up with nothing by way of saving except the potential, again.

Here's the problem with Daylight Saving as an energy-saver: We tend to want our computers and our televisions and our radios when we want them. More importantly, Daylight Saving really pushes Americans out of the house at the end of the day. And when Americans go out of the house, they may go to the ballpark, they may go to the mall, but they don't walk there. They get into their cars.

Daylight Saving increases gasoline consumption, something the petroleum industry has known since 1930.

BLOCK: So in other words, maybe the lights are off at home, but people are in their car going to the Dairy Queen.

Mr. DOWNING: That's exactly right. People go out and spend money. This has been long - tremendously effective spending policy. Retail stores love Daylight Saving.

BLOCK: Because?

Mr. DOWNING: Well, because when we have an hour of sunlight after work, Americans tend to go shopping. The first and most persistent lobby for Daylight

Saving in this country was the Chamber of Commerce, because they understood that if their department stores were lit up, people would be tempted by them.

In 1986, Congress gave us an extra month of Daylight Saving Time. That's when we went from six to seven months, which is the period we've been living with recently. In that congressional hearings, the golf industry alone - these are the industry estimates - told Congress one additional month of daylight saving was worth \$200 million in additional sales of golf clubs and greens fees. The barbecue industry said it was worth \$100 million in additional sales of grills and charcoal briquettes.

BLOCK: This may be kind of an urban legend, but I thought I had heard that one of the backers behind extending Daylight Saving Time into the beginning of November was the candy industry, and it all had to do with Halloween.

Mr. DOWNING: This is no kind of legend. This is the truth. For 25 years, candy-makers have wanted to get trick-or-treat covered by Daylight Saving, figuring that if children have an extra hour of daylight, they'll collect more candy. In fact, they went so far during the 1985 hearings on Daylight Saving as to put candy pumpkins on the seat of every senator, hoping to win a little favor.

(Soundbite of laughter)

Mr. DOWNING: They didn't get it then, but they got it this time.

BLOCK: You know, if you look at the calendar for this year, there are going to be eight months of Daylight Saving Time, four months of Standard Time. It's really imbalanced now.

Mr. DOWNING: Well, it does call into question the very phrase Standard Time, doesn't it, if we're spending eight months off of standard time. And really, the week that we're going to see probably the most drastic effect for most Americans is going to be that extra week in November, when we fall back a week later this year. and that's because we're going to have very late sunrise times.

When we move out to March and November, we start to get sunrise times as late as 8:30 in the morning, which is what Grand Rapids will be looking at in November.

BLOCK: Well, I gather Congress has written an escape clause into all this that if it's not working, they can repeal the whole thing.

Mr. DOWNING: Congress has set aside \$150 million to study the effects of Daylight Saving once again. And it claims if it doesn't work to save energy, we're going to go back to the old seven-month period, which, of course, would simply mean that we have to adjust our clocks at a new time next year.

BLOCK: Well Michael Downing, thanks for talking with us.

Mr. DOWNING: Thanks, Melissa.

BLOCK: Michael Downing teaches creative writing at Tufts University and wrote the book "Spring Forward: The Annual Madness of Daylight Saving Time."

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## A Time-Change Timeline

March 9, 2007 · 2:48 PM ET



Benjamin Franklin — shown in a 1783 engraving by Nathaniel Currier — is credited with advancing the concept of daylight-saving time. He wanted to save candles.

*MPI/Getty Images*



President Franklin D. Roosevelt signs a declaration of war in 1941. "War Time," a variation on daylight-saving time, followed. Again the idea was to save fuel.

*Hulton Archive/Getty Images*





A Kuwait Oil Company drilling rig on the northern border with Iraq. Daylight-saving time is still about saving energy.

*Joe Raedle/Getty Images*

**1784:** Ben Franklin writes a paper extolling the virtues of extending daylight in order to save candles.

**1883:** The U.S. and Canada listen to the cries of their railroad executives and adopt Standard Time.

**1918:** The U.S. establishes a daylight-saving time to run for seven months to conserve electricity during World War I. Once the war was over, the national law is dropped and daylight-saving time became a local option.

**1942:** During World War II, President Franklin Roosevelt orders a year-round daylight-saving time, called "War Time," which runs for three years.

**1944:** For the next two decades, there is no national law. States and jurisdictions can choose whether to observe daylight-saving time and when to begin and end it.

**1966:** Congress passes the Uniform Time Act of 1966, establishing a beginning and end date for daylight-saving time, but leaves it up to local jurisdictions to decide whether to use it.

**1973:** Congress enacts the Emergency Daylight Saving Time Energy Conservation Act in response to the Arab oil embargo. Daylight-saving time is extended to eight months rather than the normal six. The Department of Transportation says the equivalent of 100,000 barrels of oil each day was saved.

**1986:** Daylight saving is moved from the last Sunday of April to the first Sunday of April. The end date is left the same.

**1987:** Chile delays its time change by one day to accommodate a papal visit.

**2005:** Congress passes the Energy Act of 2005 which starts daylight-saving time one month earlier in the spring and extends it one week later in the fall, beginning in 2007.



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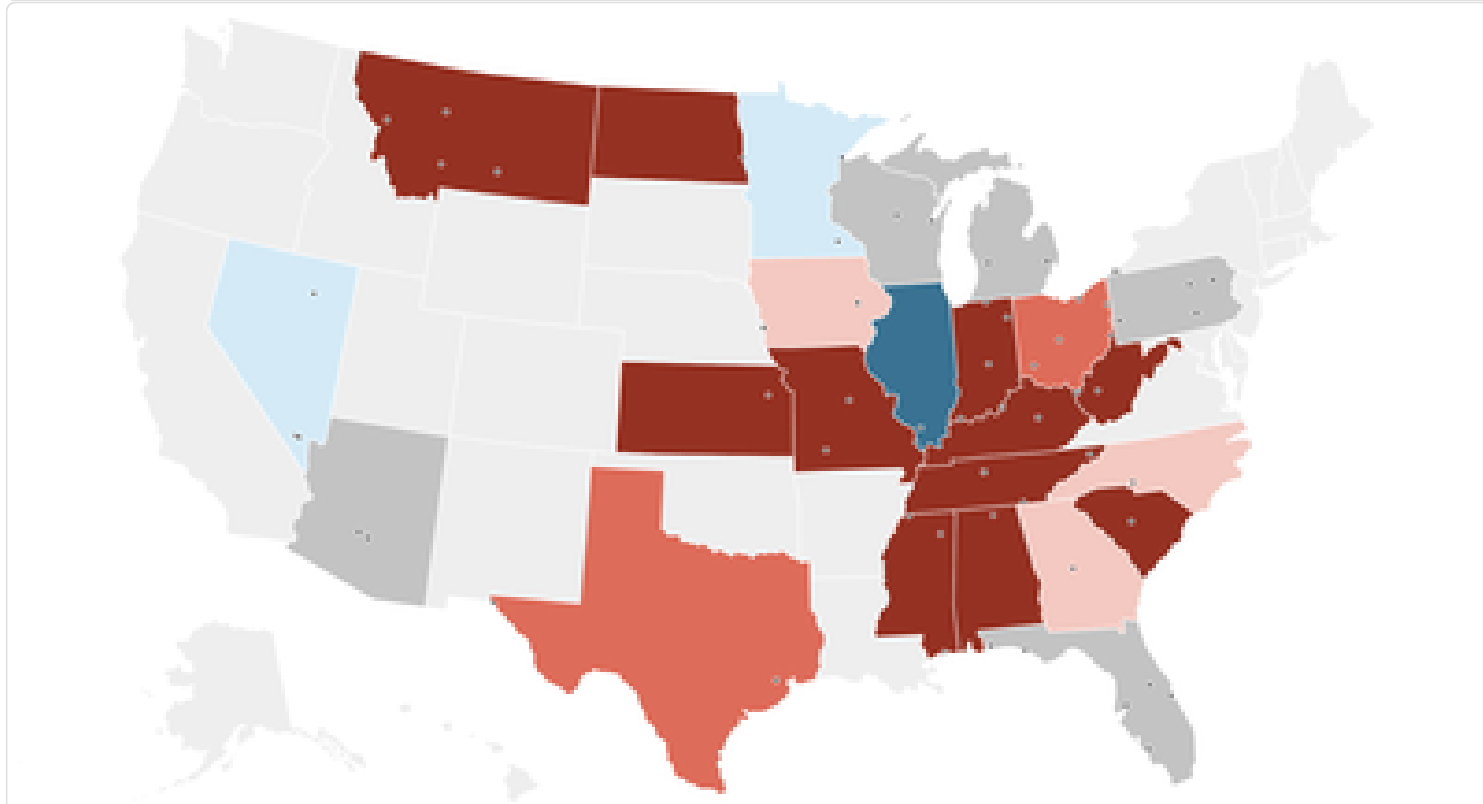
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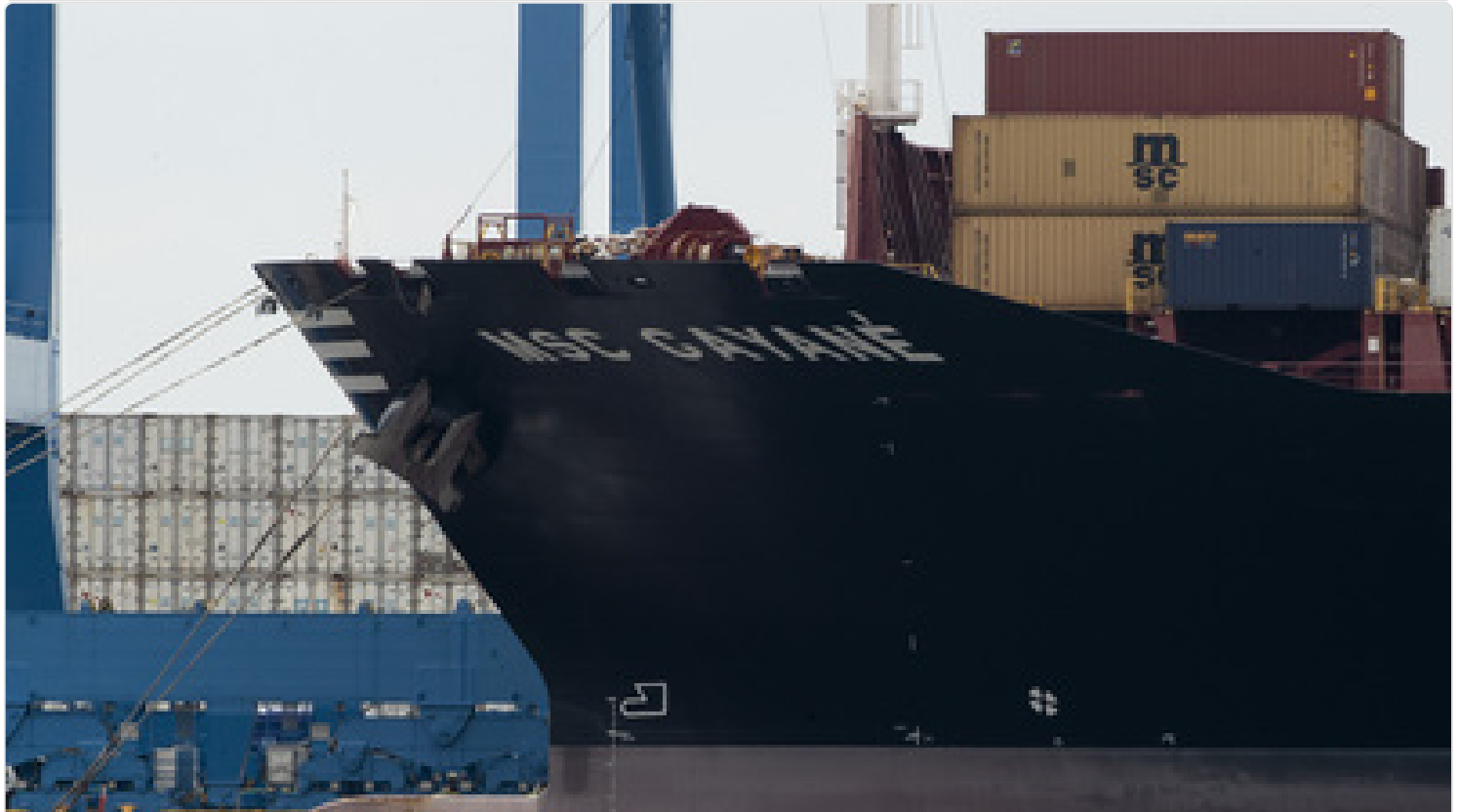


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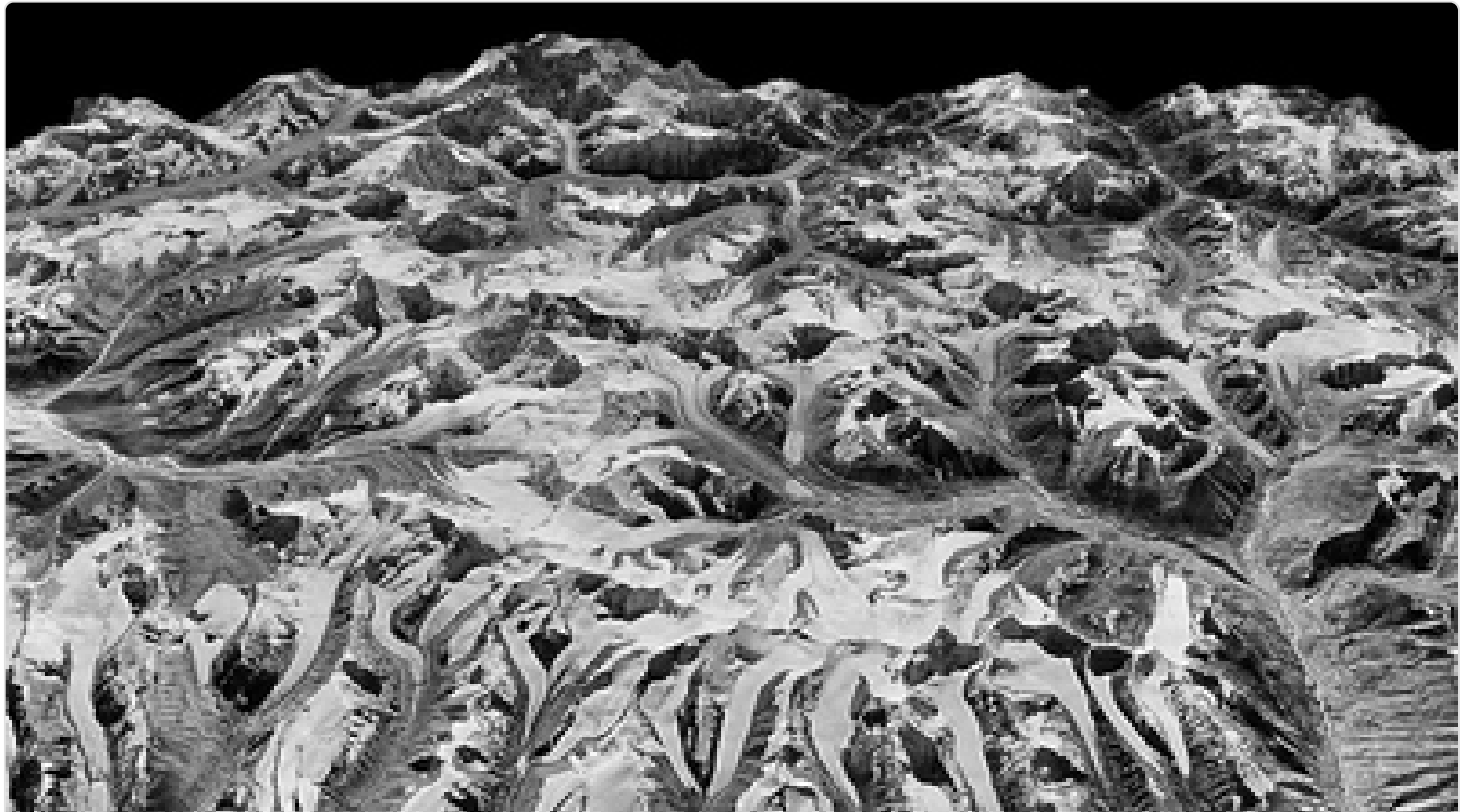
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