

OPINION + VOICES

Who wants to go to work in the dark? Californians need permanent standard time

UCLA Chancellor Gene Block says we must be mindful of the health consequences associated with insufficient morning light

While some people look forward to “falling back” one hour when daylight saving time ends, others feel their sleep routine is thrown off. A recent study says they may be right.

Gene Block and Johanna Meijer | February 28, 2019



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When Californians voted in November to end the increasingly pointless process of resetting our clocks twice a year, it also was a step toward improving our health.

Mounting evidence suggests that disruptions to our body’s biological clock are harmful, and growing recognition of this fact by scientists has fueled efforts in other states and even the European Union to take action. But ceasing the biannual disruptions alone is not enough.

Here in California, where the sun rises over San Diego nearly an hour earlier than it does at the Oregon border, choosing permanent daylight saving time could create real health and safety issues for the northern part of the state.

In a state nearly 800 miles long, permanent daylight saving time would have the sun rising over San Diego in late December at 7:47 a.m. In San Francisco, sunrise would occur around 8:20 a.m. And in Crescent City, in the far north, it would rise at 8:42 a.m.

That means most children and many commuters across Southern California would pretty much always head out to school or work in daylight, while most everyone in communities from the Bay Area north would begin their work or school days during winter in darkness.

This lack of morning light can have serious impact on our biological clocks, which control the body’s many daily rhythms including our sleep and wakefulness cycle. Humans require adequate morning light so that our internal biological rhythms synchronize properly to the local time. There’s a wealth of data demonstrating that a lack of exposure to light leads to sleep and metabolic disorders, depression and cardiovascular disease, among other ailments.

Shift workers, for example, who often start their days in darkness and go to sleep while the sun is still shining, are at increased risk for these health problems.

Many countries in the far north, such as Norway, have innovative artificial lighting strategies to deal with excessive winter darkness. We can certainly learn from their experience, but we also have choices that those in the far north do not.

The most important of those choices currently rests with California’s legislature, which must be mindful of the health consequences associated with insufficient morning light.

On a national scale, federal officials should take notice of what happens in California. Even though Washington, D.C., has far bigger issues to sort through, U.S. Sen. Marco Rubio did introduce legislation calling for the U.S. to move to permanent daylight saving time last year. Yet imagine winter sunrise in Seattle, which would occur close to 9 a.m.

Permanent standard time is the only fair and viable option, not only for California, but the entire nation. California lawmakers, regardless of district, have a responsibility to residents in the northern part of the state. They also have an opportunity to make this important point to Congress, which might someday impose a permanent time change for the nation.