

# Ask Juneau — Why do we have daylight saving time in Alaska?

By Richard Mauer | Posted: Sun 1:35 PM, Mar 18, 2018

**JUNEAU, Alaska (KTUU)** Two viewers this week had timely questions — if you pardon the pun. The viewers were wondering about daylight saving time, which went into effect last Sunday — March 11 — in Alaska and the rest of the United States.

“Why does the state of Alaska do daylight saving time?” Harold Thornton of Soldotna wanted to know. In his email to Channel 2 News, he said that no one he knew could come up with a good reason.

Another viewer misremembered an initiative on daylight saving time. The viewer thought Alaskans voted to kill daylight saving time, but the measure, actually proposed twice, never made it to the ballot after petitions circulated in 2006 and 2007.

Other Alaskans have been fighting daylight saving time but making little progress. One is Anna MacKinnon, an Alaska State senator, who has proposed killing off daylight saving time twice — once in 2009 when she was in the House and named Anna Fairclough, and again in 2015 as Sen. MacKinnon. The House bill passed the House but not the Senate, and the Senate bill passed the Senate but not the House.

Now the co-chair of the Senate Finance Committee, MacKinnon says she is done with the matter for the moment.

“Right now, the state is focused on budget issues — we are trying to set aside personal aspirations, as far as legislation goes, and really focus on the huge issues that are facing our state, and that is the fiscal crisis, the people of Alaska, and what we need to do to stabilize Alaska’s economy.”

But she hasn’t forgotten what she did before, and she spoke forcefully about dumping daylight saving time when she was interviewed last week just after the clocks changed.

Her past support wasn’t a joke or a distraction, she said, even though it was often associated with the bill of another Senator to make Feb. 2 Marmot Day in Alaska instead of Groundhog Day.

**Daylight saving time**, she said, “is really artificially imposed and not something we should be doing to ourselves and, quite frankly, I believe that it is causing harm to people,” she said. “Men’s heart attacks go up.”

**Switching time can also cause jet lag in people who never left home, and lead to accidents on the job**, she said.

Time has always been a little crazy in Alaska, what with our winter darkness and summer light. The breadth of Alaska has also played role. In 1983, Alaska had four time zones, the same number as the entire rest of the country.

Alaska’s time zones became two in November 1983, ending the era when Anchorage and Juneau were in different time zones.

The New York Times said then: “Except for annual national daylight time changes, no such broad shift has occurred since Nov. 18, 1883, when the railroads adopted time zones to facility their scheduling and make their operations safer.”

**Federal law imposes time zones and daylight saving time, but states are allowed to opt out. Hawaii and parts of Arizona don’t observe it.** Florida’s “Sunshine Protection Act” imposes daylight saving time on the state year-round, but only if Congress changes federal law to allow that. Sen. Marco Rubio has said he would try.

While some people call standard time “God’s time,” Sen. MacKinnon uses the term “sun time,” in which noon is really high noon — when the sun is directly overhead. Daylight saving time has a greater negative effect in western Alaska than the rest of the state because of its presence at the edge of the Alaska time zone and the disregard for sun time. Noon on a western Alaska clock occurs in afternoon and daylight saving time only makes the problem an hour worse. ⊗

“Western Alaska is disproportionately disadvantaged in Alaska by not staying with sun time vs this man-made daylight saving time,” she said.

But Southeast Alaska is another matter. It was on the same time as Seattle back in the 1980s, and agreed to the switch that set the region to an hour earlier. But killing off daylight saving time in Alaska would push them two hours off Seattle.

And MacKinnon says that national retailers have studied the time switch and found that people spend more money in the evenings when there’s daylight, giving an economic incentive to business to preserve the status quo of a time switch.

*Have a question about state government or politics? Send it to .*

---

---