

QUARTZ

Daylight Saving Time as Americans know it was instituted by corporate lobbies, not farmers

November 4, 2017



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At some point in elementary school, many American children learn that Daylight Saving Time was originally intended to give farmers an extra hour of light to work the fields.

That is, in fact, a lie.

Farmers actually hated the practice, because it cut an hour of daylight in the morning, leaving them with an hour less to get goods to market, according to Michael Downing, author of the book *Spring Forward: The Annual Madness of Daylight Saving Time*. In reality, the extra hour of evening daylight was good for one thing: selling products.

“[W]hen we have an hour of sunlight after work, Americans tend to go shopping,” Downing told NPR in 2007. “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.”

Specifically we have the candy lobby, the barbecue lobby, and the golf ball lobby to thank for modern American Daylight Saving Time. But we’ll get to that in a second.

The US first enacted Daylight Saving Time during World War I, ostensibly to conserve energy by cutting down on the time people would artificially light their homes (Germany started the trend in 1916, with the US and UK following suit). But before World War I had even ended Congress repealed the practice “to quell the revolt from the farm lobby,” according to Downing.

President Franklin D. Roosevelt enacted Daylight Saving Time again during World War II, but the farm lobby staved off any peacetime daylight saving acts until 1966, when Congress passed the Uniform Time Act to solve the problem of a chaotic patchwork of some regions continuing to observe daylight saving after the wars while others did not (Hawaii and Arizona continued to opt out, which they still do).

🍖 Barbecues, ⚾️ baseball, and 🏌️ golf clubs

In the meantime, businesses jumped at the chance to sell more products.

Back when daylight saving was first enacted, “golf ball sales skyrocketed,” Downing wrote, according to *The Week*, and before floodlit playing fields, organized baseball was “a huge early supporter” of the time scheme.

Downing also contends that the petroleum lobby was a keen supporter, because it has known since 1930 that daylight saving makes people drive their cars more in the evening—so they use more gasoline.

In 1986, under president Ronald Reagan, the US lengthened daylight saving from six months to seven. At Congressional hearings the year before, the golf industry told members of Congress that the one additional month of daylight saving was “worth \$200 million in additional sales of golf clubs and greens fees,” Downing says. “The barbecue industry said it was worth \$100 million in additional sales of grills and charcoal briquettes.”

In comes big candy 🍬

Even though the 1986 switch lengthened daylight saving, it still didn’t encompass a very important date for another big industry, the candy lobby. The candy lobby was convinced an extra hour of evening light on Halloween would make kids collect more candy, and in turn get adults to buy more of it in anticipation. They were so eager to get Halloween covered by daylight saving that it “put candy pumpkins on the seat of every senator, hoping to win a little favor” during the 1985 hearings where Big Golf and Big Barbecue made their case, according to Downing.

They didn’t win it that time, but in 2005 president George W. Bush signed a bill extending DST to eight months in total, which is how Americans experience daylight saving now. Halloween, at last, was covered.