

Los Angeles Times

Capitol Journal: Year-round daylight saving time? More dark mornings is just one downside

By GEORGE SKELTON
CAPITOL JOURNAL COLUMNIST

JULY 5, 2018 | 12:05 AM

Reporting from Sacramento — We'd be better off on the Fourth of July if daylight saving time were eliminated. It would get darker earlier, and we wouldn't have to wait so long for the fireworks shows.

But the sun would rise the next day at a ridiculously early 4:47 a.m. in Los Angeles. Forget that.

So in summer, daylight saving time is better for sleeping in the morning and for playing in the evening, except on July Fourth.

But if we kept daylight saving all year, kids would be walking to school in the dark in winter. On Dec. 21, the sun wouldn't rise until 7:55 a.m. in L.A. That's uncivilized and dangerous.

These are among the weighty tradeoffs Californians will need to ponder before they vote on Proposition 7 in the November election.

That ballot measure, as described by Gov. Jerry Brown, would "albeit through a circuitous path open the door for year-round daylight saving."

"Fiat lux," Brown wrote in signing the legislation last week, communicating in Latin. His translated message: "Let there be light!"

Does that mean Brown likes the idea of staying on daylight saving all year? Or is he just having fun in Latin?

"Both," spokesman Evan Westrup replied in an email. "He also likes the idea of voters having a say."

But why does he like year-round daylight saving?

"It's pretty simple," Westrup responded. "The governor prefers the light over darkness."

OK, maybe he's a late riser.

The legislation, by Assemblyman Kansen Chu (D-San Jose), placed a measure on the ballot to repeal the state's Daylight Saving Time Act. Voters approved the act in 1949, so only voters can repeal it.

If passed, Proposition 7 would allow the Legislature to end the practice of moving up the clock one hour on the second Sunday in March, and moving it back on the first Sunday in November. The ballot measure would "encourage" the Legislature to adopt year-round daylight saving.

Brown was on target when he called it "a circuitous path." Converting to daylight saving all year would require a two-thirds majority vote in the Legislature and approval by Congress, plus signatures of the governor and president.

California could stay on standard time all year without Washington's OK, just as Arizona and Hawaii have. Arizonans want an earlier sunset in summer so they can venture outside without being fried.

Chu says he doesn't actually care whether California goes on year-round daylight saving or standard time. He just wants the state to pick one and stop switching clocks twice a year. And he found there's a lot more support for daylight saving than standard time.

“My sense is people don’t mind going to work in the dark, but they definitely prefer more light after work,” Chu told me.

He obviously didn’t talk to people I know.

Chu tried for three years to get a bill passed, and finally scored on his third attempt. The lawmaker says he introduced the measure because voters in his district asked him to.

“It creates a lot of headache for families when the time springs forward,” he says. “They have to put the kids to bed an hour earlier. Adjustment problems can last a week. My 97-year-old mom says it takes weeks for her to adapt to a new time zone.”

One study four years ago found there was a **25% greater risk of suffering a heart attack on the March Monday after switching to daylight saving time. That’s because the victims lost an hour’s sleep**, the researcher said.

OK, but there are counter arguments.

“**Permanent DST would likely lead to more pedestrian accidents on winter mornings as more adults and children venture out in darkness,**” Severin Borenstein, a professor at the UC Berkeley Haas School of Business, wrote in a recent blog.

The country went to daylight saving time in World War II **to save energy. But there’s no solid evidence it did** or does today. People may turn their lights on later in the day, but **they run their air conditioner longer.**

Going to all-year daylight saving would leave California out of sync with the other Pacific Coast states. And in summer, there’d be a three-hour difference between us and New York, but in winter only two hours. That would require adjustments twice a year. Maybe some screwed up financial dealings and TV listings.

But we’d always be the same as Arizona.

Although there’s a natural inclination to dismiss this proposal as not worth much thought, it clearly could have a substantial effect on our lives. And it’s amazing that the bill passed the Legislature so overwhelmingly with little concern or passion.

“I don’t know whether they were asleep,” Sen. Hannah-Beth Jackson (D-Santa Barbara) says of her colleagues. She voted “no.”

“First,” she says, “if California wants it, the federal government is going to say ‘no.’ Second, the system we have really does the best to accommodate people.

“Third, with so many critical issues facing this state — housing, healthcare, the gas tax — to dive into the pros and cons of this diminishes the importance of more substantive ballot measures.”

Chu answers: “I’m sorry if it’s not important to you, but it is to my constituents. It means the world to people who take the time to come talk to me.”

Sure. But people who really worry about changing the clock twice a year are blessed with not having a lot to worry about.

george.skelton@latimes.com

Follow [@LATimesSkelton](https://twitter.com/LATimesSkelton) on Twitter

Political columnist George Skelton has covered government and politics for nearly 60 years and for The Times since 1974.