

# Boston

## Charlie Baker's War Against the Morning Sun

**After our Republican governor commissioned a study on whether the state should secede from the Eastern Time Zone, we started to wonder: Is Charlie Baker really a Libertarian in disguise?**

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November 6, 2016

Not long ago, a *Bloomberg* article popped up in my inbox that gave me pause: Governor Charlie Baker had greenlit a task force to study whether Massachusetts should move into a new time zone—one “that would brighten the end of the day in the months that the Northern Hemisphere tilts away from the sun.” The proposed move, according to the story, would essentially liberate Massachusetts from the cruel government-imposed ritual known as daylight-saving time and free us from the pesky biannual chore of having to adjust our clocks.

From the start, it sounded like a ludicrous notion. Can you imagine coming up to Boston from New York for a business meeting and having to deal with jet lag? And vice versa. Would anyone still do it? Would Amtrak schedulers have an aneurysm? And what about the poor schlubs who make the daily commute down from New Hampshire? The eccentricity of the idea seemed deeply off-brand for Baker, who's essentially the gubernatorial equivalent of NBA legend Tim Duncan: predictable, effective, but not likely to toss up a half-court hook shot just for a laugh.

Then the L-word popped into my head: Could Baker's potential disdain for falling back and springing ahead signal that the state's highest officeholder is a closeted Libertarian? After all, he wants to privatize the MBTA and has a strong dislike of the Common Core education curriculum. And let's not forget that during the late 1980s Baker served as one of the first-ever co-directors at the Pioneer Institute, a Boston-based think tank dedicated to free-market principles and small government. Plus, of course, Baker is a noted mentee of Bill Weld, the 2016 Libertarian Party vice-presidential hopeful. The puzzle pieces seemed to be coming together.

Still, maybe Baker's task force has a point. As we turn the clocks back this month, you certainly don't have to loathe big government to see the absurdity of daylight-saving time in our hyper-connected world. But the tradition of Uncle Sam meddling with our sunshine seems to strike an especially sour note with the Libertarian ethos, occasionally becoming a cause célèbre among the movement's vanguard. Katherine Mangu-Ward, editor in chief of *Reason* magazine, once lamented, “Cutting energy consumption—whether because of wartime shortages, oil embargoes, or global warming fears—has always been the justification for the abuse of American sleep schedules.” Meanwhile, Steve Hanke, a professor of applied economics at Johns Hopkins and a senior fellow at the Libertarian Cato Institute, tells me that it's not the issue of daylight-saving

time that's screwed up—it's the issue of time zones. Russia has 11; China has one; North Korea made up its own. It's total chaos, just not the kind that Libertarians usually like.

Finally, I went straight to the source to find out what Baker himself had to say about it. He declined to comment, but his advisers pointed to an all-too-telling statement that Baker made to the State House News Service after signing the bill. "I think the time zones we have are fine," he said, "and they've been fine for a very long time. . . . I especially worry that if we head too far down this road we could end up creating a lot of problems for ourselves with respect to all sorts of issues around work schedules, commuting schedules, and a whole bunch of other things." The way Baker talked of the study, it was a political concession in order to push through his billion-dollar job-creation-and-workforce-development bill.

Alas, I should have known. Tim Duncan didn't play basketball like he was on the Harlem Globetrotters. And Charlie Baker isn't really interested in shredding the fabric of time along the Eastern Seaboard. Shredding the bureaucracy behind the MBTA, though—that's a whole other story.