



Pick a time and stick with it

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On Saturday afternoon, Nov. 6, Sen. Kyrsten Sinema (D-Ariz.) tweeted “Daylight saving time ends tomorrow. Arizona, you know what to do: Nothing.” Unfortunately, the circadian rhythm of roughly 173,000 residents of the Navajo Nation, the bulk of which occupies the northeast corner of Arizona, was disrupted for the second time this year, making them vulnerable to harmful unintended consequences.

The Navajo Nation elected to follow daylight saving time because its territory extends into states that follow DST. But the rest of Arizona’s residents, including yours truly, can gloat along with Hawaiians, the only other state that doesn’t participate in the biannual assault on our mental and physical health.

Research shows disruptions of the circadian rhythm can contribute to depression and mood disorders. A study by Finnish researchers found that turning the clock ahead or behind was associated with an 8 percent increased risk of stroke. A 2020 study by sleep researchers at the University of Colorado concluded “sleep deprivation and circadian misalignment” caused a 6 percent increase in fatal motor vehicle accidents during the first week after people spring ahead. Circadian disruption has also been linked to an increased risk of heart attack and might even impact liver and immune system function.

The idea of daylight savings time originated in 1784 with Benjamin Franklin. During his tenure as ambassador to France, he wrote a letter to *The Journal of Paris* suggesting it would economize on the use of candles. Conserving energy is the rationale behind DST to this day. Yet numerous studies fail to demonstrate evidence of energy savings. And even if some regions or economic sectors were to realize specific savings, they must be weighed against the mental and physical health trade-offs.

Some business groups have favored DST, believing it means more hours for commerce. Others believe it disrupts business.

In 1966, Congress established official dates for springing forward and falling back with the Uniform Time Act. The act allowed states to opt out of DST. Congress extended DST by four weeks in 2005. Many countries in Asia, Africa, and South America do not, or no longer practice biannual time changes. The European Parliament voted to end the practice in 2019, but bureaucracy, the COVID-19 pandemic, and Brexit have prevented this from happening.

Arizona participated in daylight saving time from 1966 to 1967, but the residents of the hot southwestern state didn't want an extra hour of heat and sunlight for running their air conditioners on high. In 1967, its legislature opted out of DST.

Hawaii never opted in. Its legislature decided that the state's distance from the U.S. mainland plus its proximity to the equator—which made for little variation in the seasons—gave them no reason to disrupt Hawaiians' schedules. The territories of Guam, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands don't participate either.

To date, 19 states have enacted laws or resolutions that would create year-round daylight saving time, but Congress must change federal law in order for this to happen.

In March of this year, Sen. Marco Rubio (R-Fla.) introduced the “Sunshine Protection Act of 2021,” which would make daylight saving time permanent and standard. It has 14 co-sponsors, 8 Republicans and 6 Democrats. Rep. Vern Buchanan (R-Fla.) introduced the bill in the House of Representatives in January.

Of course, another option would be to eliminate daylight saving time and return to year-round standard time. But with daylight saving time already in effect eight months out of the year, it might be less disruptive to just extend DST over the remaining four months and spare people another circadian jolt.

With Congress bogged down in partisan and intra-party disputes over massive spending bills, it appears that ending biannual clock changes is one idea around which everyone, regardless of ideology or party, can coalesce. Some may want to take the easy route and make daylight saving time year-round and permanent. Some may prefer a return to year-round standard time.

As an Arizona health care practitioner, my only recommendation is to pick a time and stick with it.

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