

SIC TRANSIT DAYLIGHT SAVING TIME?

If the proponents of California Senate Bill 51 (SB 51) have their way, this could be the last time Californians “spring forward” – that is, change their clocks to move from Standard Time to Daylight Saving Time.

The proponents: SB 51 author 6th District Senator Roger Niello (R-Roseville) and a medical community that has long inveighed against certain health and public safety consequences of the twice per year clock changing regimen that more than 97% of the nation has followed for 80 years. Add to that an increasing share of the public that would prefer for other reasons to simply “ditch the switch,” and it’s clear that an issue long simmering on the back burner of low priority is fast moving toward the front burner of critical mass.

But why “ditch the switch” in favor of Standard Time when Californians voted by a margin of 62% to 38% in 2018 to ditch it by going to Daylight Time? Why ditch it in favor taking what we now do for 4 months of the year and extend it all 12 when it would be so much simpler to just take what we do for 8 months and extend it to 12?

As you might have guessed, the reasons for flouting public opinion and pursuing the much more complicated and less popular of the two courses are complicated.

As stated by California Legislative Counsel in the preamble of SB 51, “Existing state law, Proposition 7, an initiative measure approved by the voters at the November 6, 2018, statewide general election, sets the standard time for California and sets daylight saving time to begin each March and end each November. Proposition 7 authorizes the Legislature to amend these provisions by a 2/3 vote to change the dates and times of the daylight-saving time period, consistent with federal law, and authorizes the Legislature to amend these provisions by a 2/3 vote to provide for the application of year-round daylight-saving time when authorized by federal law.”

That is what Californians voted for by a 24-point margin – full time Daylight Saving Time. However, the key phrase in the “summary” is “consistent with federal law.”

Current federal law permits states only two (2) options with respect to Standard versus Daylight Time: 1) Permanent Standard Time or 2) a combination of Standard and Daylight Time as prescribed by Congress (no wiggle room on the times/dates or details). Currently, 48 states hew to the biannual spring/fall switch. Two (2) states, Arizona and Hawaii, remain on Standard Time year-round. Thus, while California and the other 47 states are free to follow suit with Arizona and Hawaii by moving to permanent Standard Time, they CANNOT move to permanent Daylight Time without special dispensation from Congress in the form of a waiver or specific enabling legislation. Thus, the path of no resistance to ditching the biannual clock switch that the public increasingly wants to ditch, and the medical community also supports ditching, is ONLY the Standard Time option. There is no such simple Permanent Daylight Time option.

And while there are some sleep studies that find a marginal preference for Standard as opposed to Daylight Time, the real rub here is the path of greater resistance to the Daylight option represented by the need for enabling federal legislation.

When Senator Niello filed his bill December 12 there was nothing in the offing at the federal level resembling the required enabling legislation. However, on January 8 Washington's Democratic Senator Patty Murray and Florida's Republican Senator Rick Scott co-authored what they tagged the "Sunshine Act" that would mandate that all 50 of the states go to permanent Daylight Time. It was a reprise of the same bipartisan bill that passed the United States Senate in 2022 but was never taken up by the House of Representatives. The 2025 version has since attracted 14 additional supporters, roughly half Democrat and half Republican, including California Senior Senator Alex Padilla. For those wondering, there is at least one thing the two parties can agree upon, and it is the preference for "ditching" an increasingly unpopular "switch" by moving to permanent Daylight Time as Californians agreed to in 2018.

Despite 2018's Proposition 7 and other efforts in California that would have moved the state to permanent Daylight Savings Time, something that would likely have been of economic benefit to the California golf community, the California Alliance for Golf (CAG) stayed clear of weighing in, content to just let things remain status quo (biannual switching of the clocks).

However, given increased public support for "ditching the switch" along with solid medical evidence that supports the elimination of the biannual clock switch, the choice is no longer between a status quo that the California golf community finds acceptable and a switch that while perhaps marginally better economically, is not worth the expenditure of political capital to pursue.

The choice is now between Standard and Daylight Time. Golf didn't ask for that choice; it was made for us by others and other forces. Continued agnosticism on the subject is no longer wise.

If you need further evidence that this whole issue has reached critical mass, consider this. There are bills on the subject in 32 American states – 18 of which follow SB 51's path of no resistance by moving to permanent Standard Time, 11 of which do the opposite by moving to permanent Daylight Saving Time, and 3 of which (Texas, New York, and Nebraska) propose both options, both of them having already moved forward in Nebraska.

It doesn't take a genius to understand that the loss of an hour at the end of the day would curtail much of the "twilight" after-hours golf that supports the state's massive numbers of working golfers, league play, junior golf programs, and high school programs – in short, those players and those programs that are key to growing and sustaining the game. Whatever gain there would be from an earlier sunrise would be dwarfed by those losses, even if one were to assume that the myriad local noise ordinances that now restrict opening times could be amended to accommodate the earlier sunrise.

SB 51 is a spot bill. It has of yet no detail other than the following: "The people of the State of California do enact as follows: SECTION 1. It is the intent of the Legislature to enact legislation that would relate to the implementation of permanent standard time."

When the bill is populated with detail, as it must be in order to move forward in the legislative process, the California Alliance for Golf (CAG) can then determine whether and/or more likely how to craft some form of objection, whether in the form of a simple declarative opposition or a more nuanced opposition unless amended in some specific way – perhaps something along the lines of the much more comprehensive study of ALL the consequences, both intended and unintended, of

moving either to permanent Standard or permanent Daylight Saving Time – things like the consequences of losing recreation hours for a young generation now slated to live shorter lives than their parents due to inactivity, loss of business hours for recreational activities similarly situated to golf, impacts upon tourism, ancillary economic impacts, impacts upon energy consumption, and public safety just to name a few. Focusing on one impact to the exclusion of all other factors relevant to a fully informed decision about something that is not a matter of urgency is single entry bookkeeping of the worst order, particularly when the “decision” may well be preempted by a federal action that would require a complete reversal of course in the shortest of orders.