

## Let's lock the clock on standard time

By Dr. Karin Johnson and Lynne Lamberg

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Sen. [Marco Rubio](#) (R-Fla.) recently reintroduced his [Sunshine Protection Act](#). Last year's version squeaked through the Senate, but the bill, which would make daylight saving time permanent, died in the House.

"This ritual of changing time twice a year is stupid," Rubio said in a [press release](#). "Locking the clock has overwhelming bipartisan and popular support."

Rubio is right! Roughly [two in three U.S. adults](#) favor a national, fixed, year-round time.

Rubio is wrong about the best way to achieve that goal, however. Decades of scientific studies show it's actually permanent standard time that would foster better physical and mental health, according to Jay Pea, founder and president of [Save Standard Time](#), a nonpartisan national nonprofit.

While a bill calling for permanent standard time has yet to be introduced in Congress, [a bill proposed last year](#) by Oklahoma state Rep. Kevin West (R) would mandate the state to remain on standard time. Oklahoma's House of Representatives passed the bill, but it stalled in the state's Senate.

Any state can opt out of daylight saving time, under the 1966 [Uniform Time Act](#). Yet, only two states currently stay on standard time year-round, Hawaii and Arizona (except for the state's Navajo Nation). Additionally, all five populated U.S. territories — American Samoa, Guam, the Mariana Islands, Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands — also follow standard time.

This year, most of the U.S. will "spring forward" at 2 a.m. local time on Sunday, March 12, and "fall back" to standard time at 2 a.m. on Nov. 5.

"Mounting evidence shows the dangers of seasonal time changes, which have been linked to increased medical errors, motor vehicle accidents, increased hospital admissions and other problems," notes psychologist [Jennifer Martin](#), president of the American Academy of Sleep Medicine. [More than 90](#) other community groups concur.

Some proponents of daylight saving time claim these negative effects are just temporary. They are mistaken.

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Humans are programmed to live in harmony with the Earth's 24-hour day-night cycle. As diurnal creatures, we feel and function best when we stay active in the daytime and sleep at night.

Exposure to sunlight soon after we awaken regulates our daily sleep-wake cycle. It also orchestrates the smooth interaction of alertness, mood, appetite, heart rate, blood pressure, body temperature, cell division and hundreds of other bodily activities.

Our brains stay on sun time year-round regardless of what external clocks say. Standard time parallels sun time. At noon standard time in the center of each time zone, the sun will be directly overhead.

During daylight saving time, we get less exposure to morning light, causing our internal clocks to fall out of sync with the sun. Most of us find it harder to awaken on dark mornings and harder to get to sleep at our usual bedtime when evenings stay lighter later.

In the nearly eight months of the year that daylight saving time is in effect, we sleep less than we do in the four months we live on standard time. The disconnect between sun time and body time makes us perform less efficiently and optimally.

On permanent daylight saving time, as outlined in Rubio's bill, a person living in Washington, D.C., who awakens at 7 a.m. and starts work or school around 8 a.m. would [arise before sunrise 184 days](#) a year and start work or school in the dark 86 days a year, an [interactive chart](#) from [Save Standard Time's](#) shows. On permanent standard time, the same person would get up [pre-sunrise only 86 days a year](#) and never start work or school in the dark.

Moving the clock ahead by one hour doesn't save time or daylight. When we switch to daylight saving time, we simply shift light from the morning to the evening.

Daylight saving time's advocates are the [recreation and tourism](#), [restaurant](#) and [energy industries](#). Some proponents of daylight assert it benefits the agriculture industry, but most [farmers hate the time switch](#). Cows get up with the sun, they point out, and farmers get up with their cows. Farmers have objected to daylight saving time since it was first introduced in 1918.

It didn't save energy then — and the recurring claim that it does has been [debunked repeatedly](#). In fact, daylight saving time encourages greater energy use. On darker, colder mornings, people turn on more lights and turn up the heat. On brighter, warmer evenings, they use their air-conditioning longer leading to higher power usage. They also drive more, increasing gas consumption.

American adolescents and workers also face major challenges in managing their lives when daylight saving time is in effect.

We already have a [national epidemic](#) of sleepy teens. U.S. middle and high schools typically start before 8 a.m. That time is out of sync with changes in the biological clock that occur at puberty. These changes prompt teens to remain awake until 11 p.m. or later and, if allowed, to sleep until 8 a.m. or later. If the U.S. were to adopt year-round daylight saving time, children would have to [commute to school in the dark](#) about one-third of the academic year. Some would face potential dangers while walking to school or waiting for school buses in the dark. Many likely would doze in their morning classes. Next week, plenty of sleepy teen drivers — and sleepy adult drivers — will be on the road.

Many essential workers, including teachers, farmers, healthcare providers, police officers, firefighters and other community service workers, and people who work in construction, transportation and factories lose sleep when daylight saving time is in effect. That lowers their workplace performance and puts them at higher risk of workplace injuries. There's also an issue of social justice: These outcomes [disproportionally harm](#) lower income and minority households.

People living on the western edges of most time zones, where the sun rises later, experience greater differences between their weekday/weekend bedtime and wake-up times than people living further east. More than 53 million Americans live in what Dr. Jeff Gentry of Eastern New Mexico University calls “eccentric time localities,” areas where body clocks remain more than 30 minutes out of sync with the sun. Analyzing 12 years of traffic data, he found a [21.8 percent higher vehicle-fatality rate](#) in these localities, which resulted in an estimated annual economic cost of \$1.8 billion.

Unless time zones are redrawn, our best option is to adopt permanent standard time. When compared to permanent daylight saving time, permanent standard time is the far healthier choice.

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