

Evening daylight is for saving—spring forward or fall back

Written by Ashley Sullivan

As the country prepares to “spring forward” into daylight-saving time for yet another year, many may be wondering where this idea even came from and why it’s still done.

But nonetheless, most of the country will set their clocks forward one hour before retiring to bed this Saturday, March 12 in anticipation of the 2 a.m. time change Sunday, March 13.

Some reasons behind daylight-saving time are to make better use of the daylight in the evenings, reduce the number of road accidents in the evenings and to save energy from using less artificial light during the evening hours.

Daylight-saving time was adopted by the United States in 1918 during World War I as an attempt to conserve fuel used for electric power. At this time, standard time zones were established, and DST was set to begin March 31, 1918.

Daylight-saving time was observed for seven months in 1918 and 1919 but was so unpopular with the public it was repealed in 1919. DST then became a local matter of choice, and a few states and larger cities continued with it.

To conserve energy during World War II, President Franklin Roosevelt instituted a year-round daylight-saving time called “War Time” from Feb. 9, 1942 to Sept. 30, 1945. From 1945-1966, states and cities were free to independently choose whether or not to observe DST and when it started and ended, causing a lot of confusion throughout the states.

In April 1966, Congress made daylight-saving time uniform but allowed the states to decide whether or not to exempt themselves. Coloradans voted later that year to use daylight-saving time from spring to fall of every year.

On Jan. 4, 1974, President Nixon enacted the Emergency Daylight Saving Time Energy Conservation Act of 1973, and clocks were set ahead Jan. 6, 1974. Congress amended the Act Oct. 5, 1974 and the country returned to standard time Oct. 27. In 1975, DST resumed Feb. 23

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and ended Oct. 26.

From 1987 through 2006, under legislation enacted in 1986, DST was observed from the first Sunday in April to the last Sunday in October but was changed in 2007 as part of the Energy Policy Act of 2005. Daylight-saving time in the U.S. now begins at 2 a.m. the second Sunday of March and ends at 2 a.m. the first Sunday of November.

In the United States, the changeover time was originally set at 2 a.m. because of its practicality and minimal disruption. It avoids the confusion of the day switching to yesterday, and most people were home and few trains were running at this time. It's late enough to hardly have an effect on bars and restaurants, yet early enough to not effect most people's work or church schedules.

Indiana didn't begin using daylight-saving time until 2006, and Hawaii and most of Arizona have chosen not to observe DST.

In Arizona, the Navajo nation does observe daylight-saving time, while the Hopi Reservation, being completely surrounded by the Navajo nation, does not observe DST. This, in effect, creates a daylight-saving time "donut" in Arizona, where the donut-shaped area observes DST and the "hole" in the center does not.

In December 2010, Sen. Greg Brophy submitted a bill to make daylight-saving time permanent in Colorado so people can have more evening daylight to enjoy the outdoors. At the same time, Rep. Ed Vigil submitted a bill for Colorado to join Arizona and Hawaii in staying on standard time year-round, citing that farmers and ranchers no longer need the extra daylight in the evenings.

Vigil's bill to end daylight-saving time was postponed indefinitely by a legislative committee in February. Brophy admits his own proposal is probably in conflict with federal law, which only gives states the option to exempt themselves from DST—not to run on daylight-saving time year-round.

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In 1999, then-state Sen. MaryAnne Tebedo had the same idea as Brophy but couldn't get a bill out of committee because of the conflict with federal law. Brophy's bill has not gone to committee yet, but he believes it could be a states' rights issue, arguing that the federal government shouldn't have the right to regulate the time in Colorado.

Daylight-saving dates back to Ben Franklin

Benjamin Franklin, author of the proverb, "Early to bed and early to rise makes a man healthy, wealthy and wise," published an anonymous essay in 1784 while in France. He suggested that Parisians economize on candles by rising earlier to make use of morning sunlight.

He satirically suggested taxing shutters, rationing candles and ringing church bells and firing cannons at sunrise to wake the "sluggards." He was not suggesting daylight-saving time but simply believed that people should use daylight productively.

Modern DST was first proposed by George Vernon Hudson. This New Zealand entomologist knew the value of after-hours daylight, as his shift-work job only allowed him leisure time for collecting insects. He presented a paper to the Wellington Philosophical Society in 1895, proposing a two-hour daylight-saving shift.

The invention of daylight-saving time is often credited to William Willett who, in 1905, independently conceived the idea after noticing how many Londoners slept through a large part of a summer day. He also disliked having to cut his golf rounds short at dusk. He published his proposal in a pamphlet named "Waste of Daylight" in 1907 to advance the clock 20 minutes on each of the four Sundays in April and set them back the same amount on the four Sundays of September.

Robert Pearce, a liberal member of Parliament, took up Willett's proposal, introducing the first Daylight Saving Bill to the House of Commons in 1908. The bill did not become law and many subsequent bills failed in the following years.

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In 1916, Germany and its WWI allies became the first to use DST as a way to conserve coal during wartime. Many countries soon followed their example, with the United States adopting it in 1918.