

## **Massachusetts Could Swap Time Zones for Later Winter Sunsets**

Of all the major cities on America's eastern seaboard, none is as far north or east as Boston. Which creates a slight problem in winter: The sun sets really early. As in, for most of December, well before happy hour.

The state, it appears, might do something about that. Governor Charles Baker recently signed a bill ordering a study of the wisdom of moving its 10,555 square miles into a time zone that would brighten the end of the day in the months the Northern Hemisphere tilts away from the sun. The idea came from Quincy resident Tom Emswiler, who worries Massachusetts is losing college grads to sunnier climes. On Dec. 9 last year, the sun went down in Boston at 4:11 p.m., only 22 minutes later than in the Yukon.

There is indeed dissatisfaction among young people with a city that can go dark about three hours after lunch. "You look out the window and it shoots your day," says Sahil Bhaiwala, 21, a Boston University mathematics and economy major headed into his senior year. "All you feel like doing is going home, making dinner and going to bed."

To keep the likes of Bhaiwala from running off to Silicon Valley, Emswiler says, Massachusetts should throw in with those who live in the Atlantic Time Zone, which covers eastern Canada, the Caribbean and parts of South America, and do away with changing the clocks in spring and summer. From November through March, the sun would set an hour later than it does now, and those brutish winter days would lose some of their sting.

### **Physiological Costs**

The sun would rise an hour later too, but the thinking is that darkness in the morning is less depressing than darkness at the end of the day.

Emswiler, a 36-year-old health-care administrator, first suggested the time-zone switch two years ago in a Boston Globe op-ed, to which he says reader feedback was voluminous and enthusiastic. His piece outlined the physiological costs of going on and off daylight saving time -- medical research has pointed to more heart attacks in the three days following clocks being moved forward in spring -- and argued sticking to one time would be economically and psychologically beneficial.

In making his case, he also cited a 2013 Boston Federal Reserve study that showed New England had the lowest retention rate of college graduates than all other parts of the country, with only about 63 percent of the class of 2008 still in Massachusetts a year after earning diplomas.

### **Wind-Chill Factors**

"We're in competition for talent with places like New York and California," Emswiler said on Bloomberg Radio's Baystate Business Hour. "And if we can make the sun set not at 4 p.m. when it's dark and cold and no fun outside, that'll make it a little more palatable."

Of course, as Emswiler acknowledges, people may quit Massachusetts for any number of reasons, everything from the high cost of living in Boston to the other difficulty with winter, which involves often large amounts of snow and wind-chill factors.

The legislative commission that will probe the matter was established as part of an economic development measure, and must report its findings by next July. Time changes have been under discussion in other states, though none have recently taken the step. California's legislature actually studied for a while a bill that would have effectively accomplished the opposite of what Massachusetts is considering: The proposal to quit daylight saving time would have brought darkness earlier in the evening during much of the year. California, it should be noted, has less of a sunshine shortage issue to worry about than Massachusetts.

Daylight saving time, or DST as it's called, is a relatively recent phenomenon. Benjamin Franklin made an early nod to the concept in a 1784 essay in which he humorously suggested Parisians change their sleeping habits to maximize their hours awake during daylight and save on candles. In 1916, Germany became the first country to use DST, to exploit sunlight and reduce evening use of incandescent lighting, thus saving fuel for World War I. The U.S. temporarily adopted it two years later, and most states later made it a rule.

Hawaii and most of Arizona don't observe DST. Before 2008, clocks in some Indiana counties sprung forward and fell back, while others didn't. That was confusing, as it might be if you drove over the Massachusetts border into, say, Connecticut and looked at your watch and found yourself 60 minutes apart from everybody else.

Emswiler figures a few other states in the region probably would need to sign on to the plan for it to generate enough support, and says there's great interest from people he knows in New York City. "This is a place that's really interested in a later sunset," he says. "Remember, they don't eat brunch on the weekends until 1 p.m."

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