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State Legislatures, Labor Groups Seek Repeal of Daylight-Saving Time

by LADB Staff

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State and federal legislators and labor unions launched strong protests against the use of daylight-saving time (horario de verano) in Mexico, but were unable to overturn the federal policy. President Ernesto Zedillo's administration implemented daylight-saving time in 1996 to save energy and to keep the Mexican economy synchronized with the US and Europe (see SourceMex, 1996-01-10 and 1996-08-21). Since then, the government has promoted the benefits of moving the clock forward one hour in April.

Statistics released by the Comision Nacional para el Ahorro de Energia (CONAE) indicate the use of daylight-saving time in Mexico will save about 1 billion megawatts of electricity per hour this year. This is roughly equivalent to the amount of electricity used by 19 million homes for five weeks. CONAE, a division of the Secretaria de Energia (SE), said the reduction in electricity use will also save about 2 million barrels of oil this year.

CONAE said the government and the private sector have saved 1.583 billion pesos (US\$166 million) since daylight-saving time went into effect three years ago. The agency said the savings are the equivalent of the cost of constructing an additional electricity generation plant in Mexico. But the government's arguments in favor of daylight-saving time have failed to convince many Mexicans, who are concerned that the time change creates unnecessary health and safety risks.

Many Mexicans have complained that the time change increases risks for school children, who now have to go to school in the dark. In response to this concern, the legislatures in Aguascalientes, Chiapas, and Durango states passed bills allowing schools to begin an hour later. This move has basically defeated the energy-saving purpose of daylight-saving time.

Similarly, more than half the respondents to a public-opinion poll conducted by the Universidad de Guadalajara said the time change has resulted in "some type of biological alteration, including drowsiness, headaches, and increased stress levels. "The astronomical and mathematical data indicate that there is a real imbalance in our body clocks as a result of the time change," said a resolution passed by the Jalisco state legislature this year. The Jalisco state legislature actually voted to remain on standard time, but the decision was later rescinded because of pressure from the federal government.

A NAFTA mandate?

Many Mexicans also resent the time change because of a widespread belief that Mexico was forced to adopt daylight-saving time to comply with a secret clause in the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). State legislatures consider resolutions opposing time change. In addition to the Jalisco state legislature, lawmakers in Chiapas, Nuevo Leon, Tamaulipas, Coahuila, Tabasco, Baja

California Sur, Michoacan, Mexico state, and the Federal District have held extensive debates this year on whether to accept the federal government's imposition of daylight-saving time.

In most cases, the legislatures passed official resolutions rejecting the time change and directing the state's governor to defy the federal law but decided not to make any changes this year. As a sign of the widespread rejection of daylight-saving time, legislators from the various states have turned in petitions signed by tens of thousands of citizens who oppose the time change.

The petition drives have been led primarily by state legislators from the opposition Partido Accion Nacional (PAN) and Partido de la Revolucion Democratica (PRD), but many members of the governing Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI) have also expressed strong reservations about the change. The independent labor organization Consejo Nacional de Trabajadores (CNT) also issued a statement opposing daylight- saving time. "The measure does not create any savings and results in increased hardships for many workers," the CNT said.

Energy Secretary Luis Tellez acknowledged the concerns presented by the various state legislatures and the CNT, but said the government could not repeal daylight-saving time this year even if it chose to do so because aviation and other transportation protocols had taken into account the time change.

Still, the state legislatures in Coahuila, Tamaulipas, and Baja California Sur are planning to continue deliberations on whether to accept daylight-saving time in future years. Tellez said the legislatures would technically not be violating any federal laws if they decide to remain on standard time.

Sonora has been allowed to remain on standard time because of its close economic and cultural ties to Arizona, one of a few US states that does not observe daylight-saving time. [Note: Peso-dollar conversions in this article are based on the Interbank rate in effect on April 7, reported at 9.49 pesos per US\$1.00] (Sources: El Universal, 03/16/99, 03/26/99, 03/30/99, 03/31/99, 04/01/99; Novedades, 03/31/99, 04/01/99; The New York Times, 04/03/99; La Jornada, El Financiero International, 04/05/99; Excelsior, 03/30/99, 03/31/99, 04/01/99, 04/02/99, 04/06/99; El Economista, 04/06/99

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