

BY LAURA PUTRE

TIME BANDIT

Think farmers are responsible for Indiana's time troubles?
You haven't met **Chet Dobis**.

IN THE THREE DECADES THAT CHET DOBIS has been an Indiana politician, he's been called a lot of things: stubborn, sneaky, resistant to change. But no one's ever accused him of being a farmer. The closest he's ever come to tending the land was mowing a golf course at a country club sometime back in 1958.

So much for the perception that farmers are responsible for the tangled mess that is Hoosier time. To be sure, Indiana growers have consistently opposed daylight-saving time since the nation first adopted it during World War I. But in the last several years, the figure who most embodies Indiana's screwy relationship with the clock isn't a man who works with soybeans or manure spreaders. It's Dobis, a flinty 61-year-old Democratic state representative from Northwest Indiana.

In February, it was Dobis who introduced a resolution seeking to place most of Indiana in the Central time zone and pave the way for the statewide observance of daylight-saving time. Though it would die a quick political death, the proposal—which dovetailed with the position advocated by everyone from Republican gubernatorial candidate Mitch Daniels to the state's largest newspaper—briefly seemed a workable solution to Indiana's time problems. And for suggesting that solution, Dobis, a

meat-and-potatoes guy who tends to blend into crowds, managed to look like a legislative knight in shining armor, the man who just might overcome 30 years of political bickering to bring Indiana clocks out of the dark ages.

What few seemed to notice, and fewer comment on, was that for years Dobis had been largely responsible for keeping those clocks *in* the dark ages. Through the deft exploitation of political alliances and a mastery of every niggling loophole in the system, the 34-year House veteran has long been the state's most prominent obstacle to daylight-saving time. Prior to this year's legislative session, he and his Statehouse allies had managed to block at least half a dozen bills in support of DST.

"With his service and years of experience, he's been able to get a lot of things done very quietly," says Rep. Tiny Adams, a Muncie Democrat who has crossed swords with Dobis over DST. "Things that I probably could never get done. You've gotta earn the respect, and you just don't do that in a year or two."

The reason for Dobis' longstanding intransigence—and for his seeming reversal—is as provincial as his tactics have been effective: Every previous effort to adopt daylight-saving time would have kept the state in the Eastern time zone. Dobis, who hails from Lake

PHOTOGRAPH BY E. ANTHONY VALAINIS

TIMELINE

In the Zone 1883 A.D.

Continental United States adopts four standard time zones. Hoosiers immediately get suspicious.

Waste Not Bon Mot 1907 A.D.

William Willett, a builder in London, becomes the 20th century's first serious advocate of DST, publishing his views in a pamphlet titled "Waste of Daylight."

Time Savers 1918 A.D.

The U.S. Congress officially adopts the Prime Meridian agreement of 1884 and, to conserve energy during World War I, also imposes DST.

Time—and Time Again 1919 A.D.

At end of WWI, Congress repeals DST due to its unpopularity.



MYTH UNDERSTANDING

Debunking Hoosiers' time-honored beliefs about time

MYTH: Benjamin Franklin got us into this mess.

FACT: Yes, Franklin first proposed something like daylight-saving time in a 1784 essay. But it was the expansion of railroads in the mid-19th century that made standardizing time an issue. Back then, each city, town and village set its own time, resulting in massive confusion; at one point Wisconsin alone had 38 time zones. In 1870, to rectify the situation, a New York school principal named Charles Dowd designed a plan that eventually became the foundation of our modern time system.

MYTH: Under daylight-saving time, children would have to wait for school buses in the dark.

FACT: Kids boarding buses in winter already do so in the dark. On February 6, for example, the sun rose at 7:48 a.m., nearly 30 minutes after classes started at Indianapolis public high schools. Daylight-saving time wouldn't change that; it lasts only from April to late October.

MYTH: Daylight-saving time hurts farming.

FACT: 47 other states don't have much of a problem adhering to daylight-saving

time. Ohio, Kentucky, Iowa, Wisconsin, Illinois and Minnesota all observe it. Putting Indiana in sync with the rest of the country could actually help farmers by reducing the logistical hassles of transporting agricultural products from Indiana.

MYTH: Indiana has the world's most screwed-up relationship with time.

FACT: Australia makes Indiana time seem as orderly as Martha Stewart's linen closet. Three of the country's six states and one of its two territories observe DST. Several of those regional governments, however, change the dates of DST observance due to politics or to accommodate, yep, festivals.

MYTH: Indiana switches time zones.

FACT: No state switches time zones. The confusion stems from the fact that 77 of the 82 Indiana counties that lie in the Eastern time zone never change from Eastern Standard to Eastern Daylight Time—which means we happen to be in sync with Central Daylight Time for half the year, though not actually in the Central time zone.

County—one of the five counties near Chicago that align their clocks with the Windy City year-round—likes Central time, the rest of the Hoosier State be damned.

STURDILY BUILT, WITH HARD BLUE EYES AND a television preacher's combed-back hair, Dobis has always seen the world through the lens of his humble beginnings. His father was a liquor salesman in Gary before moving the family to nearby Merrillville, in 1956, so he could manage a golf course. The Dobises lived in a two-bedroom apartment above the clubhouse, where young Chet mowed the greens and hunted rabbit and pheasant in a nearby field that would someday be paved over with Pep Boys and Applebee's franchises.

Politics ran in the family. Dobis' uncle, Tony, ran for mayor of Gary in 1949. ("He won the race," says Dobis. "But when he woke up the next day, he had lost by 3,200 votes.") Dobis first ran for the state legislature in 1970. He burnt up lots of shoe leather courting the black vote in Gary, and he had his campaign workers translate mailings into Czech, Polish and Serbo-Croatian to appeal to ethnic voters. Still, no one was more surprised when he won a seat in the Statehouse than Dobis himself.

DOBIS SEES EASTERN DAYLIGHT TIME AS ANOTHER WAY FOR THE "HOOSIER HOLY LAND" ELITE TO IMPOSE THEIR WHIMS ON HIS NECK OF THE WOODS.

So began the long treks back and forth from Merrillville—where Dobis still lives with his wife, Darlene, and was, until recently, vice president of the former Gary National Bank—to Indianapolis, where he lives out of a suitcase when the legislature is in session.

During his first term, in 1971, Dobis had a very specific mission. At the time, small municipalities within three miles of major cities could be annexed at will; Dobis pushed for a bill that would overturn the "buffer zone" law and allow places like Merrillville to become towns in their own right. The bill passed.

Today Dobis represents more of suburban Lake County and less of Gary proper, but if the boundaries of his district have changed, Dobis has not. He's always been loyal to the needs of Northwest Indiana, even when they run counter to the interests of the rest of the state.

TIMELINE

War and Timepiece 1942 A.D.

Franklin Roosevelt reestablishes DST, or "War Time," during WWII. Indiana follows WWII until 1945, when it reverts to year-round standard time.

The Central Problem 1949 A.D.

Indiana legislators vote to put the state in the Central time zone. Hoosiers near Cincinnati and Louisville respond with a resounding "Make me."

A Wrinkle in Time 1957 A.D.

State legislators vote to make Central Standard Time the official time of Indiana and to observe DST in Indianapolis but nowhere else.

Eastern Island 1966 A.D.

Congress passes Uniform Time Act, which places Indiana in the Eastern time zone.

Like many Indiana business titans, Jones says confusion about time has made it very difficult for his companies to do business with other parts of the world. "Often with phone calls to Europe or Asia, or to the East Coast and West Coast, it's very difficult to coordinate schedules," he says. "Airline schedules are screwed up, meetings are missed because nobody knows what time it is in Indiana. Pretty much everybody else is in sync, and Indiana's out of sync. An analogy I often use is Indiana having its own currency. It's like saying, 'Instead of a dollar bill, let's use wood chips.'"

Initially, Jones' longtime friend Andy Thomas, now a state representative, ran the Hoosier Daylight Coalition. When Thomas left the post to run for office in 2002, Jones enlisted Pizzano, a suburban mom in search of a cause. "She didn't have a lot of political experience, but she had the passion, and she was willing to do a lot of work," Jones says.

A former military wife who works in the mortgage industry and has "a couple kids and a big dog," Pizzano spoke at town-council and other meetings and gathered petition signatures to gauge "the common

Joe's" feelings about the issue. For the most part, she says, the response was positive. "If someone did say, 'I don't want to change the clock,' I would say, 'I don't want to either, but if it means having my kids here with a job close to me, I'll change it.'"

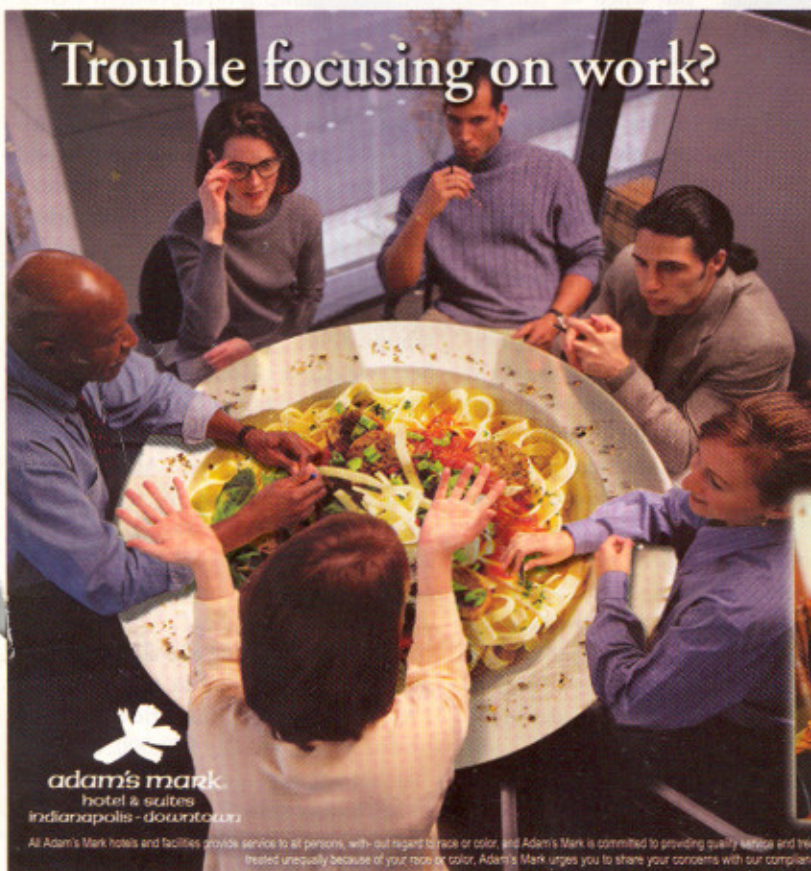
But last summer, after two years of unsuccessful attempts to bring a DST bill to a vote, Jones disbanded the Hoosier Daylight Coalition. "It didn't seem like we were making particularly good progress," he says. "We did our job and realized we had gotten a substantial majority of the people in the state in favor of it." But they kept running into Dobis and company in the Statehouse. "It's the leadership there that's causing daylight-saving time to not even get a fair vote on the floor."

Torr says he can't blame Jones for giving up. "I think you can only close your hand in the car door so many times to see whether or not it hurts," he says. If Torr sounds frustrated—well, it's tough being outsmarted time and again by one's fellow legislator, especially when that legislator hails from a town known more for its muscle mass than its brain matter.

But lately Dobis has had to endure

frustrations of his own. This winter, after years of being the Statehouse's most notorious DST obstructionist, he finally got a taste of his own medicine. In February, days after Dobis proposed the resolution asking the federal government to move most of Indiana to the Central time zone—saying he sensed momentum in the House for the switch—House Speaker Patrick Bauer quashed the whole idea, saying the state had more important things to worry about. "I don't see advantages or disadvantages, and I think that's the problem," Bauer told reporters. "Some people are so convinced that a time change is going to bring in jobs and things like that, and other people believe a time change will ruin their life. There's not a consistency."

Bauer and Dobis share a long history. Both were first elected to the House in 1970, yet three decades of service together has not made them close; in 2002, Dobis challenged Bauer in his bid to become Speaker. It seemed appropriate, then, that Bauer was the one reminding Dobis of a classic truth: In politics, it's easier to be the critic than the craftsman. For Dobis, the lesson has been a long time coming. ■



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