

## Just in time for New Year's: A proposal for a better calendar

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## No more '30 days hath September, April, June and November'

Wouldn't it be convenient if your birthday, Christmas and the Fourth of July -- not to mention most other major holidays -- all fell on the same day of the week, year after year? Wouldn't it make life -- or at least planning -- easier, for instance, to know that Dec. 17 would always fall on a Saturday or that January 1 -- New Year's Day -- would always be



celebrated on a Sunday?

Richard Conn Henry, professor in the Henry A. Rowland Department of Physics and Astronomy at The Johns Hopkins University, thinks it would. He has designed -- using computer programs and complex mathematical formulas -- a new calendar that would make it happen.

Under Henry's plan, each new 12-month period is identical to the one that came before. Each month has either 30 or 31 days. January, for instance, would have 30 days, as would February, April, May, July, August, October and November. March, June, September and December would all have 31 days.

Henry, a physicist who also directs the Maryland Space Grant Consortium, says his new calendar would have "profound economic and practical benefits" if adopted worldwide. He is waging a Web-based campaign to make this happen by Jan. 1, 2006. Henry points out that this transition date is ideal, because New Year's Day 2006 falls on a Sunday on both the old and proposed calendars, facilitating a seamless transition.

"Just ask yourself how much time and effort are expended each year in redesigning the calendar of every single organization worldwide to accommodate the coming year's calendar, and it becomes obvious that my calendar would make life much simpler and would have noteworthy benefits economically, especially for businesses and other institutions," Henry said.

"With my plan, we can have a stable calendar that is absolutely identical from year to year and which allows the permanent, rational planning of annual activities, from school to work holidays."

Called the "Calendar-and-Time Plan" (C&T) because it also advocates the worldwide adoption of a 24-hour, universal time scale (more on that later), Henry's innovation promises to improve on what he sees as the



"defects" of the dozen or so rival reform calendars that have been proffered by various individuals and institutions in the past 100 years.

"Calendar reform has always failed before, and for a simple reason: All major proposals involved breaking the seven-day cycle of the week, which has always been -- and probably will always be -- completely unacceptable to humankind because it goes against the Fourth Commandment of the Bible about keeping the Sabbath Day," Henry said. "C&T never breaks that biblical cycle."

What's more, the C&T calendar is "far more convenient" than is the current Gregorian calendar, which has been in place for more than 400 years -- ever since Pope Gregory, in 1582, modified a calendar that was instituted by Julius Caesar in 46 BC.

To bring Caesar's calendar into sync with the seasons (one of the main reasons for reforming it), the pope and his scholars removed 11 days from the calendar during that October, so that Oct. 4 was followed immediately by Oct. 15. The need for that kind of adjustment derived from the same problem that makes designing an effective calendar a challenge today: the fact that there is an uneven number of days in an Earth year: 365.2422 days, to be exact.

Our current calendar tackles this challenge by instituting "leap years" every four years. Henry thinks he has found a better solution: drop leap year entirely and institute, instead, a one-week "mini-month" between June and July every five or six years. In honor of his personal hero, Sir Isaac Newton, Henry has dubbed this seven-day period "Newton." His computer calculation ensures that "Newton Week" brings the new calendar in sync with seasonal changes as the Earth circles the sun.

Newton Weeks would bring with them benefits not enjoyed under the Gregorian calendar, Henry said.



"If I had my way, everyone would get Newton Week off as a paid vacation and could spend the time doing physics, or other activities of their choice," he said, only half jokingly . "You can't say the same of leap years."

Newton Week would pop up irregularly: 2009, 2015, 2020 and 2026, for instance, would all need a Newton Week to keep the calendar as close to the cycle of the seasons as possible. As a result, the new calendar is never more than five days off the seasons. In fact, after Jan.1, 2006, the C&T calendar would be identical to the current calendar 15 percent of the time, and only one day different 29 percent of the time.

Henry has established what he calls the "International Association for 2006," an online organization aimed at rallying support for his plan. He serves as president of the organization, and Jess Cully, a calendar reform enthusiast from Portsmouth, England, is now vice president for that country.

In addition to advocating the adoption of the new calendar, Henry also urges everyone to simultaneously switch to what is called "Universal Time" (formerly known as Greenwich Mean Time). Doing so would synchronize the date and time the same worldwide, streamlining such things as international business and exchange.

"We would quickly get used to the fact that sunrise and sunset henceforth occur at what seem to us unusual hours by the clock," Henry said. "My late mother, for example, successfully switched from Fahrenheit temperature to Celsius, telling me on one occasion, 'It's a very hot day -- 30 degrees!' That shows me that people are adaptable if benefits are there. The C&T benefit is much greater than that resulting from the change from Fahrenheit to Celsius."

Source: Johns Hopkins University



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