

I think Mercer County, North Dakota changing to Central time would be a good decision for educational, commercial, medical and communicative reasons. The current difference in time zones with the majority of the state, not whether Central is preferable to Mountain, is the central and problematic issue.

My first concern regarding the difference in time zones relates to education. I am the principal of Beulah Middle School. Our students are involved in a variety of co-curricular activities which routinely require them to be transported to schools in the Central time zone for competition. Due to the difference in time, our students lose an hour of school contact each time this occurs.

I am aware that the issue of school bussing has been touted as a problem if Mercer County were to change to Central time. I grew up and still have many friends and family in Watford City, ND, a small town 100 miles north and west of Beulah. Interestingly, Watford City, a sprawling rural school district that buses more miles than any other district in the state, is on Central time.

Living and working in a different time zone than major shopping and medical services is problematic. Our daughter's misses a half day of school every six weeks to make her appointments in Bismarck. My mother recently spent 14 days in a Bismarck hospital recovering from knee surgery. I was unable to visit her in the evenings due to the difference in time. By the time I got off work it was 6:30 Central time, add to that an hour and a half to drive and get to her room, and it would have been 8:00 p.m.

The same time problem occurs in the retail and service sector. By the time we can get to Bismarck, Minot, or Dickinson, the stores are closing. I recently needed to bring our computer in to be repaired at a service center in Bismarck that was open 9-5 Monday through Friday. Impossible. I ended up paying to send the computer UPS.

My final concern involves the communicative difficulties created by two time zones both professionally and personally. I make frequent telephone contacts within the state. I frequently miss incoming calls from people working in Central time prior to my arriving at work in the a.m. Two hours of potential contact time, rather than one, are lost over the noon hour due to the difference in time. At the end of the day, I am unable to reach my colleagues in the Central time zone because they have already left for the day.