

Title: **Not a huge deal, but does state need to meddle with an eclipse?**
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Not a huge deal, but does state need to meddle with an eclipse?

Last week the legislature passed a joint resolution that allows school districts to start the next school year on Thursday, Aug. 17. Without this resolution, schools could not start before the third Monday of that month, Aug. 21 – the day of a solar eclipse.

The resolution states, “[O]n Monday, Aug. 21, 2017, South Carolina will be in the path of the largest total solar eclipse experienced in North America since February 1978, providing a rare learning opportunity for people in the Palmetto State.” It goes on to declare, “[T]o capitalize on the potential educational value of this eclipse, South Carolina public school districts should be given the flexibility to move their opening dates to before the eclipse.”

The intent is clear: At some point on Aug. 21, from around 2:39 to 2:45 p.m., the great eclipse will be visible in South Carolina and legislators want to

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make sure that students are able to be in school so they can learn about and view it, although students are typically dismissed by 2:45 p.m.

Once again, this time at a galactic level, the legislature thinks it knows best.

The eclipse is billed as a once-in-a-lifetime sight, but is it really up to the legislature to ensure that students see it? Shouldn't that be left up to parents? If the sight will be that impressive – and we hope it will be – parents or guardians should be pulling children out of school faster than they do on opening day of the state fair.

Alternately, perhaps the legislature, which really does know best about astronomy and education, not to mention ethics and taxation, should be encour-

aging all state agencies, including universities, to alter their working hours so that everyone can witness this rare phenomenon. To more fully encourage viewing, it should pass a bill giving tax credits to employers that allow workers to step outside and gaze upon the wonder. Perhaps there should even be a concurrent resolution explaining how to make pinhole projectors for safer viewing, and how, in times past, eclipses were portents of the ends of civilizations.

This resolution passed the Senate unanimously. It met some opposition in the House yet still passed easily. There are worse examples of legislative meddling, from onerous regulations to laws that seek to limit free speech. Nevertheless, this one, whatever its intentions, was still entirely unnecessary.

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