

Justice Jim Johnson to step down

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OLYMPIA — State Supreme Court will lose one of its more conservative members next month as Justice Jim Johnson announce today he will retire at the end of April.

Jim Johnson — the court has also has Justice Charles Johnson — is a former state assistant attorney general who became a voice for strict construction, limited government and the ability of the public for input in their government. He was the author of blistering dissents in one of the court's most controversial and wide-reaching decisions, the so-called McCleary ruling that the state was failing in its constitutional duty to provide adequate support for schools which essentially ordered the Legislature to spend more. He termed it “a clear usurpation of the Legislature's constitutionally mandated duty.”

“Judges sometimes have delusions of grandeur,” he wrote in his dissent. “...this order oversteps the bounds of proper judicial action.”

When the justices were introduced during a joint session of the Legislature earlier this year, Jim Johnson got a standing ovation from the Republicans in the chamber.

Before his election in 2004, Johnson helped write or defend several state initiatives, including I-601, which capped the state budget. The press release announcing his early retirement said he “vows to continue such efforts, to protect and exercise the people's right to control government.” He was easily re-elected in 2010, besting Stan Rumbaugh by more than 265,000 votes in the primary and appearing by himself on the general election ballot.

He has been absent from oral arguments since mid February for what a court spokeswoman described as “unexpected health concerns” and wasn't expected to return for the court's winter term.

Johnson's term ran through 2016, but the state will hold a special election this year for a replacement to fill out that term. Gov. Jay Inslee can appoint a replacement to fill the seat in the meantime.