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Lawmakers nix the session's State of the Judiciary speech

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Posted by [Joseph O'Sullivan](#)

State lawmakers have decided to forgo one custom that they've had since the 1990s: a State of the Judiciary speech.

The speech, given by the state Supreme Court's chief justice, has been given at the start of every budget session – which is every odd-numbered year – in a joint address to the House and Senate. The practice goes back to at least 1995; here's [footage of the one given by Chief Justice Barbara Madsen](#) in 2013.

In state politics, 2014 will go down as the year [the court held legislators in contempt](#) for not making enough progress to fully fund public education. Earlier this month, some lawmakers protested the court's action by [filing a bill to make court races partisan](#).

In a recent Facilities and Operations Committee meeting, lawmakers decided not to schedule the State of the Judiciary address. Legislative leaders, however, insist the decision is not in retaliation for the contempt ruling.

"I don't think either chamber is eager to go after the Supreme Court," said House Majority Leader Pat Sullivan, D-Covington. "This is not a slap in the face to the court."

Still, Sullivan acknowledged that some House members have had "some issues" with the court.

"Tensions have been heightened," he said.

In an interview last week with political reporter Jim Brunner, Senate Majority Leader Mark Schoesler, R-Ritzville, also downplayed the decision not to schedule the speech, attributing the decision to a matter of logistics.

In a statement, Madsen, the chief justice, said she would give lawmakers a written version of the report, a practice done in even-numbered years when no speech is made.

"The State of the Judiciary address has been a tradition in Washington state for several decades now," wrote Madsen in the statement. "It has served as a positive tool to inform the Legislature and the public about the state of Washington's justice system. I hope that, in the future, the Supreme Court will again be invited to make this important presentation."

