

SPOKESMAN REVIEW

## Spin Control

# Sunday Spin: Silliness at the halfway mark

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OLYMPIA – As the Legislature passed the halfway mark in the 2013 session last week, some members started to show signs of too much time in the damp, gray environs of the South Puget Sound.

Or maybe just too much time in close proximity to each other. Whatever the reason, we saw a rise in legislation introduced for no reason other than to make political points.

After Republicans on the Senate Commerce and Labor Committee pushed through a bill that would allow a “training wage” for some teenage workers that would be three-quarters of the current minimum wage, House Democrats responded.

Not, as a logical mind might guess, with a bill declaring that the minimum wage is, by definition, the lowest an employer can pay, regardless of age. Rather, they introduced a bill that would set a training wage for beginning legislators, at 75 percent of standard legislative salary for their first two years.

House Republicans on the Labor Committee – where their companion bill on teen training wages didn’t even get a hearing – found this particularly unfunny. They fired off a sternly worded statement accusing Democrats of being pawns of organized labor, failing Econ 101, and being “more interested in making political statements than working on the issues.”

“I guess if they are going to offer tongue-in-cheek memorials they do not have any solutions,” said Rep. Cary Condotta, R-Wenatchee.

But such criticism for lack of seriousness was undercut that very day by Sen. Mike Baumgartner, R-Spokane, and two of his GOP colleagues, who introduced a bill to reduce the state Supreme Court from nine members to five.

“The Legislature finds that it can no longer justify the luxury of four additional Supreme Court justices,” says the bill, which offers to use money saved – on judicial salaries, staff and possibly even robe dry-cleaning – on public schools.

Considering that the bill was introduced so late it is all but unpassable, the obvious purpose is a swipe at the high court, using the majority’s own words against it from the previous week’s ruling that tossed out the voter-enacted requirement for supermajorities to confirm tax increases. If that requirement went beyond the “plain language of the

state Constitution,” the bill says, then having more than five justices on the Supreme Court does, too. (This is arguably a selective reading of the constitution, quoting the first part of a section that says the court shall consist of five judges, but ignoring a later sentence that specifically says the Legislature can add justices as needed. In 1909, legislators concluded the state needed nine.)

The senators didn't go so far as to suggest which justices should step down, although they could have assured themselves a favorable 3-2 majority by grandfathering onto the bench the three who dissented on the supermajority case. Instead, they suggested the justices get together and draw straws, with the four who pull the shortest straws turning in their robes and hitting the road. Clearly, this is the sign of a serious proposal. A facetious one would have reduced the court by successive rounds of eenie-meenie-miney-moe.

### **Breathe deep and hold it**

Then there was Rep. Ed Orcutt, R-Kalama, who had the bad sense to be flippant in an email, which in 2013 amounts to spray painting an expletive about one's boss on a brick wall and signing one's name.

Orcutt derided the House Democrats' recent proposal to come up with some \$10 billion for transportation projects through a series of tax and fee increases. A longtime foe of most tax increases, Orcutt allowed there was one he could countenance: a proposed \$25 fee for new bikes costing more than \$500, to be used to help pay for bike lanes and trails.

When the owner of a bike shop wrote to tell Orcutt why that was a dumb idea, he responded essentially that it was time for bike riders to pick up a share of the cost of the roads on which they ride. Then he went a bit further.

“Also, you claim that it is environmentally friendly to ride a bike. But if I am not mistaken, a cyclist has an increased heart rate and respiration. That means that the act of riding a bike results in greater emissions of carbon dioxide from the rider. Since CO<sub>2</sub> is deemed to be a greenhouse gas and a pollutant, bicyclists are actually polluting when they ride.”

His email quickly found its way to the Cascade Bicycle Club's blog, from whence it made its way around cyberspace. He later apologized, saying he was trying to make the point that biking isn't a zero-pollution activity, but did it poorly and probably shouldn't even have gone there.

*Spin Control, a weekly column by Olympia reporter Jim Camden, also appears online at [spokesman.com/spincontrol](http://spokesman.com/spincontrol).*