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Staff editorial

Recall Dale Washam

Washington Supreme Court made the right call last week when it ruled unanimously to approve the recall petition filed against Pierce County Assessor/Treasurer Dale Washam. Now it is up to the registered voters of the county to do the rest. The petition needs 65,500 valid signatures to get on the ballot.

Our state constitution gives citizens the right to recall their leaders. This right would mean little if politicians could stall recall efforts by throwing down legal roadblocks. The court is to be applauded for seeing through Washam's cynical tactic and allowing the process to move forward.

The petition was filed by Robin Farris, a Puyallup resident. Washam, no stranger to a courtroom, tried to halt her effort to remove him from office with a legal challenge.

The fact that Washam is a target of a recall is fittingly ironic. There have been many times in the past, prior to him finally winning an election after countless defeats, that Washam has attempted to unseat one elected official or another in these parts. Now he is about to get a taste of his own medicine.

No elected official in this county within the past three decades has deserved to be recalled as much as Washam. He was elected due to two reasons: the incumbent, Ken Madsen, had announced he would not seek another term. The absence of an incumbent typically draws numerous candidates, as it did in 2008.

The other reason was instant runoff voting, an intriguing yet confusing election method that had never been used in this part of the country before. It was approved by voters, then withdrawn by another vote after Washam took office. The gadfly from Puyallup got

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nowhere near a majority of the vote, but with so many candidates and a system that gave credit to second and third-place votes, Washam finally won an election. Certainly the fact that he had run so many times gave him some name recognition, so some voters may have picked him simply for that reason.

His time in office has been marked by internal strife, lawsuits and irrational antics. His obsession with punishing Madsen borders on paranoia. Every official he has turned to, from the governor to the county prosecutor, has declined Washam's requests for an investigation into Madsen's time in office.

His treatment of staff has drawn the ire of organized labor, which has filed grievances for unfair labor practices. Several key employees, some who had spent many years in this office, have quit and filed lawsuits. In a time when Pierce County is making painful budget cuts, wasting money on legal expenses to protect a buffoon such as Washam is pathetic. The taxpayers are footing the bill for his irrational behavior; now they have a chance to save some money by removing him from office.

Farris has not been active in politics, which makes her ideal for the role she has chosen. Her effort is not driven by ideology, but simply a desire for good government and effective leadership. We commend her for stepping up to the plate.

Recalling an elected official is not something that should be taken lightly. Removing someone from office for disagreements on policy or philosophy is inappropriate. For that situation, the polling place is the correct forum to remove an incumbent. But that is not the case here; Washam is clearly unfit for the position he was elected to. Removing him from his position of government leadership as soon as possible is in the best interest of the public.

We urge the voters of Pierce County to sign the petition. For those who are motivated enough, consider gathering signatures. Farris has indicated she would prefer not to use paid signature gatherers. For more information on her efforts, visit www.recalldalewasham.org.