

East-west rift revives talk of east-side state

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OLYMPIA — In a year of heightened east-west conflict, Sen. E.G. "Pat" Patterson thinks he has the perfect answer.

Secession.

With the backing of most Eastern Washington senators, the Pullman Republican has introduced a memorial that asks Congress to create a new state east of the Cascades.

He'd call it Lincoln.

"Lincoln was a great emancipator, and this bill would emancipate us from Seattle," Patterson explained Monday.

He said it with a grin. No one really expects the bill to pass. Even his co-sponsors say it's just a way of relieving the tension — and getting in a little poke at the populous Puget Sound area.

Regional issues have jumped to center stage in this year's legislative session.

Thirty-six days into the 105-day session, evidence of the east-west split can be seen in:

■ **Transportation:** The Western Washington-dominated House Democrats and a few west-side Republicans want changes in the Department of Transportation they say would assure greater political

control. But east-side legislators fear a grab for road money.

Two House proposals go even further. One, backed by House leaders, would allow transportation taxes — including gas taxes — to go for costly Puget Sound rail transit projects. Another would allow all members of the state Transportation Commission to come from the west side. The panel decides how road money is spent.

■ **Initiatives:** Rankled by the fact Seattle can qualify an initiative for the ballot with a few petition tables at the Space Needle and Kingdome, Sen. Jim Matson, R-Selah, proposes that signatures be evenly distributed in each of the state's congressional districts. The same bill has been filed in the House by Republican Sim Wilson, who represents a rural district near Marysville. Neither bill has gone anywhere.

■ **Studded tires:** Tacoma-area Republican Rep. Shirley Winsley proposed a ban on studded tires. Eastern Washington legislators gutted the bill. It appears to be skidding toward oblivion in the House Rules Committee.

■ **Redistricting:** When the state Redistricting Commission redraws legislative and congressional district boundaries this year, Eastern Washington is expected to lose a legislative district. And it won't have any say in the matter.

Democrats and Republicans in the House and Senate each named a member to the commission. All four came from the Puget Sound area, three from Seattle. And when the four members picked a non-voting chairman, they rejected all east-side candidates and named another Seattle resident.

That last slight prompted Patterson's memorial.

"It's just a mild protest that we got shut out on the Redistricting Commission," Patterson said. "It

just lets them know we'll be watching while they carve us up."

Patterson's memorial, co-sponsored by nine senators, would create a new state from the crest of the Cascades to the Idaho border.

It's not a new idea. A few years back, Sen. Jim West, R-Spokane, even proposed a state of "Columbia," joining Eastern Washington with the Idaho panhandle.

Patterson and his co-sponsors chuckled as reporters asked about their serious philosophical statement. "It's probably more in the humor category than reality," admitted Sen. Scott Barr, R-Colville.

Sen. Frank "Tub" Hansen, D-Moses Lake, cranked out a press release that declared, "Eastern Washington lawmakers are tired of getting stuck with legislation catering to the interests of the coast. Growth legislation, new farm regulations, prison siting, hazardous waste disposal: West-siders have all kinds of interesting plans for us. But we're not interested, and it's time they figured it out."

Notable absences from the sponsor list were Senate Majority Leader Jeannette Hayner, R-Walla Walla; Senate Floor Leader Irv Newhouse, R-Mabton; and Sen. George Sellar, R-East Wenatchee. They have to deal with the rest of the state.

Also absent was Sen. Jim Jesernig, D-Kennewick.

"It's funny, but I have a concern that the rhetoric might be building up on the transportation issue — and turning the east-west split into a war," Jesernig said.

Western Washington really isn't that bad, said House Speaker Joe King, D-Vancouver. "I think you have some Republican senators traditionally playing that like a drum, pretty cynically, look out, look out," he said. "It serves people to have an enemy."

Then again, maybe Western Washington is just as tired with east-siders. Confided Sen. Dean Sutherland, D-Vancouver. "The rumor is that all the senators from Western Washington are going to be co-sponsoring this bill."