

Washington State Bar the Same as Washington D.C.

☒ As an attorney, I'm required to be a member of the Washington State Bar Association and had to pay \$450 a year in dues. I belong to the California State Bar Association to which I pay dues as well.

This year, a Spokane attorney got enough signatures to have a referendum voted on to lower the dues for all attorney members from \$450 to \$325. According to the author, the median fee among the State Bars is \$317. Even the bar dues in NY, which is a very pricey place, are less than in Washington state.

The whole concept of reducing fees is so much like the budget talks in Washington D.C. No one wants to cut taxes, Bar dues or spending.

The plea from the WSBA's President to vote "no" on the referendum even included a calculation that the difference in the dues is only \$.34 a day! He went on and talked about all the services the Bar provided to him and everything that will have to be eliminated if, God forbid, the Bar Association didn't continue to take in the same amount of money it had for years. And while it may not look like a whole lot of money, I know attorneys who are out of work or working in areas they know nothing about just to get by.

In another email from one of the Bar's Governors, he gave me his reasons for voting "no" on the referendum. "A cut in license fees of this magnitude would put many valuable services and programs at risk of being eliminated or cut, including: casemaker free legal research tool; ethics line; law office management assistant program; free and low-cost CLEs for young lawyers; WSBA leadership institute and other diversity programs; home foreclosure legal aid project; and

the moderate means program. Sounds a whole lot like the waste we see in Washington D.C.

As an attorney, I'm also required to take 45 hours of continuing education here in Washington every three years. As far as I'm concerned, the whole "CLE" thing is a money-maker for some and a waste of time and money for the rest of us. I have to belong to a local bar association which offers free CLE credits. I don't know why I have to pay \$450 to the WSBA and it can't even offer a few free CLEs once in a while.

Except for the check I write every December, I have no contact with the Bar. I do get its nice glossy magazine every month which could easily be produced for a lot less money. It could go the way of California and save a lot of money by emailing it to me. In other words, I get absolutely no benefit from belonging to the WSBA but it gets my \$450.

Every small business has had to make cuts. Our local government has had to make cuts. Corporations have had to make cuts. All across the nation, municipalities, cities, counties and states have had to make budget cuts.

This is not a new issue. The WSBA like all governments should've cut their fees and then created a budget within those means. As far as I'm concerned, the only purpose for a Bar Association is to oversee attorney admissions and discipline. Otherwise, the Bar should stay out of my life. I don't want it telling me how to vote on anything, and I don't understand why the Bar needs to fund any of these so-called "outreach programs" like the Lawyers Assistance Program which counsels lawyers, judges and laws students. Why aren't these programs managed by pro bono lawyers?

And let's not forget all the lobbying efforts with which the WSBA is involved. As an example, a few years back I exchanged emails with one of the Bar's Governors who agreed to an increase of the Business & Occupations Tax from .15% to .18%

to help the State out with its budgetary problems. Thanks to the WSBA, we pay more B&O Tax and I don't expect the rate to ever go down again.

Politicians in D.C. can't or won't cut taxes and the WSBA wouldn't reduce its fees voluntarily. If States with far more attorneys can get by with far less, I don't know why the WSBA couldn't have done the same. Fortunately, the referendum passed by 52% although I can't imagine why it didn't pass by 90%, but a win is a win.

In an email I received, the President wrote, "In the next several weeks the Board of Governors will begin grappling with some very difficult decisions on how to achieve a \$3.6 million reduction in WSBA's budget." I can visualize the wringing of hands, weeping and gnashing of teeth and staffers wearing black armbands at the WSBA offices.

I don't get it, but if you do, God bless you.