

The Winter of Our Discontent

By Reg P. Wydeven
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Shakespeare's 'Richard III' begins with the famous line, "Now is the winter of our discontent." That certainly describes our winter this year, which feels like it's lasted as long as an elementary school production of a Shakespearean play.

The discontent is magnified by the fact that we had such a terrific winter last year, where I only used my snow blower once. This year I had to use it on days where it didn't even snow, because the wind moved drifts from my yard to my driveway. Last week someone reminded me that at this time last year, we already had days with temperatures in the 80s and all the golf courses were open.

Well, misery loves company, and I'm glad I'm not the only one disgruntled with winter. Ohio resident Michael Gmoser, however, actually did something about it.

Gmoser is the Prosecuting Attorney for Butler County. Fed up with winter, Gmoser filed an indictment against Punxsutawney Phil, of Gobbler's Knob, Pennsylvania, for misrepresentation of an early Spring. Phil is the famous groundhog who comes out of his hole every February 2 to predict the end of winter. This year, Phil did not see his shadow and retreat back into his den, therefore, Spring should come early. Similar to my NCAA Tournament bracket, Phil's predictions were way off.

According to Gmoser's indictment, on or about February 2, 2013, Punxsutawney Phil "did purposely, and with prior calculation and design, cause the people to believe that Spring would come early." The indictment indicates that Phil's "proclamation" of the end of winter constitutes an "unclassified felony" that offends "the peace and dignity of the State of Ohio."

As punishment for Phil's crime, Gmoser is requesting the death penalty. Coincidentally, a Wisconsin legislator is also requesting the death penalty for groundhogs.

Representative Andre Jacque has drafted a bill that would remove groundhogs from Wisconsin's protected species list. By doing so, this would allow people to kill an unlimited number of groundhogs, a/k/a woodchucks, a/k/a whistling pigs, a/k/a land beavers, during a season that would run nearly year-round. Jacque believes groundhogs no longer require protected status because they are abundant and constitute a nuisance.

Groundhogs were placed on Wisconsin's protected species list decades ago by wildlife officials, meaning that except for landowners killing them when they're on their property, anyone else would need the permission of the Department of Natural Resources to kill one. DNR officials are unable to confirm why groundhogs were originally designated for protection. Some speculate that when groundhogs were less prevalent, officials wanted them protected because the holes they burrow can provide important shelter for a number of other animals.

Apparently Jimmy the Groundhog, Sun Prairie's resident spring prognosticator, has already hired an attorney to stay off of death row.