

# Court lets Ramstad take a seat in senate

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Jim Ramstad was cleared of violating campaign laws Tuesday just hours before he was sworn in as the new state senator from District 43, which includes Plymouth, Robbinsdale and part of Golden Valley.

Although he was seated with the rest of the senators, Ramstad isn't entirely in the clear yet. The court's findings will be referred to the Senate's Elections and Reapportionment Committee for routine investigation.

The committee then will recommend whether Ramstad should keep his seat. The full Senate, dominated by the DFL, has the final say on the future of Independent-Republican Ramstad.

But Ramstad isn't worried. "I hope they do look [the findings] over. They'll find what a completely fair and honest campaign my committee and I ran. It'd look pretty silly" for them to contradict the judge's findings, he added.

Ramstad, who defeated DFL incumbent Emily Staples by 2,800 votes, was accused of distorting her voting record in his campaign literature. It was also charged that his campaign workers had illegally distributed literature on election day.

The case has helped him politically, he said. "I heard from so many people in my district and received over 1,000 letters of support. It's given me more exposure."

Ramstad said he had "no hard feelings" against Staples. "But it's a shame that the taxpayers' money was spent this way," he said.

Ramsey District Judge Edward Mulally ruled that Ramstad made accurate statements in his campaign literature when he claimed that Staples voted to double her own salary, get her own pension after six years in office, tax retired public employees' pensions and raise her expense ac-

count allowance by 60 percent.

Ramstad also made accurate statements, Mulally said, in claiming that Staples voted against providing sales tax exemptions for residential heating fuels, increasing the tax credit for renters, "inflation-proofing" income taxes and providing tax relief for senior citizens. The case originally was filed in Hennepin County but was assigned to Mulally by the state Supreme Court.

In some cases, Ramstad presented Staples' voting record forcefully, but not falsely, Mulally said. Ramstad claimed that Staples voted for a bill allowing "homosexuals who openly advocate their way of life to force themselves on any employee or landlord." That bill prohibits discrimination against homosexuals by landlords and employee, although it makes no specific reference to homosexuals who openly advocate their lifestyles.

Mulally said Ramstad used hyperbole when he said that Staples voted for a bill that "allows a person who drives a \$20,000 car with \$600 cash in his or her pocket to be eligible for general assistance welfare." The bill changed public assistance requirements by increasing the allowable value of personal property from \$300 to \$600 and eliminating any limits on the value of an applicant's car.

The judge only briefly addressed countercharges by Ramstad that Staples used defamatory language in calling him an "inexperienced carpetbagger" who had attempted "to buy control" of the Legislature. Mulally said Staples' allegations were "moderately inflammatory" and that her time might have been better spent defending her voting record. However, he added that the court's opinion on these allegations against Ramstad was not directly relevant to the case brought by Staples.



Star Photo by Jack Gillis

Jim Ramstad was sworn in at Minnesota Senate