

A tribute to a rare politician

Nearly a year after his death, former longtime U.S. House Rep. Jim Ramstad is still bringing people together.

In a rare moment of unity, members of Minnesota's U.S. House delegation set aside their differences and joined forces to honor one of the more outstanding public servants this state has produced, seeking to rename the Wayzata Post Office in Ramstad's memory.

Democratic Rep. Dean Phillips, who now holds Ramstad's seat, said he sought to get the post office renamed for the Republican because "he was a man of principle, decency, integrity and of substance."

"His work on mental health parity was extraordinary. He cared about bipartisanship and respect for one another. It's been an inspiration to have that type of thoughtful leadership as a model."

In his 18 years in Congress, Ramstad displayed an inexhaustible ability to find common ground with others, particularly in the treatment of mental

Former U.S. Rep. Jim Ramstad will have a post office named in his honor.

health and addiction. It was a path he had walked himself, having faced alcoholism earlier in his life. The experience — and subsequent 39 years of hard-won sobriety — gave him a deep well of compassion and understanding for the struggles of others that he never forgot.

One of his signature accomplishments came through a most unlikely political partnership. Ramstad and the late U.S. Sen. Paul Wellstone, an icon of the left, worked together for seven long years on the landmark Mental Health and Addiction Treatment Parity Act, which ultimately was passed in 2008, six years after Wellstone's death.

After Wellstone died in 2002, Ramstad wrote: "I'm glad I got to know you, Paul, as more than just a colleague. Grateful I got to know you as a true friend." Often, he said, Wellstone would deliberately speak after Ramstad at an event so he could good-naturedly proclaim, "Ramstad, I love you like a brother, but how can you be so wrong?"

Perhaps the secret to Ramstad's political success was that he didn't just build coalitions. He built relationships.



Jim Ramstad

Former state Sen. Paul Anderson, a Republican who represented Plymouth, cut his political teeth as an intern for Ramstad. “He loved politics,” Anderson said, “because of the possibilities. It was a way to make the whole community better with good public policy.”

Anderson called Ramstad, nicknamed “The Rammer,” a “big personality who never took himself seriously, but who took his job incredibly seriously.” Many times, Anderson said, Ramstad would leave the Capitol, take the long flight home, and immediately — and quietly — head out to the home of someone who needed an intervention, or treatment, or just a fellow traveler who could talk him through a rough patch.

“I’m thankful to have had a front-row view of his work,” Anderson said, “and for his friendship.”

The bill to rename the post office, passed by the House and Senate, now awaits the signature of President Joe Biden.

Minnesota can be proud of the legacy left by Ramstad. The challenge will be for others to build on it.

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