



Two Secretaries of the Senate – in 1971

Peter Wattson, one of the two current Secretaries of the Senate, began working for the Senate in 1971. That week there was another instance of two secretaries of the Senate, if only for a few days.

The party breakdown in the Senate was nearly tied at the beginning of the 1971 session; 34 senators caucused with the Conservatives and 33 with the DFL caucus. This was the last session of official nonpartisan designation in the Legislature. On the first day of session, then Lt. Governor Rudy Perpich ruled that Sen. Dick Palmer of Duluth could not be seated because of a pending election contest, and then proceeded to cast the tie-breaking vote to help the DFL elect its candidate for Senate Secretary, Pat Flahaven, over the conservative nominee. George Goodwin, the Conservatives' nominee, claimed he was elected. But Goodwin's election included the vote of Sen. Palmer, whom Perpich ruled could not vote.

For the next week two versions of the daily journals were kept; the DFL caucus version ignored Sen. Palmer. Steve Dornfeld reported on January 12 in the *Minneapolis Tribune*, "There are also two sets of Senate committees. Chairmen designated by the Conservatives have been hanging on to offices that go with the chairmanships. DFLers have been having some trouble getting quorums at committee meetings they have scheduled."

Arguments over control of the Senate went to the Supreme Court. On Wednesday, January

13, the Court sided with the Conservatives, ruling that DFL Lt. Governor Perpich could not break a tie vote in the Senate and could not exclude Sen. Richard Palmer. (The Senate deadlocked, 33-33, on the corrupt campaign practices election contest against Palmer, so he retained his seat, but only served one term in the Senate.)

George Goodwin served at Secretary of the Senate during the 1971-1972 session.

Patrick Flahaven became the Secretary of the Senate the following session, in 1973, and went on to a long and distinguished career, serving until his recent retirement in 2008.

The Library has many articles on this event. They can't be posted due to copyright restrictions, but we would be glad to send copies to those who request them. (Send an email to: refdesk@lrl.leg.mn)

(Interesting side note: After Lt. Governor Perpich ruled that Sen. Palmer would not be seated on the first day of session, Supreme Court Chief Justice Oscar Knutson walked out in protest. The senators, including Sen. Palmer, were sworn in by Representative Jack Fena. See *Senate Journal* pages.)

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*See clippings in the
George Goodwin section.*