

# Elaine Ramos presses appeal of University firing

By JEFFREY R. RICHARDSON

Elaine Ramos was fired from her position as the University of Alaska's Vice President for Rural Education Affairs a little over a month ago. Since then, Ramos and her attorneys have been

preparing for battle with university President Robert Hiatt.

Ramos, a Tlingit with background in nursing and education, was appointed to the newly-created position a year ago to manage and develop a greater

effort by the university or provide higher education in the bush.

Although Hiatt has made allegations about her performance in the press and in memorandums to Ramos herself, Ramos

has declined to comment on them in detail until parties involved agree on how she should present her case and appeal Hiatt's decision.

Confident that she has enough evidence to defend her

work, she did say that the university administration never tried to make her job any easier.

"They didn't give me any support, they didn't want to in fact," she said.

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# Ramos firing called offensive and unprecedented

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Hiatt told a broadcast reporter in Fairbanks that he never wanted to hire Ramos in the first place because he felt she wasn't qualified.

Although Hiatt and Ramos discussed the possibility of her removal prior to his final action, Ramos said the president indicated to her that he was still thinking about it. Because of this, Ramos and several members of the Board of Regents were stunned to read of her dismissal in the All-Alaska Weekly as they waited for a December 10 Regents meeting to begin in Anchorage. Hiatt had informed the paper of decision before notifying Ramos and the Board of Regents, the policy-making body of the university.

One long-time observer of university affairs told the Tundra Times that Hiatt's tactics were "offensive and unprecedented."

On December 23, Ramos, through her attorney Linda Walton, filed a grievance with the university, stating:

"Mrs. Ramos believes: (1) that she was arbitrarily and capriciously removed from her office as Vice President of REA, (2) that such removal was in violation of Federal and State law because it was based on race and sex discrimination, and (3) that her removal was clearly erroneous in view of reliable probative and substantial evidence on the complete record as a whole."

She also charged that her reputation had been damaged by the way her removal was carried out.

Since her grievance was filed, both sides have fired volleys of letters trying to reach agreement on how her case should be heard.

Ramos originally filed her grievance with the University of

Alaska Grievance/Ethics Committee. At the time this was the only such body in existence. It is composed of university faculty and staff from across the state. Ramos asked for a public hearing before this body.

Although Hiatt agreed to a public hearing, his attorney would not confirm this. Then, on January 12, Hiatt took two actions:

1. He issued new regulations for the university Grievance/Ethics Committee, including a provision that anyone having a hearing before the group would accept its decision as final and waive all other remedies.

2. He announced the creation of a University of Alaska Board of Grievances whose members are to be appointed by himself. He said he would agree to a public hearing if the new board agreed.

Although the new board has apparently been planned for

some time, Ramos is disturbed by Hiatt's timing. Her attorney said, "I'd be willing to comment that it's certainly irregular."

In spite of this, Ramos has agreed to re-file her grievance with the new board, but not without first stating certain conditions of her own. Attorney Walton sent a letter to the chairman of the old Grievance/Ethics Committee which reads in part:

"Apparently the University does not understand its own grievance procedure and has many spokesmen with different proposals. In view of this, Mrs. Ramos delineates under which she is prepared to proceed as follows:

1. Mrs. Ramos would like to attempt to resolve this matter with the University through a fair grievance procedure, with an impartial committee presiding. Of course the names of the committee members should be

disclosed in advance.

2. She asks that Dr. Hiatt make himself available to testify under oath and offers to do the same.

3. She asks that Dr. Hiatt stick to his statements made to the news media, and agree that the recommendations of the committee be submitted to the Board of Regents, rather than to him, for initial action.

4. She asks that the hearing be public.

5. She asks that her replacement not be named until a decision has been made as a result of the above fair hearing, and that the hearing be held as soon as possible.

6. Mrs. Ramos waives no legal rights by appearing before the committee. The findings on the committee will be merely advisory and not binding on any party, and Mrs. Ramos would be entitled to a de novo trial in the event that legal action is ultimately filed."

Apparently, the clouds hanging over the status of rural education and Ramos herself will only be disbursed by a university hearing or a lawsuit.

The questions raised by Ramos' removal do not just involve her performance, but also her own allegations that she has received no support from Hiatt in developing rural education. In addition, Ramos pointed out that people in the field who are actually running rural education programs are "in a quandry because they feel the quality of their work has been questioned."

Ramos said she has received numerous phone calls from top village and regional Native leaders, including leaders from the 12 non-profit and profit Native corporations many have asked what they can do to help.

Outgoing Alaska Federation of Natives President Sam Kito is not one of those leaders. He has told a radio station in Fairbanks that he sees no problem with Hiatt's action at this time. Kito also serves on the Board of Regents.