

# Ramos v. University of Alaska reviewed

(Editor's note: *Tundra Times* Anchorage Bureau Chief has prepared the following analysis of key arguments in the debate over the removal of Elaine Ramos as University of Alaska Vice-President for Rural Educational Affairs. Arguments for reinstatement of Ms. Ramos and defense of former President Hiatt's actions in the matter were concluded last week before the University's Board of Grievances. The grievance board is currently reviewing testimony prior to announcing a decision in the case.)

By JEFFREY R. RICHARDSON

It has been about five months since Robert Hiatt charged that the rural education office of the University of Alaska under Elaine Ramos was not "under control."

It has been a little over two months since Hiatt was forced to resign his post as University president after serious financial troubles in the college system came to light.

Apparently, rural education was not the only part of the university that was out of control.

On April 4, the University of Alaska Board of Grievances began a hearing to determine if Ramos should be reinstated as Vice President for Rural Educational Affairs (REA). The board was directed to hear the case by Superior Court Judge Ralph Moody, who said Ramos must go through regular administrative channels to protest Hiatt's decision to remove her before taking her case to court.

Ramos claims the University prevented her from having a fair hearing, and is not convinced she is going to have one now. She has charged Hiatt with race and sex discrimination in firing her. Hiatt maintains he removed her because she was a poor administrator.

Several battles between Ramos and the university are being waged at the same time. The most important for rural Alaskans is whether Hiatt had a good reason to fire Ramos in the first place. Was she doing the job? Was rural college education becoming a reality under her guidance?

Ramos, and some rural Alaskans, say yes; Hiatt, and other rural Alaskans, say no.

Neither Ramos nor Hiatt were completely satisfied with the way the rural education system was shaping up. Ramos blames the university for not supporting rural education, while Hiatt suggests that Ramos was never right for the job and all her enthusiasm could not make up for what he felt was a lack of administrative experience.

It is apparent that both have administrative styles and education philosophies that do not mix well.

However, beyond these questions of Ramos's qualifications and philosophy is the controversy over how Hiatt went about removing Ramos. She strongly objected to the fact that Hiatt informed the press of his decision to remove her before informing her. Even more importantly, she claims that Hiatt and the university actively prevented her from protesting her action, which they deny.

Native and rural Alaskans are widely divided on the firing of Ms. Ramos; people working in the rural education office are reticent because they fear they may lose their jobs

if they say the wrong thing.

Hiatt's allegations are contained in a memo written to Ramos last November 22 and in an affidavit filed by Hiatt after Ramos took her case to court.

In the memo, Hiatt indicated he had always had doubts about her abilities because she lacked administrative experience.

"... I had deep concern about your being able to administer this very comprehensive and difficult program given your limited experience in higher education affairs."

Ramos stands on her experience and record of many years in nursing and education, including several years of administrative work at Sheldon Jackson College. Her position at Sheldon Jackson included Director of Special Services and Vice-President for Institutional Development. She also served as administrative director of the Alaska Native Language Center.

The difference between Hiatt and Ramos over qualifications is important because it illustrates that problems existed between the two that perhaps could never be solved. An affidavit written by Charles Bovee, vice-president for academic affairs at Sheldon Jackson indicates how differently Hiatt and Ramos viewed her position: "Mrs. Ramos held several responsible positions at Sheldon Jackson College, and, in each case, performed her responsibilities effectively and adequately. Mrs. Ramos brought to the post of Vice-President of Rural Educational Affairs a sensitivity and awareness of the grass root needs so important in developing programs which would respond to students in the rural areas of Alaska. I noted that, 'Although Mrs. Ramos does not have the typical educational background for a similar position in another state, her excellent qualifications in the essential areas more than qualified her for the position advertised. The University could undoubtedly find a person with impeccable educational qualifications but who would lack the perception, insights and sensitivity and ability Elaine could bring to the task.'"

However, this was not enough for Hiatt, who told Ramos that she was selected for the job over his objections and reservations expressed by the selection committee "on the assumption that your dedication to educational opportunities for Native people would somehow make up for your limited experience. With nearly a year behind us, I am now convinced that this assumption will not come to fruition at least within the time frame available to us for advancement of this important program."

Hiatt also charged that "severe demoralization within your staff has occurred as a result of an administrative style which is too personalized." Although he did not indicate who on the REA staff was demoralized, Ramos volunteered that it was probably people at the Alaska Native Language Center, with whom Ramos has another philosophical difference. She claims the center is research oriented when it should be devoting more of its resources to training Native linguists.

Hiatt also criticized Ramos for her "inability to delegate top-level responsibility" and claims that he, and other university officials made every effort

to "improve her performance."

Ramos suggests that she has gotten REA off the ground in spite of Hiatt.

Despite Dr. Hiatt's obstructionism, I felt that I was making progress in gaining the respect of other faculty at the University.

"My staff did have some problems. However... there was good feeling on my staff also. I believe that given a reasonable period of time and the opportunity to do so without obstruction from Dr. Hiatt, I can deal effectively with staff problems that do exist."

In his memo, Hiatt made reference to Ramos not meeting a schedule in implementing REA programs although he did not specify what the schedule was.

In her affidavit, Ramos denies the charge:

"There was no time schedule for REA which had not been met. In fact it was always expected and intended that the first year of administration would be largely a year of planning for future delivery."

In another document prepared by Ramos in defense of her administration, she suggests that Hiatt was over-anxious to begin new rural programs even before Regional Policy Advisory Councils had had a chance to offer program ideas.

On the other hand, Hiatt charges that Ramos did not make proper use of the councils. He said various units of the university "and in particular the community colleges have been slighted by you, much to their dismay. You have not met, in a significant way on their campuses, with staff and Policy Advisory Councils for discussions. Many on Policy Advisory Councils have been 'turned off' by your failure to visit the site of programs for which you are responsible."

Hearings held by the Alaska Post-Secondary Commission last year indicated that the community colleges wanted to see more of Ramos, and she admits she did not travel in rural areas as much as she wanted to. However, "I do not feel that I slighted existing units, although on many occasions when I had trips planned to outlying areas, Dr. Hiatt directed me to attend another University function on short notice, so that many trips had to be cancelled," Ramos said.

One problem that kept her in Fairbanks was the REA budget. There was no unified budget when she took office in January, funds for rural education were scattered throughout the university programs and accounts.

After locating funds with which to run her office, Ramos has to prepare a budget proposal for fiscal year 1978.

When the Board of Grievances met in Fairbanks earlier this month, the charges and counter-charges presented defined battle lines. The outcome is anybody's guess.

The REA office has limped along since Ramos was dismissed with no clear direction. The mandate from rural Alaskans to the state to deliver college programs in the bush is too strong to think the existence of REA is in question. What will be decided, eventually, either by decisions of the Board of Grievances or the courts, is how those programs will be delivered.

Hiatt charged that Ramos prepared her budget with no input from her staff, that the budget was poorly written, and that her defense of her budget before the Board of Regents was "most ineffective."

"My budget presentation on November 13, 1976 was not any worse than other budget presentations. Considering the difficult circumstances I had to work with... I think my budget presentation was quite adequate. In fact, at least one member of the Board of Regents said I did a good job."