

A senator redresses a tradition X-2

She wears pants; history is made; a colleague follows suit.

By Robert Whereatt
Staff Writer

It is not exactly the same as the first man on the moon, or the first woman on the moon, for that matter, but it is history of a sort. The pants barrier has been broken in the Minnesota Senate. On April 16, 1993, Sen. Ellen Anderson, DFL-St. Paul, strode into the Senate chamber in the State Capitol in pants and a jacket.

The walls of the chamber stood. The sergeant-at-arms remained calm. And the senior male senators, those steeped in the hoary traditions of the place, uttered not a word.

"I was dressed up. No one said anything," Anderson said matter-of-factly Wednesday.

But Sen. Sandy Pappas, DFL-St. Paul, was more exuberant. "We broke the pants barrier," she announced to a reporter. Pappas herself repeated the feat Monday.

"I was warned by one of my colleagues that I might get kicked out," she said. She wasn't.

The Senate always has been the more formal, the more proper — some might call it the more stuffy — of the two houses of the Legislature. Coffee is not allowed on desks during the session and members can't read newspapers at their desks.

Pappas recalled having a vase of lilacs on her desk once during the 1990 session, her first year. "I was told I couldn't have them. So I wore them." *See 4/60, 9/6/93*

There is no written rule that bars women from wearing slacks in the Senate during session, according to Patrick Flahaven, secretary of the Senate.

There is, however, an unwritten rule that predates Flahaven's start in 1971 that requires male senators to wear coats and ties. "The only thing that was asked of women was that they dress appropriately," he said.

Flahaven said that to his knowledge that was never interpreted or enforced as a ban on pants. But Pappas and Anderson said women senators have understood the unwritten rule to mean pants are not allowed. (In the House of Representatives, anything goes, including tieless men and women in pants.)

The smashing of the pants barrier was not by design.



Sen. Sandy Pappas: "I was warned by one of my colleagues that I might get kicked out." She wasn't.



Sen. Ellen Anderson: "I was dressed up. No one said anything." A memory lapse led to historic moment.

Anderson, 33, a first-term legislator, had forgotten that a brief floor session of the Senate had been scheduled Friday, and so had dressed more casually than usual.

Nonetheless, it counts.

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