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## Teacher reinstated after standing ground on flags

*THE DENVER POST*

Lakewood, Colo. — A geography teacher put on paid leave for refusing to remove Mexican, Chinese and U.N. flags from his classroom is being allowed to return to school today after district officials backed down.

But Eric Hamlin, who teaches seventh-graders, hopes his experience will inspire a backlash against a Colorado law that restricts the display of other nations' flags.

"This hasn't been a teacher-versus-school-district issue," Hamlin said. "This has been a teacher taking on the state statute with the school district stuck in the middle as the enforcer."

Carmody Middle School Principal John Schalk put Hamlin on paid leave Wednesday after the teacher refused three orders to take the flags out of his classroom.

The school district cited a state law prohibiting the display of any flag but the American or Colorado flags on public buildings, including schools.

Temporary displays for instructional or historical purposes are exempt, but the school principal did not consider Hamlin's display temporary enough.

District officials agreed Thursday that Hamlin could keep the flags up for six weeks, then exchange them with other flags from his collection of more than 50. The district said he could keep his next set of flags — 25 of them from Middle Eastern nations — up for 12 weeks.

Former state Rep. Carl Miller, who sponsored legislation in 2002 that strengthened a 1971 law restricting foreign-flag displays, said the school was right to put Hamlin on administrative leave and should not have let him return to school so soon.

Miller, a Democrat from Leadville, disagreed with Jefferson County Superintendent Cindy Stevenson, who said the outcome was a "win-win situation."

"The only win-win I see is that Mr. Hamlin wins, China wins, Mexico wins and the United Nations wins," he said. "It's certainly not a win for the United States of America."

The district reported getting several phone calls from parents, most supporting Hamlin.

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