

# House votes to make English the official federal language

By Stephen Green  
COPLEY NEWS SERVICE

S.A. Union 6/2/96

WASHINGTON — The House approved a bill yesterday that would make English the official language of the federal government and repeal requirements for bilingual election ballots.

of the English-only movement that such legislation works to divide the nation, not bring it together as supporters claim.

Republican leaders rushed the legislation through the House for a final vote before the August recess, combining the "official language" legislation sponsored by Rep. Randy "Duke" Cunningham, R-Escondido, with a bilingual ballot repeal measure sponsored by Rep. John Porter, R-Ill.

The vote of 259-169 followed 13 years of organized lobbying to make English the official language — a movement popularized by the late California Republican Sen. S.I. Hayakawa.

Critics yesterday renewed con-

## English

### House approves repeal of bilingual ballot rule

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we wanted to have it as an arrow in our quiver as we leave for San Diego and the Republican National Convention," said House Majority Whip Tom DeLay, R-Texas.

The legislation now goes to the Senate, where its future is uncertain. Although Cunningham said he has been assured of a Senate vote this year on the bill, Senate Majority Whip Trent Lott, R-Miss., told reporters no decision has been made.

The Clinton administration quickly threatened a veto in a statement from the White House Office of Management and Budget that described the measure as "highly objectionable . . . unnecessary, inefficient and divisive."

President Clinton, however, signed similar state legislation when serving as governor of Arkansas.

Besides Arkansas, California and 22 other states have made English

their official language. The constitutionality of Arizona's measure is now before the U.S. Supreme Court.

On final passage, 36 Democrats joined 223 Republicans in voting yes. Only eight Republicans voted no. All California Republicans supported the bill and all Democrats opposed it, with the exception of Rep. Jane Harman of Rolling Hills, who voted yes.

The importance the Republicans placed on the bill was signified by a rare speech on the House floor by Speaker Newt Gingrich, R-Ga., who warned that failure to approve the bill "would literally lead . . . to the decay of the core parts of our civilization."

To applause from Republicans, Gingrich described the bill as a "modest step in the direction of reinforcing and reasserting the greatest civilization ever to provide freedom for the human race."

Opponents of the bill applauded Rep. Jose Serrano, D-N.Y., who accused the bill's supporters of "taking a non-issue and questioning people's patriotism."

Yesterday's action was the farthest the official language proposal ever has advanced in Congress. Hayakawa, an immigrant of Japanese ancestry, founded U.S. Eng-

lish — the nation's largest and oldest organization dedicated to making English the official language — in 1983.

One portion of the bill would repeal the federal requirement that jurisdictions with large numbers of non-English speakers provide election ballots in voters' native tongues. The measure would not stop states and localities from printing bilingual ballots, if they choose.

Most of the debate, however, focused on the official-language provision.

It would require the federal government to conduct official business in English, with certain exceptions, including national security, international relations, trade, language training, the census, and public health and safety.

Under the bill, the federal government would have to print most of its documents in English, including Internal Revenue Service tax information. Citizenship ceremonies also would have to be conducted in English.

"We must take this defining step to avoid our nation becoming divided into many ethnic enclaves," Cunningham told the House. His portion of the bill, Cunningham declared, would "empower" immigrants to learn English, a requisite

for economic success.

Rep. Brian Bilbray, R-Imperial Beach, accused opponents of "hiding behind multiculturalism when they don't want to admit what they really mean. I live on the Mexican border where I see that those who don't learn English don't have access to economic opportunity."

Bilbray told the House of the 1992 San Diego County grand jury report that accused the San Ysidro School District of intentionally keeping students from learning English in order to keep them speaking Spanish and to preserve the Mexican culture.

Opponents, however, charged that the bill is divisive and effectively discriminates against non-English speakers.

"The author of this bill is well-intentioned and a good guy," Rep. Bill Richardson, D-N.M., said of Cunningham. "But what we're doing is totally unconstitutional."

"English-only is against our tradition and bad business," Richardson said. "We're telling billions watching the Olympics that English is the only language that's important."

Rep. Rosa DeLauro, D-Conn., accused Republicans of offering the bill "as their latest wedge issue to divide the American people."

Said Rep. Robert E. Andrews,

D-N.J.: "This is a shameful attempt to take the real anxieties of real people and direct them at those who are not like the rest of us."

Other opponents noted that there is nothing in the bill to increase English-language instruction, although there are waiting lists for such classes throughout the country.

One section of the bill would authorize lawsuits by those who claim the bill's provisions have been violated. Democrats said this would lead to excessive litigation. However, the California law has a similar provision, yet it did not lead to litigation of any note.

Supporters of the legislation cited findings by the Census Bureau that more than 320 languages are spoken in the United States.

A substitute bill offered by Serrano that would have encouraged multilingualism was defeated by a vote of 250-178.

The House also rejected by a vote of 257-171 a Serrano proposal to prohibit presidential candidates from using public funds to buy advertising in Spanish.



# English as official U.S. language becomes election-year football

**By Stephen Green**  
COPLEY NEWS SERVICE

WASHINGTON — When it was time for Rep. Randy "Duke" Cunningham to vote on a bill that would make English the official government language, the Escondido Republican responded "Sí!"

It was a rare moment of levity last week during an otherwise bitter debate in the House Economic and Educational Opportunities Committee over a bill that has become an election-year political lightning rod.

The legislation, which was drafted by Cunningham, is headed for action on the House floor as early as this week. The debate there is likely to be as politically charged as the battle that transpired in the committee, which approved the measure by a narrow party-line vote.

The divisions over the bill reflect not only the emotions inevitably triggered by an issue striking chords of nationalism and of ethnic and linguistic pride, but also the high political stakes of an election year.

The bill is strongly supported by such groups as the American Legion and the National Grange, and Republicans say the measure will work to their electoral advantage. Making English the official language is widely popular, according to opinion surveys, even supported by a majority of ethnic groups.

However, Democrats portray the bill as discriminatory and aimed at effectively disenfranchising non-English speakers. The bill is opposed by an array of labor, civil rights and ethnic organizations, including the American Civil Liberties Union, the Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational

Fund and the AFL-CIO.

But the legislation drafted by Cunningham is neither as extreme as some opponents claim nor as far-reaching as some supporters would prefer.

"There are many who think this bill doesn't go far enough," said committee Chairman William Goodling, R-Pa., who supports the legislation. "Others believe it goes too far."

Among those who had hoped to see the legislation significantly stronger is Jim Boulet, executive director of English First, which for years has also been lobbying state legislatures to adopt English-only laws.

Boulet said that although the bill "addresses many of our concerns," English First had hoped that the measure would prohibit bilingual ballots and do something to curb bilingual education programs, which critics say have proved ineffective in teaching English.

Cunningham said he tried to draft legislation that would draw bipartisan support, but in the Economic and Educational Opportunities Committee the bill failed to attract a single Democratic vote. In es-

sence, it would require that the business of the federal government be conducted in English.

The Democrats said the bill would cripple law enforcement by prohibiting federal agents from speaking in languages other than English. They also complained that the bill would prohibit non-English speakers from having sufficient access to the federal government.

However, Cunningham noted that the bill has exemptions for such activities as law enforcement, diplomacy, public health and safety, language training and Social Security.

The Clinton administration, which has backed bilingualism, opposes the bill, according to the Justice Department.

But with GOP presidential candidate Bob Dole supporting the measure, Republicans probably wouldn't mind a veto from President Clinton — believing such an action would hurt the president politically.

But there is no guarantee that Clinton would veto the legislation. While governor of Arkansas, he signed a bill making English the state's official language.



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## Across the divide

### *English as common language binds the nation*

**R**ecent history illustrates convincingly that bilingualism breeds separatism — and often with catastrophic consequences for a society.

Consider Quebec. The Canadian government's official policy of bilingualism, which mandates that everything from highway signs to speeches on the floor of parliament must be in both English and French, has not mollified Quebec's nationalistic drive for independence.

Quite the opposite. Bilingualism has served only to widen the cultural divide between Canadians of French and British descent. Many observers now believe Quebec's secession from the rest of Canada is inevitable and that, when it occurs, other provinces may seek to go their separate way as well.

A common language is the single most important thread that binds a nation of diverse people. Conversely, the lack of a unifying language can lead inexorably to an unraveling of society along ethnic and racial lines.

This lesson is especially important for a nation of immigrants such as the United States — and absolutely critical for a polyglot society such as ours in California.

The inherent dangers of bilingualism are clear in the rapid demographic changes occurring in this state, where historically large numbers of Spanish-speaking immigrants are being assimilated. Our challenge is to ensure that all Californians have the opportunity to learn English as an essential step toward full integration into society.

Indeed, without a mastery of English, most immigrants will be condemned to the economic backwaters, with no opportunity for advancement.

Tomorrow, two bills designed to underscore the importance of English as a unifying force in America will be considered on the House floor. The first would designate English as the official language of the federal government; the second would repeal an ill-advised mandate requiring local governments to

provide ballots and other election materials in a multiplicity of foreign languages.

The measure making English the official language of the U.S. government was drafted by Rep. Randy "Duke" Cunningham, R-Escondido. It requires that most federal documents be printed only in English, but it makes common-sense exceptions for public health and safety, national security, international relations, language training and the census.

Although opponents claim the bill is racist, nothing in it is coercive or punitive. Sadly, such name-calling too often displaces reasoned debate on this emotion-charged issue.

In truth, Cunningham's legislation would have very limited practical impact because the vast majority of the government's business already is conducted in English. Nonetheless, it is important symbolically as an official stand against creeping bilingualism. It sends a needed signal that the predominance of English is central to America's values.

That theme should apply, above all, to the voting booth. In order to become U.S. citizens, immigrants must display minimal proficiency in English, which certainly ought to include the ability to read a ballot.

Printing voting materials in other languages sends the unhealthy message that understanding English is not essential to citizenship.

The reality is that most immigrants recognize that learning English is indispensable to success in this country. In San Diego County, for instance, there are long waiting lists to get into adult English classes. That's why the House Economic and Educational Opportunities Committee was wrong to reject a proposal to boost funding for English instruction.

Our language is the common ingredient that unites American society. We all have a stake in ensuring that immigrants are given every opportunity to learn English.



# The common language

S.D. 07107  
8/1/92

## A law that makes the obvious ridiculously official

**H**aving lived through parochial language wars in other countries, I find it depressing to see Americans start one of their own, particularly one led by Californians, who ought to know better.

House Republicans, lacking anything better to do, last week voted to make English our official language.

What will they think of next? How about making the dollar the official currency and seven days the official week? They can make Washington the official capital and the moon the official satellite. There are lots of things the House can make official.

Of all the silly, pompous, fatuous, bogus, futile gestures this Congress has done, making English the official language

Latin to me), is located atop *le Drug Store* on the Champs Elysees, where leading items on the menu are *le hamburger* and *le hot dog*.

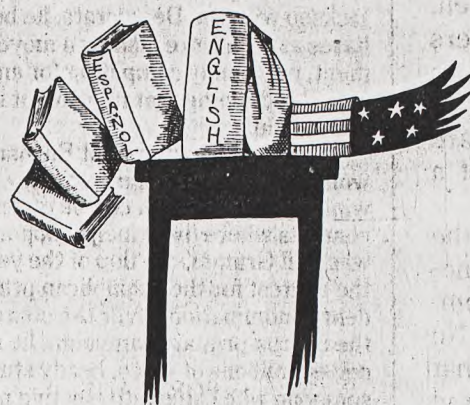
China is at it, too. Beijing has launched a campaign to rid the nation of non-Chinese words regarded as politically "unhealthy." "Confusion and pollution in the language," says a Beijing University language professor named Jin Kaicheng, "is harmful to national dignity." Dear me!

France and China are different from the United States: They force foreign cultures to assimilate. Perhaps House Republicans have heard of the Huguenots and have heard of Tibet. In France, for years, children could not be baptized with nonofficial given names such as Tygdwal and Gwendolyn, even though these are legitimate Celtic names used in Brittany since before the Romans.

When nations are not immigration nations, as France and China are not, culture, to a degree, can be coerced. We know the plight of Tibetans. When large numbers of Africans came to France following de Gaulle's liquidation of the empire, they either assimilated or were sent home. Three Moroccan high school girls who wore Islamic head scarves to French schools a few years ago were given the choice of removing them or going to private school.

In America, we don't coerce culture. Historically, immigrants have understood that English was the way the pot melted, and if the first generation didn't melt, the next one did. Americans whose parents spoke English had plenty of school comrades whose parents did not. We never gave it a thought.

America has a cultural richness no other nation enjoys, one that has created the enduring idea of American exception-



MARGARET SCOTT

## James O. Goldsborough

THE SAN DIEGO UNION-TRIBUNE

goes to the top of the heap. And the crusade is being led by San Diego's own Rep. Randy Cunningham, who says his bill will allow immigrants to "achieve the American Dream."

You got that, Chicanos down in the barrio? You Cubans in Little Havana? You Italians in Little Italy? You Chinese in Chinatown? You Vietnamese in Little Saigon? Spread the word: The door to the American Dream is officially open.

Why didn't anyone think of this before? How have people managed, up to now? The Germans fleeing repression after 1848, the Chinese working the railroads in the 1870s, the Filipinos picking pineapples in Hawaii, the tens of millions of Italians, Poles, Czechs and Swedes at the turn of the century — how has English survived without the 104th Congress?

My own ancestors, who came from Ireland and settled in Pittsburgh in the 1850s, spoke English, but with Irish accents. Now that we will have an official language, we need an official accent, too, like they have in England.

Some people take this bill seriously. "I do not want to see the country become ethnic enclaves," said Rep. Marge Roukema, R-N.J.. So why, as Rep. Xavier Becerra, D-Los Angeles, asks, has the House cut funds for teaching English? The bill is a joke, like the initiative that declared English California's official language a few years ago — and hasn't been heard of since.

I've seen it all before. French governments are always launching crusades against foreign language and even foreign culture. Euro-Disney was delayed for years because governments feared the polluting effects of American culture.

French word police go through dictionaries to purify them, disc jockeys are given quotas for foreign records, businesses are fined for using non-French words in advertising.

This last is a laugh because France's top advertising house, Publicis (sounds

alism. Yes, there are plenty of resentful old Anglos around, nostalgic for the days when the neighborhood was homogeneous. They fail to understand that America's strength is its diversity.

Backers of Cunningham's bill say its effects will be insignificant — a marvelous justification of legislation. Tax forms, Social Security forms and the like will now be printed in English only. As Becerra said, it will affect his parents, not him.

Symbolically, the bill is at sharp odds with America's history and traditions, and nowhere more than in California. In California, with a near 30 percent Hispanic population and a 9 percent Hispanic voting population, the goal should be to facilitate democracy for immigrants, not make it more difficult.

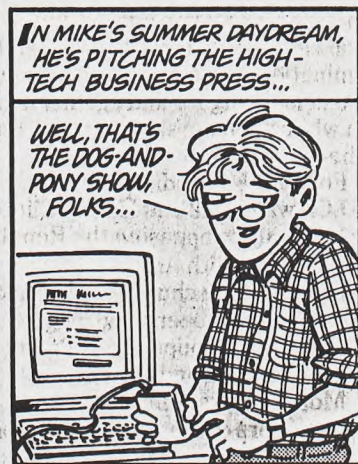
Or are Republicans afraid Hispanics will vote for the other party?

Immigrants will learn English at their own speed, as they always have, and their children will learn it in school — if Congress lets them go to school. They may learn it more slowly today because of the changing nature of immigration, but they will learn it.

Meanwhile, maybe Americans should take advantage of the immigrants to improve their foreign-language skills. If Roukema wants to find some real ethnic enclaves, she should see how many Americans live in ghettos abroad, cut off from the host nation by an inability to speak anything but English.

## The bill is at sharp odds with America's history.

## DOONESBURY



**GOLDSBOROUGH** can be reached via e-mail at [jim.goldsborough@uniontrib.com](mailto:jim.goldsborough@uniontrib.com)