



# The Phyllis Schlafly Report

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## English Should Be Our Official Language

An American who emigrates to France does not become a Frenchman, no matter how long he lives there. Likewise for other countries. But people come to America from all over the world and they become Americans.

How do we make Americans out of people who come here from so many other continents and cultures? Surely the best, quickest, most obvious, and most efficient way is to teach them to speak English. Immigrants who come to America want to be Americans and to enter our social, political and economic mainstream. Speaking English is the admission ticket to that road. Without it, immigrants are forever relegated to menial jobs.

The establishment media expressed shock when some presidential candidates joined the movement to make English our official language, but this issue has been steadily building for years. When Americans get the chance to express themselves, it's clear what they want. Twenty-two states have already made English their official language. In Florida, the official English proposition passed by 84 percent, in California by 73 percent, and in Colorado by 61 percent.

The movement to legislate English as our official language has nothing to do with what language you speak in your home, church, or club, or what foreign languages you may care to learn. It has to do only with what language is promoted and paid for by the government.

Few Americans realize that current federal law requires ballots to be printed in non-English languages if only five percent of the population in a voting jurisdiction, or ten thousand people, speak a language other than English. 375 voting districts in 21 states are now required by the federal government to provide voting ballots and election materials in foreign languages.

In San Francisco, voting materials are printed in three languages. In Los Angeles, ballots printed in Spanish, Chinese, Japanese, Vietnamese, Tagalog and Korean cost the taxpayers \$900,000 in last year's mayoral election.

Alameda County, California officials say they spend almost \$100 a ballot to provide foreign language voting materials.

Why are we doing this? Our laws require that naturalized citizens must "demonstrate an understanding of the English language, including the ability to read, write, and speak words in ordinary usage in the English language." Since only citizens can vote, there is no reasonable excuse for non-English ballots.

In a number of reported cases, poor translations have made it impossible for someone using the non-English ballot to cast an informed vote. The *New York Times* reported one 1993 case where a Chinese ballot printed the character for "no" as a translation of "yes."

### The Bureaucratic Bilingual Boondoggle

An \$8 billion bureaucratic boondoggle called "bilingual education" keeps more than two million immigrant children segregated from English-speaking teachers and children, and thereby consigns them to a foreign-language ghetto where they are taught all subjects in their native tongue. It's a sort of language apartheid. It is nurturing a permanent, non-English-speaking subculture within America, and that does not bode well for our future.

The term "bilingual education" is a complete misnomer because there is no requirement that children in bilingual programs ever become fluent in English. It promotes unilingual education in the immigrant's native tongue, rather than bilingual language skills.

Since 1974, federal regulations have required public school instructors to be proficient in the foreign language they teach, but no regulations require that they speak English fluently. Federal regulations also decree that a school can lose its funding if it fails to "instruct," "maintain," and "develop" in the student's native tongue, but there is no corresponding penalty for failing to teach English.

The result is that students can and do graduate from public high schools without ever learning English. This system has built a powerful lobby of non-English-speaking

school personnel trying to maintain their jobs and funding by keeping children in foreign language classes year after year. According to Linda Chavez, a former director of the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights and now president of the Center for Equal Opportunity, the bilingual education lobby has “a far-reaching political agenda to promote Spanish among Hispanic children — regardless of whether they speak English or not, regardless of their parents’ wishes and even without their knowledge.”

Indeed, that is what happens. The bureaucrats try to put all children with Hispanic-sounding names in bilingual education programs even though they may be fully English-speaking and come from English-speaking homes.

Contrary to what some have argued, we can’t blame the Supreme Court for the bilingual education travesty. The 1974 *Lau v. Nichols* decision simply left it up to the schools to devise a remedy to deal with non-English-speaking students. It was U.S. Department of Education bureaucrats who created the monster called bilingual education. By the late 1970s, the federal civil rights office was threatening a cutoff of federal funds to public schools that did not offer bilingual education to Hispanic and other language-minority students.

In California, a 1993 report by the Little Hoover Commission called bilingual education “divisive and wasteful.” Yet, California’s public school system now mandates instruction in 42 different languages. New York City students are taught in 82 languages, including Kpelle, Nyanja, Twi, Gurma, Ewe, Cham, and others most Americans have never heard of.

## **What’s the Alternative to Bilingual Ed?**

Non-English-speaking immigrants didn’t start coming to the United States in 1974. All those millions of earlier immigrants learned English by what is called the immersion method; that is, the adults put their children in public schools where only English was spoken, the children learned English rapidly, and they went home and taught English to their parents. This system worked just fine until federal busybodies, with more money than they knew how to spend, decided to experiment on vulnerable immigrant children whose parents didn’t know how to fight the system.

Bilingual programs were forced into the schools by federal bureaucrats without any research whatsoever to demonstrate their effectiveness. Twenty years after they started, there’s still no proof that these programs are successful in bringing immigrant children into the English-speaking mainstream of our nation. Christine Russell, professor of English at Boston University, evaluated 79 bilingual programs and found that none was any better than just immersing children in English. She said, “Ninety-one percent of scientifically valid studies show bilingual education to be no better — or actually worse — than doing nothing.”

Anyone who studies this subject will quickly discover dozens of parents who are disappointed or angry at the

public schools for failing to teach their children English. Congressman Toby Roth tells about a foreman on a south Texas ranch, Ernesto Ortiz, who said: “My children learn Spanish in school so they can become busboys and waiters. I teach them English at home so they can become doctors and lawyers.” Ortiz understands that English is the language of opportunity, and that denying them English means denying them the opportunity to advance in America.

Jorge Amselle, a policy analyst for the Center for Equal Opportunity, says that “Bilingual education today means three to five years in a program where as much as 90 percent of the child’s day is spent in the native language, even if it isn’t his or her native language.” Some parents complain that their children have been taking math in Spanish for as many as seven years.

Amselle relates many horror stories. He says that last year the Houston school district discovered that at least 90 foreign bilingual education teachers had falsified teaching credentials, cheated on competency exams, were working illegally in violation of their visas, or could not speak English. One school principal admitted that she has many bilingual education teachers who speak virtually no English.

Parents complain that the small amount of time dedicated each day to English, usually 10 to 20 percent, is made to include lunch, physical education and music, time that could be spent learning English. Amselle says, “There are many parents who want to remove their children from the bilingual program, but face a lot of intimidation from school administrators.”

Polls have found that more than three-fourths of all Americans believe that English should be the official language of government and that anyone who wants to live in this country should learn English. This is especially true of immigrants themselves. A survey of immigrant parents done for the Department of Education found that 78 percent of Mexican Americans and 83 percent of Cuban Americans thought that schools should not teach immigrant or minority children in a foreign language instead of English.

## **Bilingual Education’s Hidden Agenda**

The bilingual education lobby now asserts that evidence of effectiveness is not important because the decision of how to teach immigrant children is a “cultural” not a pedagogical issue. Some admit openly that the purpose of bilingual education is not assimilation at all, but is to make foreign language and culture an integral part of American society.

Some advocates see bilingual education as the first step in a radical transformation of the United States into a nation without one common language or fixed borders. Josue Gonzales, director of bilingual education during the Carter Administration and now a professor at Columbia University Teachers College, says that Spanish “should no longer be regarded as a foreign language” but should be

considered "a second national language."

Linda Chavez has reported that others in the bilingual lobby have even more extreme views. At the annual conference of the National Association for Bilingual Education in Phoenix in February 1995, several speakers challenged the very idea of U.S. sovereignty and promoted the notion that the Southwest and northern Mexico are really one cultural region, which they dub *La Frontera*. Eugene Garcia, head of bilingual education at the U.S. Department of Education in the Clinton Administration, told the conferees that "the border for many is nonexistent. For me, for intellectual reasons, that border *shall* be nonexistent." His rhetoric was greeted by thunderous applause.

At the November 1994 meeting in Austin of the Texas Association for Bilingual Education, both Mexican and American flags were displayed on the stage, and the teachers and school personnel in attendance stood for the singing of the national anthems of both countries.

This movement for ethnic separatism is part of the prevailing liberal dogma called multiculturalism which, in turn, is a major tenet of Political Correctness. Daniel J. Boorstin, former Librarian of Congress, has warned that "The menace to America today is the emphasis on what separates us rather than on what brings us together — the separations of race . . . of origins, of language. . . . Bilingual teaching tends to restrict opportunities for the very people who need the opportunity to enter the mainstream of American life."

The historian Theodore White points out, "It is distasteful that a nation whose seal bears the inscription *E Pluribus Unum* (From the Many, One) should be asked to divide itself from one nation into many tribes." A voice from another era, President Theodore Roosevelt, bluntly expressed this same, consistent American doctrine: "The one absolute certain way of bringing this nation to ruin would be to permit it to become a tangle of squabbling nationalities. We have but one flag. We must also have but one language, and that language is English."

In addition to the social destructiveness of cloistering new Americans behind a language wall that prevents them from joining mainstream America, we have to face up to the sheer impossibility of dealing with so many language differences according to any standard that can be called fair or equitable. The demographers tell us that, by the year 2000, our nation will have 40 million Americans who do not speak English.

The large number of foreign languages that are now spoken in America make it downright ridiculous to try to devise laws and regulations that mandate non-English

ballots or public school teaching. There are 115 languages spoken in New York City schools. Election Boards and public schools obviously cannot offer their services in so many scores of languages, so what happens is that some languages are preferred and others are discriminated against.

In California, driver's license tests can be taken in 31 different languages. In New York, 23 different tests are offered, and Michigan offers 20. But think of all the other foreign languages in which driver's license tests are *not* offered. That's an open invitation for a flood of new lawsuits.

Rhode Island now allows its citizens to take a driver's license in any of six favored languages. Yet the Rhode Island Historical Heritage Commission reports that the state has at least 26 different language groups. The only equitable way to deal with such diversity is to accept English as the common language.

language is a priceless inheritance." This gift is part of our inheritance. We would be fools to kick it away.

We need only look across our northern border to see how ethnic and language separatism can tear apart a great nation and endanger its national identity. On October 30, 1995, by a margin of only 50.6 to 49.4 percent, voters rejected a proposal that French-speaking Quebec secede from English-speaking Canada and become a sovereign nation. The separatists garnered a much larger vote than they did in their referendum in 1980, and the close vote assures that another referendum will be held. Canada's narrow brush with national breakup should underscore the importance of maintaining our own national unity, and the best way to do that is by a common language.

Rep. Toby Roth (R-WI), with 91 co-sponsors, has introduced a bill to require that all federal government business be conducted in English and to repeal statutes that require non-English ballots and bilingual education. It should be passed. We should not compromise with the other bills now pending that try a halfway approach to the problem.

**You can't be an American if you don't speak English. Our public schools should be mandated to teach all children in English.**

**Of course, English should be our official language! The language of the Declaration of Independence and the United States Constitution is fundamental to our national identity. Without it, we will cease to be one nation.**

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### NOW ON THE INTERNET!

Recent articles by Phyllis Schlafly are now available on Eagle Forum's Internet home page:

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# *One Nation, One People, One Common Language*

by Rep. Toby Roth

For most of our nation's history, the English language has been the key to integrating new Americans, as well as the glue that has held our people together. That's all changing today. We're losing our common bond. For one in seven Americans, English is a foreign language. The National Clearing House for Bilingual Education estimates that, within five years, there will be 40 million Americans who will not speak English.

At a time in our nation's history when we need a common language more than ever, our government policies work to erode English's place in almost every aspect of our lives. Today, Americans can vote, pay taxes, take their driver's license exams, and go to school entirely in languages other than English.

Examples abound. Written and oral driver's license tests in foreign languages are available in 40 states across the country. California alone provides the exam in 31 different languages. In the most recent mayoral election in Los Angeles, ballots were printed in six different languages. The Internal Revenue Service printed tax forms in Spanish for the first time last year.

Even the most symbolic act of citizenship — the naturalization ceremony — is not safe from this trend. Recently, the Immigration and Naturalization Service conducted a citizenship ceremony almost entirely in Spanish.

In many places in America, English is no longer the first language in school. Our children are now taught, by law and with government funds, in dozens of languages other than English — 12 different languages in New York City alone. Instead of a first-rate education in English, students in bilingual education classes are taught in their native tongue, and English is rarely spoken.

Surprised? The worst surprise of all is: We're paying for it. All these linguistic services are provided at the taxpayers' expense. The American Legislative Exchange Council estimates that bilingual education alone costs \$8 billion a year, with no positive results.

In fact, bilingual education is a dismal failure at doing what Congress originally asked it to do: teach children English quickly and effectively. Tragically, it relegates countless children — unable to speak, understand and use English effectively — to a second-class future. More important, programs like bilingual education divide our country by undermining the common bond that holds our country together — our English language.

I'm working to stop these costly and destructive government policies, because there is no more certain recipe for dividing America along ethnic and linguistic lines. That's why I have re-introduced my legislation to make English our official language. My bill will end the government's multilingual policies — like bilingual

education, voting ballots in languages other than English, and foreign language citizenship ceremonies — and reaffirm that English is our national language.

Let me dispel some myths. Having English as our official language simply means that the primary language of instruction in schools is English, and that you vote and deal with the government in English. People will still be able, even encouraged, to speak and learn a foreign language, and preserve their heritage. The only significant difference will be that government actively reinforces our common language rather than erodes it.

For almost every American, this is just common sense. Just recently a *USA Today Weekend Magazine* poll found that 97 percent of respondents wanted to declare English our official language.

In the past, our nation has been a shining example of how people from every background can live and work together in harmony. I want to keep America one nation, one people. We must preserve the common bond that has kept this country of immigrants together for more than two centuries by making English our official language. Our future as a united nation depends on it.

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**Phyllis Schlafly** has been a national leader of the conservative movement since the publication of her best-selling 1964 book, *A Choice Not An Echo*. She has been a leader of the pro-family movement since 1972, when she started the national volunteer organization now called Eagle Forum. In a ten-year battle, Mrs. Schlafly led the pro-family movement to victory over the principal legislative goal of the radical feminists, called the Equal Rights Amendment.

Mrs. Schlafly's monthly newsletter called *The Phyllis Schlafly Report* is now in its 29th year. Her syndicated column appears in 100 newspapers, her radio commentaries are heard daily on 270 stations, and her radio talk show on education is heard Saturdays on 50 stations. She is the author or editor of 16 books on subjects as varied as family and feminism (*The Power of the Positive Woman*), nuclear strategy (*Strike From Space and Kissinger on the Couch*), education (*Child Abuse in the Classroom*), and child care (*Who Will Rock the Cradle?*). Her most recent book, *First Reader*, is a system to enable every parent to teach his child to read.

Mrs. Schlafly is a lawyer and served as a member of the Commission on the Bicentennial of the U.S. Constitution, 1985-1991, appointed by President Reagan. She has testified before more than 50 Congressional and State Legislative committees on constitutional, national defense, and family issues.

Mrs. Schlafly is a Phi Beta Kappa graduate of Washington University, received her J.D. from Washington University Law School, and received her Master's in Political Science from Harvard University. The mother of six children, she was named 1992 Illinois Mother of the Year.