

Why We Need to Make English the Official Language of the U.S.

BY REP. STEVE KING

I appreciate the chance to be here. We all come to CPAC every year because it's the epicenter for conservatives and energizes us so much. The history for me is a little of the narrative of how I got engaged in the English issue. I have long believed that English should be the official language, and as a candidate for State Senate back in 1996 we had a fundraiser in a shelter house in a park out in Dennison Iowa. We had about 150 people there, which was for a State Senate event and was because the governor was there, not because I was there.

Anyway, I was standing there giving a speech ranging across all the subject matter that I thought I should talk about, and one of the things I mentioned was, "I think English should be the official language of the state of Iowa." It brought this huge roar and standing ovation and I had touched a nerve that was far more raw than I had anticipated.

But [the issue] even probably wouldn't have activated me as much as it has except a newspaper reporter was in there and he wrote an editorial disparaging me for such a bigoted position. So you could take a couple positions on that. You could either curl up in the fetal position or you could fight back. So I fought back and they attacked me in the paper twice a week, all the way through the election and after.

This is a good idea. You know when you see people resist and they are vocal, vigorous resisters to the idea that the United States should have an official language. Or when they go out and demonstrate and jump up and down, and beat the drum and call us all kinds of names — why? Why is anyone so offended by an official language of the United States of America? Why do they get so angry? My sense then was more of an instinct because they were yelling and demonstrating.

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I remember my father had told me years ago that you know if you go throw a rock in a pig pen the one that squeals is the one you hit. So they were squealing. I decided this must be the right thing and so I began to drive it, and so it took six years in the Iowa Senate to establish English as the official language of the state of Iowa. The interesting piece about this was, that the then governor, Tom Vilsack, didn't want to sign this bill.

But it was an 84 percent issue in Iowa, and if he wanted to continue his political career he didn't have much choice. And so in 2002, I put the bill on his desk. I chaired the committee and organized the bill and put it on his desk, and so his choice was just really one choice: sign the bill. So we became I think the 28th state out of now 30 states that have English as the official language. I came here to Congress and carried the mail with me.

I introduced legislation known as HR 997, the English Language Unity Act. It's important that we not only pass this legislation but that we declare English to be in law, to be the official language of the United States. The reason for that is that if you don't they will make all kinds of excuses and they'll declare we're a "national language." It's got to be an official language so that the official functions of government are in English.

And then we had the Voting Rights Act that came up that was reauthorized several years ago, 4 or 5 years ago, and it imposes multiple language use when it comes to voting.

It was about all I could do to be able to offer an amendment to the voting rights act to strike the multiple language requirements that are written in them. I went out and got so many signatures on that and finally had to run against the Republican chairman of the Judiciary Committee and other leading conservatives who stood on the floor and said it was at the wrong place, wrong time. We don't need to have this debate now. That's a 25-year authorization, so if it wasn't now, it was going to be a quarter of a century later. I don't think we need to wait that long.

So here's the thing I want to arm you with. Some

thoughts on this and that is that if you look throughout history, try to find the most powerful unifying force any culture of civilization has ever had. The human universal is a common language. A common language binds people together more powerfully than religion, than common ethnicity, or by race or culture. There is nothing more powerful than language that binds people together.

If you go back in ancient history to about 245 B.C., the first emperor of China — I pronounce it “Chin shee whong” [Qin Shi Huang] — got a look at the multiple provinces in China. They didn’t have governing units at that time as we see them, but different areas where they spoke different languages.



Rep. Steve King (R-Iowa) gestures during the question and answer session of ProEnglish’s CPAC forum, “The Failure of Multiculturalism,” February 9, 2012.

They had similar clothing, food, habits, looks, ethnicity, heritage, background, but they were divided and he decided that he was going to unify China for the next 10,000 years. So among some other things that he did, Qin Shi Huang standardized the width of oxen carts, he created the terra cotta guards, he tied together the remnants — the components of what is now the fully connected Great Wall of China, 5,500 miles long, two and a half times longer than our Southern border with Mexico, by the way.

He did all those things and hired scribes who were

directed to write a written script of the Chinese language so that everyone was on the same page. Literally. Everybody on the same page, and when he did that his purpose was to unify the Chinese people for the next 10,000 years. They’ve been pretty successful so far, and there’s not a sign the Chinese are going to fracture speaking a common language and writing, especially in a common language.

You can go through history in a number of other ways, and these are just random thoughts on the passing scene, but when the Conquistadors came up into what is now Arizona and encountered the native Americans — the Zunis, the Hopis, and the Anasazi, they didn’t speak the same language — the three different tribes that I mentioned. They were fractured into their villages, and if you live in an isolated village, you kind of create your own language.

You ever notice a family that speaks in a lingo that you can’t quite understand what’s going on around their kitchen table? Well that goes for tribes, and that’s why we have so many languages on the planet. People didn’t travel much, they lived in a single place, and language sprung up out of its usage and utilization. That was true with the Zunis, the Hopis, and the Anasazi. They couldn’t communicate with each other, so the Spanish Conquistadors came in and they divided and conquered. But the mistake that they made was, if you want to call it a mistake, they brought the Native Americans into the missions to convert them to Christianity — a good thing, but they also taught them Spanish. When they learned Spanish it gave them a common language, a utility of communication, and a common form of communication’s currency. They went back to their villages and they realized, “I can talk to my neighbor and why don’t we just organize ourselves and throw those Spaniards out,” and they did.

When God looked down on the Tower of Babel he said, “Behold. They are one people. They speak all one language and nothing they propose to do will now be impossible for them.” And he had to scramble their success and so he scrambled their tongues and they went to the corners of the world, and that is the biblical testament version of how we ended up with all these languages.

There is an anthropological explanation, there’s a biblical explanation, but there is not one who disagrees that a common language unifies people. And then the Israelis, another example, about the year 1905 or so, began resurrecting a dead language, Hebrew. Yes, they used Hebrew in prayer, but not in common discussion and not in business. But they began to teach Hebrew to their children, and the reason was they wanted to form

a nation. A nation of Jews that could be bound together by a common language. And it was a historical language for them. It was an accurate and appropriate thing for them to do. The United States was actually the first state to recognize a sovereign Israel bound together with an official language — actually I think it was 1954 when they finally put ink to paper and declared Hebrew to be the official language of Israel.

So if it works for Chinese, and it works for Hebrew, and it works for Spanish, you know English should be the choice of all those people if they had the choice today. There are 31 countries today that have English, as their official language, at least one of their official languages. Singapore is one of them — 75 percent Chinese — but English is their official language. If you go to school there you will learn in English, and if you want to learn your mother tongue you have to be successful in school, then you qualify to study a language other than English. They know because English is the business language of the world, it's the language of the maritime industry and the air traffic controllers. It's also, by the way, [the language of] those that were sitting around that round table in Brussels when the European Union (EU), which went from 15 countries to 25. To hear the Germans speaking with a German accent in English, I take a little satisfaction in that, but I take more satisfaction to hear the French accent around the round table in Brussels.

English is the official language of the European Union and it's not the native language of anybody on the other side of the channel, just the British. But it's the language of success, it's the language of politics and negotiations, it's the language of business.

We have been the most successful country when it comes to assimilating different people, and we've done so because we're bound together under this common language. By the way, I asked several of Israel's ambassadors when they were over for a discussion, and that's why I know this about the history of Hebrew in Israel. I said to them, why did you adopt an official language, and they said we knew we had to assimilate people from different cultures all around the world, and we looked at the model of success of assimilation that America had established, and we adopted that model of assimilation, we just chose Hebrew because that is our historical language and you guys have English.

So there is no reason for us to back down there is no reason to think that somehow all the names we get called are accurate. They are not. Any nation in the world that doesn't have an official language, many nations have a de facto official and almost every nation has an official language. We need to move on this. HR 997

has 100 and something [sponsors] to it, and by the way, I think it's something we need to get a hearing on in the Judiciary Committee, and if any of you have leverage to help me out I'd appreciate it. I'm going to continue to make the case myself, and I think when you get to an issue that is up in the 80th percentile and an election coming and we're talking about the future of the destiny of America and English should be up on the floor of the House of Representatives for a vote, send that over to the Senate and see what Harry Reid does with that. And if he doesn't do something with that, send him back to Searchlight and put someone in there who will.

So thank you very much, I just wanted to say a few words.

Question and answer session

Robert Vandervoort: Why do we think that so many people, especially on the Left, are just convinced about this idea of multiculturalism? Why does it obsess them, do you think? Who would like to start? Rosalie?

Rosalie Porter: When bilingual education was promoted so strongly for 30 or 40 years, it kept communities together as voting blocs. If people don't acquire the English language, the common language, they are going to stay with their neighbors and they are going to vote.

It provided jobs, it provided money, and it provided control in school areas. But I will tell you something that is not widely known. I have interviewed thousands of families who have enrolled children in our schools, most of them from Spanish-speaking families. Not one parent ever said to me they did not want Spanish language instruction. They would say, teach my kid English so he can become more successful than I am.

It is the leaders who want these programs for very particular reasons: power, money, jobs, control, etc.

John Derbyshire: I can certainly understand why minorities would want things like bilingualism and special programs for themselves. It's a normal human thing to want to feel special, and if you are Armenian or Cambodian in the United States, you're one of the small minority. You're special. You're different from the rest. People kind of like that.

Although I think Peter Brimelow probably has something to say about it, but what I don't understand is why the majority population would go along with that. My best guess is that it is a sort of overshoot of, I don't know whether I want to say American, or Anglo-Saxon, or Western Civilization — I think I'll just say American — it's an overshoot of American niceness. We're very nice people. And I think it overshoots it to this strange tolerance for these identity programs for minorities.

Peter Brimelow: Americans are a very nice people actually and there's a lot of truth in what John says. But the numbers that Dr. Porter mentioned a while ago indicated there is overwhelming support for official English among Americans. It really is an elite problem. There are, I think, a few things that are very clear. The Democrats have basically given up, the American Left generally have given up on the white working class.

They were profoundly scared by experience of the emergence of the Reagan Democrats. They have essentially given up on them. So what they really want to do is to elect a new people. Decided they don't like the people they got and they want a new one and they just see bilingualism and a whole host of other things as building up new constituencies in the politic.

Of course it's treasonous. You hear enough about racism, but the real issue here is treason.

reverse it. One of them being birthright citizenship. To give you an example: Something that didn't exist now exists because of a practice. We have a practice now and part of it is Bill Clinton's executive order, but we have a practice of providing all kinds of services in multiple languages. What official English does is it says you don't have to do that anymore, and you know I have spent a lot of my time trying to embarrass the administration into actually enforcing the law in a number of different areas.

But in this case, what we do with official English is say that all official functions and all official documents shall be in English. Then we make practical exceptions such as justice or health because we don't want somebody to face a penalty without understanding the charges against them and we don't want someone to be disadvantaged health-wise because they don't have the language skills necessary to function in this society.



Rep. Steve King (R-Iowa), Rosalie Porter, and Peter Brimelow share a laugh during the question and answer session of ProEnglish's forum at CPAC. The panelists explained "The Failure of Multiculturalism" to an overflow audience.

Congressman King, I am Peter Brimelow of VDARE.com

Rep. Steve King: Oh yes, Peter. I've read your books, I just hadn't met you.

Peter Brimelow: Thank you. The question is this, how do you make official English effective? What do you do to people who say it won't have any practical effect? I was actually at *Forbes* when Gov. Deukmejian came in after the election when they passed official English.

That was his answer to it. He said I didn't see how I was going to do anything about this. He obviously hated the whole thing. But his wife who was there also was passionately in favor of it.

Rep. Steve King: Well we do some things in this country that are a matter of practice, and if you let the practice grow after awhile the tradition says you can't

But with those practical exceptions, if you have an executive branch of government that understands the cost and burden of multilingualism — that's part of it. But the other part is the cost to the unity of our culture and our civilization, and I think if we have the right president, then you'll see this cascade down through the executive branch and be implemented in the spirit that we'd like to see it implemented in. The short of that is, it's awfully hard to make things happen by law.

Peter Brimelow: What actually was the impact in Iowa?

Rep. Steve King: I had to sue the governor. That was one of the impacts. I'm actually the only living person on the planet that's successfully sued every living Democrat governor that Iowa has. It's only two though.

In any case, as secretary of state, Chet Culver was

printing voter registration documents and absentee ballot requests in multiple foreign languages because he disagreed with the official English law. So I went to court and we succeeded in that and the court ordered him to honor, and he did. That restraint now, I think, restrains any of the public officials that might want to proliferate more multilingualism within the state government of Iowa. And surely it saved millions of at this point, but it's restrained the proliferation at the minimum. And when you write any of this legislation you want to write it so people have standing so they can go in and enforce the law.

That's one of those pieces we should have done more on with all the legislation that we do.

Rosalie Porter: Representative King has brought up a very important point. There are not many politicians who will stand up and be counted when it comes to the English language. We know that. Very, very few. When I chaired the group that brought the question before the Massachusetts voters, the English for Children campaign to bring English language speaking, Governor Romney was the first and only politician to stand up. Neither had had a candidate in California, Arizona, or any place who would stand up and say, "Yeah, let's bring English to these kids."

Gov. Romney stood with me at press conferences. He advocated for changing the law and making English the language of the schools. I just want to say that.

Rep. Steve King: I'm really glad that I know that, sincerely. And I didn't, but I also wanted to make a few comments on multiculturalism, which was at the heart of this. Just to give some people in your own analysis. I went into this political arena about 15 or 16 years ago. When multiculturalism just popped up 20 or so years ago, I believed this was a pretty good tool to recognize people for their worth. We are all created in God's image and we come from different places and languages and cultures and civilizations, so if we use this to respect and honor people and their human worth, their God-given human worth, multiculturalism could have been a good thing.

But it really never was that. It always was a tool for the Left to subdivide a culture and civilization into our own little ethnic enclaves and pit us against each other, and that is what has happened. If you look over in Europe and see what they have done, they never really had an effort to assimilate. Their effort was to honor and respect the silos of humanity created in the ethnic enclaves, and they would point to an ethnic enclave, whatever it might be, say Pakistanis in Britain, for example, and say, "See how multicultural we are."

Well you're not multicultural if you're going to

have ethnicities grow up in enclaves and not assimilate into the broader society. It indicates that we didn't have confidence in our own culture and civilization.

Look at what made America great. It wasn't dividing ourselves. It was uniting ourselves. And English does more than anything else to unite us as a people.

Rosalie Porter: Well I think we have time for just a few questions from the audience before we conclude. We'll take this gentleman in the back. [*Takes question from audience member.*] The question is how does our current immigration policy contribute to balkanization and multiculturalism?

Rep. Steve King: It's creating enclaves, and if you looked at the effort there was in 1924 to shut down the flow of legal immigration coming into the United States, there was an assimilation period that was destined to last about 40 years. By design and by act of Congress because they understood that America was not assimilating its legal immigrants as fast as they were coming in.



FROM LEFT TO RIGHT: ProEnglish Board Member Phil Kent, ProEnglish Executive Director Robert Vandervoort, Rep. Steve King (R-Iowa), and ProEnglish Board Member Rosalie Porter at CPAC, February 9, 2012.

So we went through that 40-year period of assimilation that was very, very successful in that. We were proud of the successes that we had between 1924 and 1964 or so, when Teddy Kennedy said this immigration bill is not going to change the demographics of the United States.

Look at what we have. For unchanged demographics it's quite a story. But it's going to be the case any way you look at it that if you bring in large populations of foreign countries, a foreign language, a foreign culture, one thing that they will do that I think about is they assimilate into the politics of the local, where they arrived.

So Democrats see illegal immigrants as undocumented Democrats because they are coming into those

neighborhoods. That is one component. A lot of that doesn't change generation after generation. Back to Boston, Teddy Kennedy, for example, go find me an Irish, Catholic, Republican in Boston.

I had a conversation with Mitt Romney one day and he said there are two and I know one. I said I know one, his name is Gene Hartigan, and Mitt Romney said I know Gene Hartigan. So it was pretty rare to find an Irish, Catholic, Republican in Boston, but there are two of them according to Mitt Romney, and I actually met the other one the other day.

But what you see is the balkanization of America, and that's what I think Peter has written about so eloquently, the balkanization of America. And we have lost our own self-confidence in the assimilation process. English is the best tool we have to assimilate. Then when you look at the multiculturalism components of this, there are 72 means-tested welfare programs. We're not holding people accountable to go to work and carry their own load. When my grandmother got off the ship from Germany and walked across the Great Hall of Ellis Island, they were all filtered before they got on the ship to meet the standards of physical and mental ability so that they could take care of themselves, and about 2 percent didn't make the cut after they arrived. They put them back and on the boat and sent them back to Europe again because they weren't of high enough standards.

Today, if you look at the illegal immigration of about 1.2-million illegals a year coming in, somewhere between 7 and 11 percent have something that we have quantified to offer to contribute to the United States. The rest of them, 89 to 93 percent, any kind of qualifications are out of our control, as family reunification, instant visa lottery programs, somebody here on asylum, but it's not someone here on an H1B that at least conceivably can contribute to the U.S.

So I advocate for a number of things. One of them is we need a point system so that we upgrade, and an immigration policy should be designed to enhance the economic, the social, and cultural well being of the United States of America. There's no shame in that. There's

pride in that. We should be proud of who we are and what's made us great. So why wouldn't we set up a point system to reward those — however many — 3, 4, 5 million people on the planet who'd like to come here. Why don't we say to them, "Be young. Be educated. Have an earning ability. Have an ability to speak our language so that you assimilate quickly and you can contribute then to this economy and society before you become eligible for Medicare and Social Security." That seems to me to be the logical thing, and that's what I advocate. We don't even talk about it hardly enough in our society.

Peter Brimelow: I have to ask you then, what exactly is the leadership's problem here, for that matter what's the problem with the Republican presidential contenders?

Rep. Steve King: When I had all those co-sponsors on that official English back before Nancy Pelosi became Speaker, and the Fall before we had set up the dynamic as English as the national language [which] passed in the United States Senate, I wanted to bring it up in the House. I was in the perfect position to do so. I had all the co-sponsors. I had worked. I had earned it. And the timing was right politically and the answer I got was, "We're looking for someone who is an immigrant or the son or daughter of an immigrant to be the floor manager of the bill." The answer that I gave to that unnamed leader was, "I don't think much of your affirmative action program to select floor managers of bills."

So there is a fear of criticism. There's a fear that this is all about jobs, jobs, jobs. Which I think also it overlooks you have to have profit in order to pay wages. So I didn't go back to that. Let's let some people make some money.

But there is an agenda out there that should be strengthening our culture and our civilization and there are people who are afraid of this criticism. They don't want to be called racist, bigot, xenophobe — whatever it might be, and if you're afraid of that, you're not really going to be able to push anything in this Congress. From my standpoint, I've been called all those things today, so I'm not worried. ■