

How can bilingual ballots produce “equal access to and participation in the democratic process?” What is at issue is accommodations for people who cannot read English language ballots, and the law of the land is supposed to be a barrier between such people and citizenship.

It fell to Silber to say why bilingual ballots are of “constitutional consequence, amending in effect the very concept of United States citizenship.” The naturalization statutes clearly presuppose that English is the language indispensable for life in America, where all the founding documents, and all the laws and all the proceedings of legislatures are in English. Citizens not proficient in English are, Silber said, “citizens in name only” because they cannot follow a political campaign, talk with a candidate, or petition a representative, and providing them with a bilingual ballot merely makes a mockery of civic life.

Silber stressed that in no other nation do so many people, spread over so large an area, speak the same language. This nation is a creedal nation, founded on shared affirmations, not on ethnicity. Here, Silber said, ethnicity is “a private matter.” Various ethnic groups celebrate their saints and other sources of communal pride. However, the government properly recognizes only Americans, not ethnic groups. In opposition to that principle, bilingual ballots “represent a dangerous experiment in deconstructing our American identity.”

But of course. For some of the diversity-mongers who advocate bilingual ballots, such deconstruction is precisely the point. They think it is oppression for one American identity to be “privileged.”

Silber says such deconstruction is how nations die.

Have a nice day. □

Immigrants and the Language Issue

What should our policy be?

By Richard Estrada

Like it or not, Sen. Bob Dole is the linguistic if not the political reincarnation of George Bush: No habla bold vision.

However Dole has been anything but tongue-tied when it comes to articulating his position on an issue of vital importance to American nationhood: the necessary primacy of the English language.

“Lacking the centuries-old bonds of other nations,” he wrote in a *Washington Post* opinion piece in December, “we have used not only our history and values but our language, English, to make the American experiment work.”

Because the language issue is of widespread

concern to the American people, President Clinton should take note. Polls routinely find enormous voter support for making English the nation’s official language. A survey conducted last year by Luntz Research Companies on behalf of the Washington-based lobbying organization U.S. English found no less than 86 percent support for such a law.

Broadside were fired anew recently after the release last week of voluntary national standards for standard English. Crafted by the National Council of Teachers of English and the International Reading Association — organizations whose efforts to establish English standards were initially encouraged and funded by the federal government — the new “standards” instantly earned the scorn of everyone from conservative Republican education expert Diane Ravitch to Michael Cohen, a senior adviser to Clinton’s education secretary, Richard W. Riley.

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Cohen succinctly complained that the standards don't "tell parents or students what is important to learn and ... teachers what is important to teach and by when." Here is one of the "guidelines": "Students participate as knowledgeable, reflective, creative and critical members of a variety of literacy communities." The others weren't much better.

Meanwhile, author Rosalie Pedalino Porter [has published] an epilogue to her exposé about another controversy on the language front. Originally published in 1990, *Forked Tongue: The Politics of Bilingual Education* condemned a bilingual-education establishment that has been more concerned about promoting liberal ideology and bilingual teaching jobs than about helping immigrant students achieve English fluency. [See an ad for the new edition of her book on page 267.]

In other words, bilingual education has been driven by bureaucratic needs rather than legitimate educational needs. According to the American Legislative Council, an estimated \$12 billion was spent on special language programs in 1994. These programs primarily emphasized the maintenance of the source culture of the student while downplaying American culture.

But the Milton Marks Commission on California State Government Organization and Economy recently termed bilingual education in California "divisive, wasteful and unproductive." Against this backdrop, the following findings of a 1994 GAO report help explain why things are not destined to improve under the current system:

- Immigrant students tend to speak little if any English upon arrival in the United States.
- Among newcomer students placed in high school classes, some have never been schooled in their homelands and are altogether illiterate.
- Immigrant students are often poor and transient, with parents who are often unable or unwilling to show meaningful interest in their education.

Two important conclusions should be drawn: While educators should focus on developing the potential of all students, lawmakers should not deceive themselves about the consequences of constantly expanding the number of limited-English-proficiency students through other policies.

No one is harmed more by a chronic expansion of students with limited proficiency in English than non-English-speaking students who are already here. Around 2 million are currently enrolled in special language programs nationwide.

In the Los Angeles Unified School District, which features the highest percentage of limited English proficiency students in California, the four year dropout rate is almost 44 percent.

Dole is succeeding in raising the language issue partly because he is no loose Buchanan. But while the Senate majority leader deserves credit for that, he has been less than forthright in failing to note with equal emphasis that the language issue is driven by the nation's system of mass immigration.

With 1.1 million newcomers entering the country each year, it should be obvious that a policy of mass immigration is creating constituencies demanding specially tailored programs, including bilingual education and affirmative action.

In sum, Dole's failure to link immigration to language hardly means he is wrong in seeking to enshrine the primacy of English in law. And Buchanan's boom-box approach to speechmaking does not mean he is wrong in his general notion of limiting immigration. □

Language and Migration

As ethnic Germans move from the former Soviet Union to claim citizenship, Germany is enforcing the requirement that there be a satisfactory grasp of the German language. Beginning in July, 1996, ethnic Germans in the former Soviet Union who wish to migrate to Germany may receive a summons to take a German language test at the nearest German diplomatic mission. A senior official for ethnic German matters at the federal administrative office in Cologne, Christoph Verenkotte, says these tests are designed to make sure would-be immigrants meet legal requirements before leaving their countries of origin.

— From the Internet: The Voice of America

Fighting a Local Bilingual Education Establishment

Charge of 'racism' used to stifle discussion

by Terry Graham

MARIN COUNTY, Calif. —

When several of us spoke before the school board of the city of San Rafael and opposed a proposed new bilingual education program in March, we faced formidable barriers. Emotionalism was chief among them. Immediately after I shared my own research about the program, an immigrant parent rose and attached the label of "Anglo racism" to me and other opponents of bilingual education.

School children today may or may not be taught to avoid calling each other names. But in school districts across the country, that old-fashioned rule of reasoned discourse often is not practiced by faculty, administrators, school board members and immigrant parents who are attempting to protect and expand various bilingual programs. Concerned citizens routinely must battle against the entrenched interests of school personnel and well-funded ethnic advocacy organizations who often are more than willing to use pejorative labels to intimidate their opposition.

After years of observing and studying bilingual education, I'm convinced that the \$10-billion-a-year

program is a flop that keeps immigrant children from learning English. The fact that many of us oppose bilingual education because of the harm we feel it delivers to immigrant children is usually lost in the rush of the emotional reaction of bilingual education's defenders.

After the March meeting, school board member Bruce Rafal sought to silence us critics by writing an article in the local newspaper which was headlined "At center of language storm, one unnerving word — racism." He said racists were fighting the proposed program. The next day, my photo appeared in the paper. Names and photos of others who had testified against the program appeared in earlier articles. All of us felt exposed to potential harassment and even violence from radical immigrant activists in our community.

Such exposure, or the possibility of such exposure, is simply more than many citizens care to risk. Not surprisingly, many concerned parents don't speak up to challenge the bilingual educational establishment in their local districts.

But our experience in Marin County — just across the Golden Gate Bridge to the north of San Francisco — teaches some lessons on how to challenge and win against these modern-day schoolyard bullies.

Advice No. 1: Counter-Attack Epithets

We not only refused to be cowed by the epithets hurled at us, we forcefully challenged anybody who would seek to win the debate through that method.

When "Anglo racism" was alleged at the board meeting, one man jumped to his feet, shouting in anger at being so labeled. Others joined in so forcefully that police were called in to monitor the rest of the meeting. In retrospect, I think this outburst was the main reason the board did not rubberstamp the administration's proposal that night. In an earlier meeting in San Jose, charges of

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