English Language Controversy In Utah

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The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) of Utah is preparing to challenge a district court decision that properly found the state's new official English law constitutional. Utah voters approved the law as Initiative A on the ballot in last November's election.
Third District Judge Ronald E. Nehring declared the voter-approved official English statute constitutional but largely symbolic. He ruled that government employees may speak any language in the course of doing business, but only communications that are in English are "official," while everything else is "unofficial."

Probably the ACLU will include some of the arguments used to defend Bill Clinton's Executive Order 13166 issued August 11, 2000. Entitled Improving Access to Services for Persons with Limited English Proficiency, it requires federal agencies to provide "programs and activities normally provided in English" to non-English speaking residents.

Clinton's Executive Order was an attempt to elevate the inability to speak English to a protected civil right (like race, color, sex, etc.). His Order cannot be justified by any federal law and should be rescinded by the Bush Administration.

The attempt to undermine English as the official language of the American government has powerful political motivations. Influence and political spin are associated with translating laws, official statements, and campaign positions into non-English versions.

Criticism of the Utah referendum and the court decision upholding it is part of a national movement to balkanize America by compelling federal and state governments to carry on official business in foreign languages. Hundreds of U.S. voting districts have already been forced by statutes and court decisions to print ballots in foreign languages.

The fraud called bilingual education was massively rejected by the voters in California and Arizona referenda, but the federal government still pours millions of our tax dollars into this failed experiment. It's a lie to call it bilingual, because it doesn't teach two languages; thousands of immigrant children in public schools are kept speaking their native tongue rather than learning English.

The U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission is harassing businesses that try to have their employees speak English on the job. Some U.S. citizenship ceremonies have even been performed in foreign languages.

If an activist court pretends to invalidate the Utah official English law, it won't be long before we see the other side of the coin: a lawsuit demanding that the state's business be conducted in foreign languages. This has already happened in Alabama, where a woman demanded that she be given the state driver's test in Spanish; her case, Alexander v. Sandoval, will be decided by the U.S. Supreme Court this spring.

The U.S. Supreme Court already held in Employment Div. v. Smith (1990) that we do not have to provide exceptions from generally applicable laws for religious practices and customs. It should certainly follow

that a state need not provide exceptions from generally applicable laws and regulations to accommodate languages other than English.

English is becoming the language of the 21st century world and this is no time to discourage U.S. residents and immigrants from learning English. English is now the second most widely spoken language in the world, with only Chinese dialects spoken by more people.

English is overwhelmingly the second language of choice worldwide. English is the official language of the European Central Bank and the working language of the Asian trade group ASEAN.

In multilingual continental Europe, a fierce battle over language popularity appears to be ending with English emerging as the standard. Switzerland has three official languages, German, French and Italian, but it recently adopted English to be taught to all as the second language rather than one of its official languages.

The Germans have given up trying to persuade more Brits to learn German and are now promoting English as the language of the 21st century, with lessons for children as young as six. Germany's leading newspaper produces an eight-page English edition and declared that "English is going to be the lingua franca of the century."

English has exploded in popularity since the advent of the internet and about 80 percent of the internet uses English. Our language has tremendous advantages for internet use: a smaller alphabet than most major languages, no accented or pictograph characters, easy interchangeability of nouns, verbs and adjectives, and little variance in form for pronouns and verbs.

It is a great mistake to think that requiring English is detrimental to immigrants. Official English requirements have an enormously positive impact on those who learn English and then can enter the mainstream of American academic and economic life.

As Winston Churchill observed, "The gift of a common tongue is a priceless inheritance." We shouldn't permit any activist court to interfere with this heritage.