

CITY COUNCIL MEETING

April 15, 1981

VOTING RIGHTS
ACT MINORITY
LANGUAGE
REQUIREMENTS

Mayor McCarty asked City Clerk Reimche to brief the Council on a letter she had received from David H. Hunter, Attorney, Voting Section of the U.S. Justice Department concerning the application of the minority language requirements of the Voting Rights Act to the City of Lodi. The letter indicated that "the City of Lodi might better focus its minority language efforts on the provision of Spanish language oral assistance in voting precincts that have significant numbers of actual or potential voters of Spanish heritage who are not proficient in the English language and on publicity for the availability of such assistance".

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S. I. HAYAKAWA
CALIFORNIA

GENE PRAT, PH. D.
ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, D.C. 20510

COMMITTEES:
AGRICULTURE, NUTRITION,
AND FORESTRY
FOREIGN RELATIONS
SMALL BUSINESS

April 17, 1981

Ms. Alice M. Reimche
221 West Pine Street
Lodi, California 95240

Dear Ms. Reimche:

Thank you for your comments about the use of bilingual ballots.

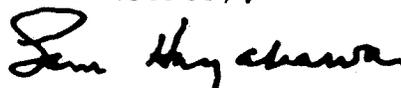
I have introduced legislation to repeal the sections of the Voting Rights Act which require the use of bilingual election materials. Thirty-nine counties in California are affected by the bilingual requirements, and many of them have voiced strong complaints about the financial hardships caused by the act. They are concerned that the costs of compliance outweigh the benefits that may be gained.

The intent of the Voting Rights Act Amendments was to bring our non-English speaking population into the mainstream of American society by allowing them to vote in a language they could read and understand. The effect of the Act, however, is to strengthen the communications barrier between English speaking and non-English speaking residents of the United States.

The requirement for bilingual election materials conflicts with the intent of two of our federal statutes. First, our bilingual education program specifies that English be one of the languages used in bilingual schools, so that minority language students will become proficient in the language spoken by the vast majority of Americans. Second, our naturalization laws demand that a knowledge of spoken and written English be demonstrated to become an American citizen. The requirement for a bilingual ballot actually contradicts the pertinent provisions of our naturalization law and implies that the English language requirement is an unnecessary formality.

I appreciate having your comments on this matter, and hope you will continue to share your opinions with me.

Sincerely,



S. I. Hayakawa

SIH:bms
Enclosure

APR 28 1981



Congressional Record

United States
of America

PROCEEDINGS AND DEBATES OF THE 97th CONGRESS, FIRST SESSION

Vol. 127

WASHINGTON, TUESDAY, JANUARY 6, 1981

No. 2

Senate

By Mr. HAYAKAWA:

S. 53. A bill to amend the Voting Rights Act of 1965 to repeal certain requirements relating to bilingual election requirements; to the Committee on the Judiciary.

AMENDMENT OF VOTING RIGHTS ACT

Mr. HAYAKAWA. Mr. President, today I am introducing legislation to amend the Voting Rights Act by deleting the provisions added in 1975 which require that bilingual election materials be provided in certain States and counties.

When the 94th Congress amended the Voting Rights Act to require the use of bilingual ballots, the intent was to bring our non-English-speaking population into the mainstream of American society by allowing them to vote in a language they can read and understand. The effect of that act, however, is to foster the fallacy among immigrants to the United States that it is not necessary to learn English. That fallacy can lead to trouble for all of us in the years ahead.

As a semanticist, I must point out that language is a means of communication. If you speak one language and I speak another and we need to communicate, either I must learn your language or you must learn mine. If I decide not to learn your language and you decide not to learn mine, we have established a barrier to communication by which both our cultures are impoverished. Throughout our history our Nation has been enriched because our immigrants have eliminated communications barriers with the use of a common language—English.

With the use of bilingual ballots, however, we are saying to our non-English-speaking citizens that they can fully participate in the political process without overcoming the language barrier. That simply is not true.

Suppose, for instance, a Spanish-speaking citizen wants to vote for a Presidential candidate or one of the various State propositions being offered. While the individual may have a ballot printed in Spanish, it will not help illuminate the differences between the candidates; it will not enlighten him on the effect the proposition will have on his life. Voter information pamphlets which are supposed to explain the issues in question are often so bureaucratically

written that they are incomprehensible in any language. So those who do not understand English are totally dependent on information received from foreign language television programs and newspapers, and discussions with friends and relatives. They are excluded from the broader perspective obtained from English-language newspapers, magazines, and television programs. They cannot listen to an English-speaking candidate present his or her own views. While the non-English-speaking citizen has been provided with an easier means to express his views, a ballot in his own language, he has been discouraged from obtaining the wide range of information necessary to develop those views.

At some point the person who does not speak English will realize the political limitations. As a member of a minority-language group, he will find it impossible to run for an office that serves a constituency whose majority speak English. He cannot effectively address his views to those who do not understand his language, so he surrounds himself with those who do. This political polarization can lead to a separatist movement, especially among our growing Spanish-speaking population.

There are those who argue that bilingual ballots are necessary for those citizens who, in years past, were denied the opportunity to learn English. These people are dependent upon, and have available to them, the assistance of foreign language newspapers, television programs, and friends and relatives. It may be unfortunate, but with or without a bilingual ballot that dependence will remain.

I am introducing legislation to abolish bilingual ballots because I believe that our country's greatness is directly related to our unique ability to merge a multitude of foreign cultures into one. The key to this ability is the acceptance of a common language that allows each new culture group to communicate and share ideas with those who have been here longer. We cannot as a nation afford to ignore the value of the American melting pot.

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The bilingual ballot is a long step in the wrong direction. Real political participation, social participation and cultural participation in all aspects of American life cannot be achieved through misguided mechanisms like the bilingual ballot. It is time we told our non-English speaking citizens the truth: They need to learn English.

CITY COUNCIL

JAMES A. McCARTY, Mayor
ROBERT G. MURPHY, Mayor Pro Tem
RICHARD L. HUGHES
WALTER KATNICH
JAMES W. PINKERTON, Jr.

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ALICE M. REIMCHE
City Clerk

RONALD M. STEIN
City Attorney

May 13, 1981

S.I. Hayakawa
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Hayakawa:

Your April 7, 1981 letter was presented to the Lodi City Council at its May 6, 1981 meeting. The Council asked that I convey to you its enthusiastic support of the referenced legislation you have introduced to repeal the sections of the Voting Rights Act which require the use of bilingual election materials. The points of your argument for repeal are well taken and are shared by the members of this Council.

As a City which has expended a great deal of funds to comply with the provisions of this act with virtually no one availing themselves of the bilingual material offered, we certainly endorse and support the subject legislation you have introduced.

By Direction of the Lodi
City Council


Alice M. Reimche
City Clerk

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