



Written by [Denise Behreandt](#) on June 22, 2009

English as the Official Language Has Broad Appeal

A recent [Rasmussen Reports](#) national telephone survey revealed that 84 percent of Americans want English to be the official language of the United States. Further, 81 percent believe it's appropriate for U.S. companies to mandate that their employees speak English on the job, and 82 percent don't think it's a sign of bigotry or racism to require that English be spoken.



These poll results should encourage those who believe that a common language is the super glue that holds the American melting pot together. Apparently, we're not all multiculturalists, after all.

It's also welcome news to those in Congress who are championing federal legislation to that end, like Rep. Steve King (R-Iowa), who is the sponsor of the English Unity Act of 2009 in the 111th Congress. The bill currently has 119 cosponsors.

Official English (as K.C. McAlpin, the executive director of [ProEnglish](#), points out) does not mean English only. McAlpin notes that states with official English laws (which now number 30) don't prevent "state agencies from using another language when it serves the public interest to do so, including: protecting health and safety, assuring equality before the law, promoting tourism, teaching foreign languages, and many other legitimate needs."

For an example of what McAlpin is talking about, look no further than Montana.

In the Big Sky state, English is the official and primary language for state and local governments. While that means official business is to be conducted in English, the law doesn't prevent a government officer or employee from using a language, other than English, while "acting in the course and scope of employment." So local police from, say, Bozeman, who voluntarily participated in an intensive language course for law-enforcement personnel, can confidently use those handy Spanish-language phrases they learned while they are out community policing. For public relations and public safety purposes, the cops have decided it's in their best interest to be more conversant with the area's growing Latino population.

But that pro-active way of thinking has been taken to extreme levels in places where state motor vehicle departments are reinventing the Tower of Babel.

[U.S. English, Inc.](#), a citizens' action group with 1.8 million members, has discovered that some states have increased the number of foreign languages in which drivers' license examinations are offered. What they learned is both laughable and alarming: "North Carolina was the worst offender in multilingual madness, increasing from two languages to ten. West Virginia saw the second largest rise, from just an English exam in 2007 to English, Chinese, German, Japanese and Spanish today. Kentucky, which was offering a license exam in 20 languages, added Albanian, Persian, and Thai, while Connecticut padded its former total of 19 with Hebrew and Turkish."

What? No Ebonics? Or Esperanto? Do you really want to share the road with all those motor vehicle



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operators who couldn't pass a simple written test in English? By the way, in order for truckers to obtain a commercial drivers license, candidates must be able to read, write, and speak English. That standard should be the one for all drivers who want to enjoy this privilege.

On the other hand, U.S. English reports that various states have had second thoughts on this issue. Arizona, Kansas, Utah, Hawaii, Maine, New Hampshire, South Dakota, and Wyoming have decided to stop offering the exam in other languages and are sticking with boring ol' English.

In an effort to avoid further balkanization and encourage assimilation, much of the public — and more than a few federal legislators — have deemed it a good time to make English the official language of this great nation. Whether that enthusiasm translates into law remains to be seen.



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