

Make English official language — lawmaker

By Carolyn DeMarco
staff writer

U.S. Rep. William Broomfield introduced legislation in the House Jan. 6 that would make English the official language of the United States.

If approved, the legislation would call for a constitutional amendment prohibiting the United States or any state from requiring the use of any language other than English.

Introduction of the legislation brought mixed reactions in Broomfield's congressional district from a number of community leaders familiar with the problems of the foreign-born.

A news release from Broomfield's office spoke of growing concerns that the United States could become "one of many minorities, each speaking in their own native tongue, in a divided, polyglot nation."

"I HAVE been very concerned that this country could be heading down the road to multilingualism if something isn't done soon," wrote Broomfield, whose congressional district includes Farmington and Farmington Hills.

"If you go into some sections of our large cities, English is not even spoken or seen. While this is not inherently bad, the problem lies with the fact that many people never have to know English because of our ballot, educational and other service programs which require, in many instances, a multilingual format."

Broomfield wasn't available for comment Friday, but his legislative aide Tony Powell explained Broomfield's reasons behind the legislation.

In addition to eliminating cost factors involved in printing ballots and providing educational and service programs in multilingual format, Powell said Broomfield believes the legislation will "force people to learn English, provide an incentive for them to learn English."

POWELL SAID Broomfield expects no backlash from the legislation. He said critics in California had called the state referendum racially motivated and promoting bigotry.

"It's not," Powell said.

"Everyone should have knowledge of English. It doesn't prohibit bilingualism in the home. However, if immigrants want to be absorbed into American society, they need to know English."

Broomfield, Powell said, believes "we need something to bind us together. As ranking member of the foreign affairs committee he sees what goes on in other countries." He cited Canada and Belgium as countries that are divided by language problems. "Governments rise and fall on the issue of what language is spoken by a leader."

Powell said Broomfield does not speak a foreign language, "but certainly doesn't discourage Americans from learning another language. That's a far cry from people coming into the country without a knowledge of English."

JAN HARTMANN, head of the Swedish Consulate in Troy, said, "It's a great thing. We are one country. We should communicate in one language. English is my second language."

"There will be some problems in providing the educational aids to these people, but if I live and vote here I should be able to read and understand the newspapers to understand what's happening here."

"I don't look upon it as negative," the Rev. Stanley Mitewski, chancellor of the Orchard Lake Schools, said. "In the United States, we all have the opportunity to speak our native language, and I endorse the idea that wherever possible permanent residents learn the English language."

"My own parents were Polish-born and spoke Polish in the household. I became a proficient bilingual. I'm sure the intent is not to stop that. It has created hardship in having to print ballots bilingually."

"I PERSONALLY think it's good. If I go to Poland or Italy, they don't bend over backward to accommodate Americans. It is not perceived as an affront there, and it should not



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— William Broomfield
U.S. representative

be perceived as an affront here."

He was also concerned that the law would be interpreted as taking away the culture and traditions of immigrants. "The Orchard Lakes Schools were founded to serve the needs of the Polish community. Language is part of the package. We can't take away the culture and tradition. We consider ourselves a beautiful mosaic. Take away the colors, and we have only black and white."

RABBI SHELDON Lopin, headmaster of Akiva Hebrew School in Lathrup Village, finds the legislation unnecessary. "English is a vital language around the world. I don't believe it's being endangered. It already is the language of the country."

"I see a need for immigrants to learn the language, but I don't believe passing legislation making it the official language will necessarily do this. We don't want to see enclaves, separated from society. We want to integrate, but we want to ap-

preciate our own heritage as well. It's not the old melting pot idea. We want togetherness, we want to communicate, but we want to retain our customs."

"My problem with Broomfield's legislation is that it is not practical. It won't accomplish the aim."

Rose Govig, coordinator of the English as a Second Language program in the adult education department of the Farmington Public Schools, views it as a positive step.

"We see people here who want to improve their level of English. Their lack of skills are holding them back from pursuing higher education and getting better jobs. Within their own

little groups they can survive, but when they want to reach out; the lack of English skills is a major concern," she said.

"They realize it when their children begin school. If your child knows more than you do, it's a problem."

"We're serving a larger proportion today. They are actively seeking help in learning English. If this legislation brings more attention to the problem and makes people more aware of the service we offer, I'll consider it a very positive thing. It bothers me that people are paying for private tutoring in English when public education offers it free."

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