

107TH CONGRESS
1ST SESSION

H. R. 1984

To reaffirm English as the official language of the United States, to establish a uniform English language rule for naturalization, and to avoid misconstructions of the English language texts of the Laws of the United States, pursuant to Congress' powers to provide for the General Welfare of the United States and to establish a uniform Rule of Naturalization under Article I, Section 8, of the Constitution.

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

MAY 24, 2001

Mr. BARR of Georgia (for himself, Mr. HALL of Texas, Mr. JENKINS, Mr. SHOWS, and Mr. COBLE) introduced the following bill; which was referred to the Committee on Education and the Workforce, and in addition to the Committee on the Judiciary, for a period to be subsequently determined by the Speaker, in each case for consideration of such provisions as fall within the jurisdiction of the committee concerned

A BILL

To reaffirm English as the official language of the United States, to establish a uniform English language rule for naturalization, and to avoid misconstructions of the English language texts of the Laws of the United States, pursuant to Congress' powers to provide for the General Welfare of the United States and to establish a uniform Rule of Naturalization under Article I, Section 8, of the Constitution.

1 *Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representa-*
2 *tives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,*

1 **SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.**

2 This Act may be cited as the “English Language
3 Unity Act of 2001”.

4 **SEC. 2. FINDINGS.**

5 The Congress finds and declares the following:

6 (1) The United States is comprised of individuals
7 from diverse ethnic, cultural, and linguistic
8 backgrounds, and continues to benefit from this rich
9 diversity.

10 (2) Throughout the history of the United
11 States, the common thread binding individuals of
12 differing backgrounds has been the English lan-
13 guage.

14 (3) Among the powers reserved to the States
15 respectively is the power to establish the English
16 language as the official language of the respective
17 States, and otherwise to promote the English lan-
18 guage within the respective States, subject to the
19 prohibitions enumerated in the Constitution of the
20 United States and in laws of the respective States.

21 **SEC. 3. ENGLISH AS OFFICIAL LANGUAGE OF THE UNITED
22 STATES.**

23 (a) IN GENERAL.—Title 4, United States Code, is
24 amended by adding at the end the following new chapter:

1 **“CHAPTER 6—OFFICIAL LANGUAGE**2 **“§ 161. Official language of the United States**

3 “The official language of the United States is
4 English.

5 **“§ 162. Official functions of Government to be con-
6 ducted in English**

7 “(a) OFFICIAL FUNCTIONS.—The official functions
8 of the Government of the United States shall be conducted
9 in English.

10 “(b) SCOPE.—For the purposes of this section, the
11 term ‘United States’ means the several States and the
12 District of Columbia, and the term ‘official’ refers to any
13 function that (i) binds the Government, (ii) is required
14 by law, or (iii) is otherwise subject to scrutiny by either
15 the press or the public.

16 “(c) PRACTICAL EFFECT.—This section shall apply
17 to all laws, public proceedings, regulations, publications,
18 orders, actions, programs, and policies, but does not apply
19 to—

20 “(1) teaching of languages;

21 “(2) requirements under the Individuals with
22 Disabilities Education Act;

23 “(3) actions, documents, or policies necessary
24 for national security, international relations, trade,
25 tourism, or commerce;

1 “(4) actions or documents that protect the pub-
2 lic health and safety;

3 “(5) actions or documents that facilitate the ac-
4 tivities of the Bureau of the Census in compiling any
5 census of population;

6 “(6) actions that protect the rights of victims of
7 crimes or criminal defendants; or

8 “(7) using terms of art or phrases from lan-
9 guages other than English.

10 **“§ 163. Uniform English language rule for naturaliza-**
11 **tion**

12 “(a) UNIFORM LANGUAGE TESTING STANDARD.—All
13 citizens should be able to read and understand generally
14 the English language text of the Declaration of Independ-
15 ence, the Constitution, and the Laws of the United States
16 made in pursuance of the Constitution.

17 “(b) CEREMONIES.—All naturalization ceremonies
18 shall be conducted in English.

19 **“§ 164. Rules of construction**

20 “Nothing in this chapter shall be construed—

21 “(1) to prohibit a Member of Congress or any
22 officer or agent of the Federal Government, while
23 performing official functions, from communicating
24 unofficially through any medium with another per-

1 son in a language other than English (as long as of-
2 ficial functions are performed in English);

3 “(2) to limit the preservation or use of Native
4 Alaskan or Native American languages (as defined
5 in the Native American Languages Act);

6 “(3) to disparage any language other than
7 English or to discourage any person from learning
8 or using a language other than English; or

9 “(4) to be inconsistent with the Constitution of
10 the United States.”.

11 (b) CLERICAL AMENDMENT.—The table of chapters
12 at the beginning of title 4, United States Code, is amended
13 by inserting after the item relating to chapter 5 the fol-
14 lowing new item:

“Chapter 6. Official Language.”.

15 **SEC. 4. GENERAL RULES OF CONSTRUCTION FOR ENGLISH**
16 **LANGUAGE TEXTS OF THE LAWS OF THE**
17 **UNITED STATES.**

18 (a) IN GENERAL.—Chapter 1 of title 1, United
19 States Code, is amended by adding at the end the fol-
20 lowing new section:

21 **“§ 8. General rules of construction for laws of the**
22 **United States**

23 “(a) English language requirements and workplace
24 policies, whether in the public or private sector, shall be

1 presumptively consistent with the Laws of the United
2 States; and

3 “(b) Any ambiguity in the English language text of
4 the Laws of the United States shall be resolved, in accord-
5 ance with the last two articles of the Bill of Rights, not
6 to deny or disparage rights retained by the people, and
7 to reserve powers to the States respectively, or to the peo-
8 ple.”.

9 (b) CLERICAL AMENDMENT.—The table of sections
10 at the beginning of chapter 1 of title 1, United States
11 Code, is amended by inserting after the item relating to
12 section 7 the following new item:

“8. General Rules of Construction for Laws of the United States.”.

13 SEC. 5. IMPLEMENTING REGULATIONS.

14 The Department of Justice shall, within 180 days
15 after the date of enactment of this Act, issue for public
16 notice and comment a proposed rule for uniform testing
17 English language ability of candidates for naturalization,
18 based upon the principles that (a) all citizens should be
19 able to read and understand generally the English lan-
20 guage text of the Declaration of Independence, the Con-
21 stitution, and the Laws of the United States which are
22 made in pursuance thereof, and (b) any exceptions to this
23 standard should be limited to extraordinary cir-
24 cumstances, such as asylum.

1 **SEC. 6. EFFECTIVE DATE.**

2 The amendments made by sections 3 and 4 shall take
3 effect on the date that is 180 days after the date of enact-
4 ment of this Act.

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