

Congressman Steve King, R-IA

August 2, 2012

House Committee on the Judiciary - Subcommittee on the Constitution

Hearing on H.R. 997, the "English Language Unity Act of 2011"

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Nadler, Members of the Judiciary Subcommittee on the Constitution,

Thank you for inviting me to appear today in support of my bill, H.R. 997, the English Language Unity Act, which will enshrine English as the official language of the United States. More than 122 Members of Congress have signed on as cosponsors.

More than 22 centuries ago, China was populated by scores of warring tribes and competing sub-cultures. They wore similar clothing, ate similar foods, and had similar ways of life. But they spoke different languages. Qin Shi Huang, the first emperor of China, had a vision to create a unified China that would last for the next ten thousand years. Qin Shi Huang standardized units of measure, currency, wheel spacing of carts, and commanded scribes to create an official written Chinese language. All of China then communicated in the same language.

A common language is the most powerful unifying force the world has ever known. It is more powerful than race, color, religion, sex or national origin. The unifying official language does not have to be English, yet we are fortunate the common language of the United States of America is English. English is the international language of commerce, politics, maritime, and of air traffic control. English is an incredible unifying force uniting America, knocking down ethnic, religious, and cultural barriers to make us one and is the modern *lingua franca* of the world. Today as we rally for unity and patriotism, our common form of communications currency binds us together and propels us toward our destiny.

Noah Webster had a vision 2,000 years after Qin Shi Huang. Webster realized the language of former colonists was degenerating into colloquialism on its way to dialects that would become incomprehensible to all but the locals. Webster wrote the American English Dictionary because he feared the fracturing of American along the lines of language. Webster's goal was the same as Qin Shi Huang's - but to unify the United States of America for all time through a common language.

I've always admired my grandmother who sent my father to school as a German-speaking son of an immigrant. Upon his return home from the first day of kindergarten, my father's first words to his mother were in German. She said to him in the sharpest of terms, "speaking German in this household is for you, from now on, verboten. I came here to become an American. You will go to school to learn English and bring it home and to teach it to me."

In 2002, as a state senator, I authored and led the the successful effort to pass official English legislation into Iowa law. Each session, since being elected to the U. S. Congress, I've introduced the "English Language Unity Act" (H.R. 997). In a survey conducted by the Rasmussen Group in 2010, 87 percent of Americans expressed their support for making English the official language of the United States. Other polls taken on a state-by-state basis have indicated similar support and to date, thirty-one states have passed similar English-language statutes.

My grandmother realized that learning English enabled generations of Americans to achieve the American dream through opportunity and liberty. Multiple studies continue to prove those who learn

English have better jobs, better pay, and are better served by others than those who are English challenged. Learning English decreases reliance on government and increases personal freedom.

The need for English as the official language appears in our newspapers every day – injuries in the workplace, mistranslations at hospitals, people who are unable to support themselves and their families – all because they could not speak English. Additionally, government spends billions for multilingual translations, printing costs, and miscommunications. Language enclaves are actually encouraged even though they are the very antithesis of assimilation.

Hebrew, as a conversational language, was dead for two thousand years until a century ago when the Jewish people restored Hebrew for the specific purpose of unifying Jews to form a nation. What model did they use? America! Because we were so successful in assimilating diverse people. Israel was recognized as a nation in 1948, just half a century after the effort began. The Hebrew language ties Israelis to their heritage, to their faith, and their nation.

There is no unifying force more powerful - not race, not color, not religion, not sex, not national origin - that binds people together more effectively than a common language. I encourage my colleagues to join me in supporting the English Language Unity Act.