

Testimony of

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Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for allowing me the opportunity to testify today in support of H.R. 997, the English Language Unity Act. This is not my first time testifying in favor of this important piece of legislation, and I believe its passage is now long overdue.

My name is Mauro E. Mujica, and since 1993, I have served as the Chairman of the Board of U.S. English, Inc., which was founded in 1983 by former U.S. Senator S.I. Hayakawa. U.S. English is a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization with more than 1.8 million members nationwide. We focus on public policy issues affecting language and national identity, with a special emphasis on laws like H.R. 997 that would make English the official language of the United States government.

For nearly 20 years, I have seen this or similar legislation introduced or passed in both the House and the Senate in various forms. Unfortunately, partisan politics and widely spread misconceptions have prevented it from passing both the House and the Senate and being signed into law. As the language divisions in America continue to grow, I believe there is no better time than now to pass the English Language Unity Act.

When I immigrated to the United States in the 1960s, I knew that English was the language of this country. Therefore, I studied it before I came here, recognizing that it was crucial to my success in America. At that time, many of the multilingual assistance programs that exist today had not yet taken hold. Executive Order 13166, which requires the federal government to provide translation and interpretation services to limited English individuals, was not signed into law until 2000. Yet even so, I and other immigrants knew that learning English was the first step to creating a prosperous life in America.

Senator Hayakawa, himself a linguist, was quoted in the April 27, 1981 Congressional Record saying, “The ability to forge unity from diversity makes our society strong. We need all the elements, Germans, Hispanics, Hellenes, Italians, Chinese, all the cultures that make our nation unique. Unless we have a common basis for communicating and sharing ideas, we all lose.” Look at our nation’s motto: *E Pluribus Unum*—out of many, one. The United States is a melting pot, and I would never suggest becoming an “English Only” nation. It is important, however, that in our acceptance of foreign languages, we do not allow America to become an “English Optional” nation.

Regardless of background, everyone can recognize that at some point, there has to be a cap on the number of translations the government, schools, hospitals and other places of business are required to provide. With more than 325 languages spoken in the United States, it is unreasonable to provide communications in each of them. H.R. 997 sends the message that in order to live a fully productive life in America, one must become fluent in English. It does not limit the number of languages an American can speak (I, in fact, am fluent in four); nor does it require citizens to speak English in their private conversations. H.R. 997 simply requires that government functions be carried out in English—with common sense exceptions for health and public safety, trade and tourism, national security and more.

As of the 2000 Census, more than 21.3 million Americans were only able to speak English 'less than very well,' meaning that 8.1 percent of Americans had difficulty holding more than a basic conversation in English. By 2010, these numbers had worsened—with 25.2 million, or 8.7 percent, of Americans claiming they could speak English less than very well. In 31 states, legislators have already taken steps to prevent this language crisis from worsening. As far back as 1811, when Louisiana declared English its sole official language, and as recently as 2010, when Oklahoma did the same, states have sent the message that English is the key to a unified America. Unfortunately, the United States Congress has not yet followed suit.

In June, U.S. English hired Harris Interactive to conduct a poll to gauge the support for Official English laws among the American people. This poll found overwhelming support—88 percent of respondents agreed that English should be the official language of the United States. Broken down by political party, this included 96 percent of Republicans, 83 percent of Democrats and 89 percent of Independents. The results showed support for Official English extends to 89 percent of males and 87 percent of females, and even 83 percent of Hispanics agreed that English should be America's official language. These poll results confirm what U.S. English has long declared: the English language is a bond that reaches far beyond political party and demographics. H.R. 997 will serve as a balance – it will allow Americans to continue to speak in whatever language they choose in their daily lives, while also ensuring that we are all bound by a common, shared language.

Mr. Chairman, I thank you again for giving me the opportunity to share my views with the Committee today. The English language is the one factor with the ability to unite us all, and I hope that the Committee takes note of the will of the American people and continues to make strides toward enacting Official English legislation.