

**PREPARED TESTIMONY OF TIM SCHULTZ BEFORE  
HOUSE JUDICIARY COMMITTEE SUBCOMMITTEE ON  
IMMIGRATION, CITIZENSHIP, REFUGEES,  
BORDER SECURITY, AND INTERNATIONAL LAW**

May 23, 2007

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for the opportunity to testify regarding the issues of language and assimilation.

My name is Tim Schultz, and I am Director of Government Relations for U.S. English, Inc., a grassroots organization based in Washington, DC. U.S. English was founded in 1983 by Senator S.I. Hayakawa, who was himself an immigrant. Our organization focuses on public policy issues that involve language and national identity, particularly official English laws.

I thank the committee for its wisdom in exploring the topic of assimilation. Regardless of where you come down on the various immigration proposals before Congress, I think it's fair to say that a number of people are doing a great amount of thinking about the contours of immigration policy. Much less thought is going into what I'd call "immigrant policy": that is, what is our policy toward immigrants once they arrive? Your former colleague, the late Barbara Jordan, wrote a 1997 New York Times Op-Ed calling it "The Americanization Ideal."

I suggest two facts should guide our thinking here: **First**, English language learning is the crucial element of Americanization. **Second**, we face a language challenge in the United States that won't solve itself.

Since 1906, the demonstrable capacity to speak English has been a formal legal requirement for naturalization. We know that. But before the swearing in ceremony, there's a process by which an immigrant comes to self identify as an American. Two years ago, the Pew Hispanic Center did a remarkably detailed study about civic attitudes of Hispanics in America, which contains perhaps the best data to date on the link between English and Americanization.

Pew found that among Hispanics living in what they called "Spanish dominant Households"—where little to no English is spoken—only 3 percent self-identify as "Americans." 68 percent self-identify first or only with their native country. Among Hispanics in English-dominant households, 51 percent self identify first or only as Americans. In other words, those who speak English are 17 times more likely to self identify as Americans than those who don't. Those who don't speak English are 22 times more likely to identify primarily with their home country than with the United States. I have no reason to believe this would be different with any other group of immigrants, by the way. I think it has to do with a fairly universal process of becoming an American.

It has been said that the First Amendment is "First" in the Bill of Rights because the freedom to speak is the right that enables all of the others. All of our rights as Americans flow from this first freedom. But for an immigrant who does not speak English, civic

engagement with one's fellow Americans is impossible. Our common civic culture presupposes a common language. Alexis de Tocqueville, the preeminent observer of American civic culture, wrote "The tie of language is perhaps the strongest and most durable that can unite mankind."

Well now, let me suggest that in the United States, that tie is facing some challenges.

Three years ago, a Pulitzer Prize winning Los Angeles Times reporter named Hector Tobar did a 2 year long Toquevillian-experiment, crisscrossing the country reporting on the civic mores of Latino immigrants in the United States. Tobar's resulting book, "Translation Nation" argued that in today's United States, living an English-optional existence is increasingly common and increasingly accepted. Now, Tobar's subtitle is "Defining a New American Identity in the Spanish Speaking United States." He generally thinks that an English optional United States is acceptable. I disagree. But his diagnosis of the social trend deserves great weight.

We also have some hard numbers to back up Tobar's anecdotes.

The 2000 Census found that there are over 2 million people born in the United States—citizens of the United States—who can't speak English well enough to hold a basic conversation.

The Pew Hispanic Center did a separate survey of Mexican migrants in 2006, and found that among those residing in the United States for 6-10 years, 45 percent still did not speak English. Pew also found that among those residing in the U.S. for 15 or more years, an identical 45 percent *still* do not speak English. In other words, if an immigrant does not start on the path to English upon arrival, chances are high that that person will never learn it.

And let me repeat: I use Latino immigrants as an example because they are the most numerous and we have the largest and best data. Remember too, a majority of Latino immigrants DO learn English, so the suggestion that they can't or shouldn't is ridiculous.

Because the grandchildren of immigrants will usually learn English by growing up in America, I don't believe that the English language is under "threat." But our national aspiration has historically been that immigrants—yes, first generation immigrants—seek to become Americans. If half of immigrants—or even ten percent—are locked out of that process, we would be removing part of the foundation that has allowed our nation of immigrants to be successful.

I'm not here today testifying about particular legislation, but we should agree that public policy has a role to play in closing the English acquisition gap. It includes increasing opportunity—more desks for more people who want to learn English. But it also includes the avoidance of policies that promote an English optional existence, and the hard headed insistence that, as Congresswoman Jordan wrote, the immigrant has mutual obligations.

In Jordan's words, the term "[Americanization] earned a bad reputation when it was stolen by racists and xenophobes in the 1920's. But it is our word, and we are taking it back." If we are to reclaim Americanization in policy as well as in spirit, a hard but cool-headed look at our policies surrounding English and assimilation is long overdue.