**Make English Our Official Language**

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English has never been the only language in America. However, it

has been and should remain our primary language and the official language of our government at all levels. Alabama showed the way in 1990 by adopting English as its official language.

Historically, immigrants have been a source of ingenuity and prosperity for this country. The vast majority of Americans can trace their heritage to a distant land, and many maintain a strong affection for the home of their ancestors or their birth country.

Traditions pass from generation to generation within ethnic groups to create a tapestry of diversity that covers and enriches our nation. We should continue to strongly encourage legal immigrants to become citizens, but it is important that those seeking citizenship embrace American values and the culture which bind us together. In order to preserve that bond, a common language is imperative.

In the United States the language of success is English, even while we have a robust and enriching tradition of people speaking different languages within their ethnic communities. Speaking and understanding English is a basic requisite to succeeding in the United States. It also provides the basis for American cultural unity.

The debate over how to address continued illegal immigration to this country and the presence of millions of people living here illegally continues unabated across the nation. In Alabama, as in many states, there is little doubt that immigration will be a major issue in the current session of the Alabama Legislature. Some people would have you believe that anti-immigrant or racist sentiments are driving the debate. But this isn’t true. Surely there are pockets of vitriolic anti-immigrant sentiment in this country, as there always have been. But most Americans readily accept their neighbors who are Latino or Asian or other backgrounds, because they are American. What lies beneath the immigration controversy today is twofold.

First, the failure of large numbers of immigrants to assimilate into our culture is leading many to fear that we are experiencing the disintegration of American cultural values. American civilization is the most successful in all of human history for a reason. Our rule of law rests on the firm foundation of our cultural values, one of which is a common language. If assimilation weakens, our foundation will weaken.

Second, Americans are concerned by the ever-increasing numbers of immigrants who are here illegally. While we work to make English language not only the official language of government but also as our unifying common language, we should ensure that any comprehensive immigration reform includes a commitment to promote citizenship and ensure a solid understanding of the Founding Fathers and the core values of American civilization.

Specific citizenship reform measures for new legal immigrants should:

* Replace bilingual education with intensive English instruction to help new Americans assimilate into our civilization, thus preserving our culture.
* Return ballots to English language format, focus on English language literacy as a prerequisite of citizenship, and insist that dual citizens vote only in the United States and give up voting in their birth nation.

These principles were understood and accepted throughout history, which enabled us to absorb millions of immigrants and their children into the American way of life.

* Rescind Executive Order 13166 requiring multilingualism in federal documents.
* Require an American history test written in English for any legal immigrant who wishes to become a citizen and meets all qualification criteria.
* Enforce the Oath of Allegiance by making its understanding and affirmation part of the citizenship test.
* Focus federal funds on teaching American history and the principles of American civilization, and create specific programs to emphasize American heroes, including military heroes.
* Provide in-depth English language and American history and civics training for new immigrants through a national program modeled after the highly successful “Ulpan Studies” program in Israel.

This would develop practical skills necessary to actively participate in everyday American life and American productivity.

New Americans have always enriched our nation, and for American civilization to succeed, we must maintain and strengthen America’s civic culture. We must do much more to help new legal immigrants who want to embrace American values and culture by helping them to attain citizenship and assimilate easily into our culture.

As we work toward reforming immigration policies, especially citizenship reform measures, we must never lose sight of the self-evident truths affirmed at the founding of our great nation. We are all created equal–citizen and non-citizen alike–and we are all endowed by our Creator with certain inalienable rights, among them life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.

For these truths to have meaning, we must recognize that every person has an inherent human dignity that must be respected. These truths morally bind us to create a workable immigration solution founded upon a system of patriotic integration with our language–the English language–as the common unifying element.

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