



# Capitol Network News

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## LANGUAGE PROPOSAL COULD FACE UPHILL FIGHT

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■(GIT) Proponents of making English the state's official language will face an uphill battle in Oklahoma if such a measure is pursued, a review of recent similar legislation indicates.

Two bills considered during the 45th Legislature — HBs 1385 and 2054 — proposed recognizing English as the common language of the state and would have required the publication of most public documents in English, although certain exceptions were provided for in each measure. Both bills suffered similar fates, falling dormant in the Senate's Rules Committee after winning House approval. Other legislation, some of which became law, requires that certain services be offered in languages other than English.

HB1385, by then-Rep. James Dunlap, R-Bartlesville, and Sen. Carol Martin, R-Comanche, was last heard from in March, 1995, when it was referred to the Senate committee after passing the House on an 83 to 14 vote.

The measure would have recognized English as the "common," rather than official, language of the state, but would have made English "the language of official public documents and records and official public meetings."

The proposed measure excluded from its provisions:

- Instruction in foreign language courses;
- Instruction designed to aid students with limited English proficiency;

- Interference with the needs of the judicial system;

- Instances "when the public safety, health or emergency services require the use of other languages," provided that the authorization for the use of languages other than English in printed materials for general distribution was approved in an open public meeting by the governing board or authority of the relevant government entity; and

- Testimony from experts, witnesses or speakers who require the use of a language other than English, provided that for purposes of deliberation, decision making and record keeping that the testimony or commentary be translated into English.

The story was the same for HB2054, which was introduced during the second session of the 45th Legislature and was identical to its first session predecessor. After passing the House 95 to 2, the bill was passed to the Senate, where it died in the Rules Committee.

Ironically, a bill which passed both legislative houses and was signed by the governor in 1995 moves the state in the opposite

direction, at least where Department of Human Services benefits are concerned.

The bill, HB1673, was one of several measures designed to bring the state into line with anticipated changes in welfare benefits. By Rep. Opio Toure, D-Oklahoma City, and Sen. Ted Fisher, D-Sapulpa, the bill established certain requirements for obtaining benefits from the Department of Human Services.

In a section dealing with the so-called "personal responsibility agreements," which is signed by the benefits recipient, the bill indicates that the agreement will be written in English, Spanish or other language "according to the applicant's or recipient's needs."

According to the department, the agreements have been made available in and signed in one other language — Spanish — since the bill took effect last year.

Practices such as that are consistent with others already in place in Oklahoma. Drivers' license exams, for example, are offered in six different languages, Mauro E. Mujica, chairman of the board and chief executive officer of U.S. English, Inc., told a Senate interim study committee on Monday. Addi-

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## KEATING WILL JOIN SCOTT IN SEEKING SCHOOL LAND PURCHASE RESTRICTIONS

From The Governor's Office

■(OKLAHOMA CITY) Governor Frank Keating said Tuesday he will join State Auditor and Inspector Clifton Scott in any effort to repeal rules that allow officials of the School Land Commission to bid on land controlled by the agency.

"The proposed transaction involving Secretary Rob Johnson was clearly one that raised some very valid questions," the Governor said. "I have spoken with Mr. Johnson and I agree with his decision to withdraw his bid and cancel the transaction. I also agree with Clifton Scott and I will support any effort to repeal rules that allow officials

of the Commission to be involved in the purchase of trust lands."

Keating said he was not present at the Dec. 5, 1995 meeting of the Commission where the rule was adopted. Neither was Scott.

"It is clear that officials who administer the management, appraisal and sale of public lands should not be involved in private transactions involving those same pieces of property," the Governor said. "I hope the Commission will address this issue soon, and I intend to join with the Auditor and Inspector in assuring that such questions are not raised again."

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