

# STATE NEWS WEEKLY SUMMARY CONTINUED

same time establishes a common-sense language policy for the government."

At the same time, Mujica said, any legislation should allow reasonable exceptions that would allow some services to be provided in languages other than English, such as public health, safety and emergency services, judicial proceedings, education to students with limited English proficiencies and foreign language instruction.

Twenty-three states, Mujica said, have adopted legislation designating English as their official language, while similar efforts have passed the House in Oklahoma — HB1385 in 1994 and HB2154 in 1995 — but have failed or died in the Senate.

Mujica faced sometimes harsh questioning from members of the Senate committee and even harsher criticism from some in the audience.

Sen. Keith Leftwich, D-Oklahoma City, asked what impact such legislation would have on multilingual efforts already approved by the legislature, such as allowing drivers' license tests to be offered in Spanish, as well as five other languages. Mujica said most legislation would not impact such efforts, because drivers' license tests are usually one of the exemptions provided for in the bills.

"I agree," said Mujica, "that we have to give some time for immigrants to this country to assimilate, but we also have to have an incentive for them to learn English. If people had been able to keep their original languages, this country would not have been built."

Asked by Leftwich whether it might be easier to repeal existing laws that mandate certain government services be provided in a variety of languages, Mujica said doing so

would create the risk of a claim of discrimination by those who saw their native language eliminated from the list of those used in government services.

Mujica's views were particularly not well received by those in the audience.

Barbara Warner, from the Bureau of Indian Affairs, said efforts such as that promoted by U.S. English threatened bilingual education funding, and in turn, the continued existence of Native American languages.

"My tribe," she said, "has only 2,300 members. When we die, that language is going to die, while Spanish and German and others will continue to live on."

Bilingual education, she said, promotes language preservation and the likelihood that the Ponca Tribe's language would continue to exist.

Mujica noted the irony of the criticism of the efforts of himself and of the organization he heads, explaining that he, too, is an immigrant.

"I, too, an immigrant — I came here from Chile some 31 years ago to study architecture at Columbia University — and know firsthand how important it is to know English to succeed in the United States," he said.

Committee chairman Sen. Ben Brown, D-Oklahoma City, noted that the panel is neither currently looking at any one piece of legislation or at drafting English as an official language legislation. He did note, however, that such legislation is expected to come before lawmakers during the 46th Legislature.

—SHAWN ASHLEY  
11/25/96

## STATE PARTIALLY REIMBURSED FOR KEATING POLITICAL FLIGHTS

■(GIT) The Department of Public Safety has been partially reimbursed for some "purely political" flights taken by Governor Frank Keating since the department acquired a new plane for the use of the executive branch earlier this year, information provided to House of Representatives staff indicates.

Department commissioner and state Secretary of Public Safety Bob Ricks informed the House staff last week that his department has received \$5,902 for Keating's use of the state airplane to attend partisan political events.

Almost two-thirds of the nearly \$6,000 reimbursed to the state, \$3,600, was repayment for the governor's trip to the GOP national convention in San Diego and for his

flight to the North Dakota Republican convention in March, which involved a leased aircraft.

Meanwhile, a Senate staff member confirmed Monday that Senate Speaker Pro Tempore Stratton Taylor, D-Claremore, and House Speaker-elect Rep. Loyd Benson, D-Frederick, will appoint a joint committee to consider whether there should be changes in the state policy concerning airplane use. A formal announcement of the panel's formation is not expected until sometime next week or perhaps later.

Keating and Ricks, citing state statutes and a legal analysis prepared by the governor's chief deputy counsel, have said it is the Department of Public Safety's responsibility to provide security and transportation to the governor at all times. At the request of lawmakers, the attorney general and auditor and inspector are looking into the matter.

The attorney general is expected to rule on whether it is legal for the governor to use the plane for personal and political trips, while the auditor and inspector is expected to determine what rate of reimbursement would be appropriate for the plane's usage for trips not related to state business. Both may address the acquisition of the plane, which some lawmakers have charged may have been improperly conducted.

Ricks refute that allegation, going so far as to say in an interview with *Capitol Network News* that his staff deserves a commendation for their work.

—SHAWN ASHLEY  
11/25/96

## LAND SECRETARY WITHDRAWS PURCHASE, SEEKS AG'S OPINION

■(GIT) The top administrator of the state's School Land Commission said Monday that he plans to ask the commission to drop his purchase of a parcel of commission-owned land and to seek an attorney general's opinion on the legality of such a purpose.

Speaking to reporters only minutes before a scheduled meeting of the commission, secretary Rob Johnson told reporters of his plans to withdraw from the purchase of a 160-acre parcel of land in Pawnee County and to seek a ruling from the attorney general.

According to published reports, Johnson, who was appointed to the post in 1995 by

*Continued on next page*

*"We must not in the course of public life expect immediate approbation and immediate grateful acknowledgment of our services. But let us persevere through abuse and even injury. The internal satisfaction of a good conscience is always present, and time will do us justice in the minds of the people, even those at present the most prejudiced against us."*

Benjamin Franklin  
letter to Joseph Galloway  
Dec. 2, 1772