

Congress of the United States

House of Representatives

Washington, DC 20515

February 3, 2006

The Honorable F. James Sensenbrenner, Jr.
Chairman
House Judiciary Committee
2138 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairman Sensenbrenner:

As the Judiciary Committee considers the reauthorization of the Voting Rights Act (VRA), we would like to express our reservations about renewing the multilingual ballot provisions in Sections 203 & 4(f)(4). As you know, these provisions were not part of the original VRA.

The United States has an unrivaled history of welcoming and successfully assimilating new immigrants from every corner of the world. We have been enriched and strengthened by that process. For generations immigrants have understood that learning English is essential to being full-fledged participants in pursuing the American dream. But we believe these ballot provisions encourage the linguistic division of our nation and contradict the "Melting Pot" ideal that has made us the most successful multi-ethnic nation on earth. They are a serious affront to generations of immigrants past and present that have made great sacrifices to learn English in order to become naturalized citizens.

This increasingly burdensome mandate on state and local governments to provide multilingual voting materials also serves to undermine the election process. It contradicts the requirement that immigrants need to demonstrate the ability to read and understand English in order to become naturalized citizens. The existence of multilingual ballots also increases the risk of election errors and fraud. To cite one example, in 2000 six voting sites in Flushing, New York printed ballots in Chinese with the names of the political parties reversed. Several thousand voters cast their votes using these erroneous ballots (Village Voice, Nov. 14, 2000). In addition, the possibility that non-citizens may use this type of ballot to participate in our elections threatens the integrity of our democracy.

Furthermore, not only are multilingual ballots an unfunded mandate, but they are a waste of taxpayer funds. Almost 300 counties in 30 states are required to have such materials available costing taxpayers millions of dollars. But two GAO reports found evidence that in many cases these materials are hardly used. For example, in 1996 Yuba County, California was required to spend \$30,000 for election materials in Spanish. But according to its registrar of voters there had only been one request for Spanish language materials there in 16 years (September-October 1996, Policy-Review, "English is Broken Here"). In the 2004 election, officials in Los Angeles County, California were required to provide more than 2,200 interpreters and spent more than

\$2.1 million to provide translations and ballots in seven different languages (Los Angeles Times, "Need for bilingual poll workers never ends, Nov. 1, 2005.").

Finally, we want to draw your attention to the fact that federal law protects the right of all citizens to bring an interpreter into the voting booth with them if they have difficulty understanding a ballot written in English. All citizens have the right to cast an informed ballot, and this is the right approach for dealing with the voters who have difficulty understanding election materials in English. Multilingual ballots, on the other hand, divide our country, increase the risk of voter error and fraud, and burden local taxpayers.

For these reasons we oppose the reauthorization of Sections 203 and 4(f)(4) of the VRA. Thank you for your attention to this matter, and we look forward to working with you on this issue.

Sincerely,

Steve King

Steve King

Bob Inglis

Bob Goodlatte

John Hostetler

Bill Jenkins

Howard Coble

Louie Gohmert

Ron Paul

Barth

John T. Lott

Roger Wicker

Bob Jones

Don R...

John ...

Karl ...

Ed Royce

Ronald ...

Steve ...

Nathan ...

Col. ...

Ron ...

3. ...

Jeff ...

Tom Price

Harsha ...

Jill ...

Gunny ...

Walter B. Jones

John ...

Jim ...

John ...

~~Andy~~
Raymond

John Klein

John Bradley

Tom Tancredi

Boyd White

Pete Sessions

John Campbell

Lehla

Phil Dwyer

Bill Shuster

Jim Ryan

John Davis

Henry E. Brown, Jr.

Todd R. Platte

Virgil Stode

Ernst Latval

Candice Miller

Steve Myrick

John Remond

Radney Alexander

J. H. Hays

Scott Bennett

Barbara Allen

**MEMBER SIGNATURES FOR LETTER TO
CHAIRMAN SENSENBRENNER OPPOSING THE
RENEWAL OF MULTILINGUAL BALLOT
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4. Rep. Bob Goodlatte
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6. Rep. Bill Jenkins
7. Rep. Howard Coble
8. Rep. Louie Gohmert
9. Rep. Ron Paul
10. Rep. Roscoe Bartlett
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12. Rep. Roger Wicker
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16. Rep. Ken Calvert
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52. Rep. Jim Ramstad
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55. Rep. Scott Garrett
56. Rep. Barbara Cubin