

What's the rush to make English our official language?

Sometimes we just want things to happen too fast. As the Kansas Legislature and those in other states across the country try to come to grips with how to integrate immigrants into society, they are looking at making English our official language.

Bad idea, lawmakers. Laws don't force people to change; social pressure does.

Just give it time, and what you want will be accomplished.

Across this country, schools were taught in German, French, Italian, Chinese and a hundred other languages. City council meetings and church services were conducted in the language that the people could understand — Bohemian, Spanish, Irish, Yiddish, German, you name it.

Each new wave of immigrants brought with them their language, religion and customs. They set up communities where they socialized mostly with each other and were comfortable.

But their children weren't comfortable. They wanted to move over the hill, across the river, into the next neighborhood. They needed to learn new things, new ways of doing things and frequently a new language.

So they did. They learned English, though many kept their native tongues because they still wanted and needed to communicate with parents, grandparents and friends back home.

Then their children came along. Mostly, they heard English at home. That's what Mom and Dad spoke, so that's what they spoke. They saw Grandma and Grandpa now and then and picked up a few words of old tongue, but without much practice, they didn't keep it.

Occasionally, a great upheaval would quicken the process.

In Kansas, the Eudora City Council held its meetings in German until the beginning of World War 1. It was probably difficult to change, but it was politically expedient to switch to English. Social pressure came to bear.

Today, we see these early waves of immigration through rose-colored glasses. We all want to be Irish on St. Patrick's Day, but 100 years ago, you might have found it hard to get a job if you were Irish — or Polish or Chinese.

Today's immigrants — Mexican, Asian, African — band together and speak Spanish or another tongue. But their children and their children's children will go over the hill, across the river and into the next neighborhood.

They will learn English and speak it to their children and integrate into the social structure, not because the government tells them to, but because of social pressure. If you don't speak English, you don't get the good jobs, you can't do business with people in other communities and the world.

But it takes time and no one, especially the Legislature, wants to allow enough time for natural social change to occur.

What's the rush? It'll all work out.

— Cynthia Haynes



It's time for a few uneventful events

Given the circumstances of our recent trip, you might think the mood would have always been somber and sad. There were moments, of course, when none of us could help but shed tears at the loss of our brother, Don.

The military honor guard, for one, brought a sense of pride to each one of us. The flag-folding ceremony is totally symbolic and impressive. We were all so touched when the young officer, on bended knee, presented the folded flag to my brother's daughter "on behalf of a grateful nation."

But, for the most part, our gathering was a celebration of Don's life. We laughed and talked and laughed some more. At one point, I stood back and just listened. The conversation was like a dull roar. If there were 20 people in the room there were 10 different conversations going on.

It was very heartwarming to hear Don's friends and neighbors tell us what a great guy he was. One elderly woman told how Don fixed her air conditioner on the hottest day of the year. "I don't know what

Out Back Carolyn Plotts



I'm going to do without Don," she said.

He had good friends and good neighbors because he was one, himself.

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Our trip home was not entirely uneventful. We were in Hays and needed to pick up a few things. Jim wanted to shop at a hardware store and I needed a few groceries. We decided to divide and conquer. I dropped him off and drove across the street to pick up bread and milk. On my return, the car began making a horrible noise and smoke rolled out from under the hood. I was in the hardware store's parking lot, so I just shut the engine off and went in to find Jim.

He diagnosed the problem and went

back into the store to buy a socket wrench. After much "whanging and banging" the car would start, but had no power steering. Jim said we had to get to a car parts store down the street, but we couldn't run the car very long because it would overheat. It was like driving a tank. I said, "Oh, we have power steering, alright. My power!"

Long story, short. Jim bought a new belt and fixed the car right there in the parking lot. My hero. We don't have air conditioning, but that can wait for another day.

What couldn't wait for another day was the phone call we received the next morning. The hardware store called and Jim had left his checkbook at the store. Luckily, for us, Dick and Donna were still in Hays (attending the 3-2-1 A State Wrestling Tournament) and they volunteered to pick it up. They even delivered it to the house while we were at church Sunday morning.

That's our life; one seamless event blended into another. I think I'm ready for a non-eventful interlude.

Senate alters, passes voter ID bill

SB 169 — Photo ID for Voting, requires photo identification of in-person voters, changes the list of acceptable identification forms for those voting by mail, requires all voters to provide identification at every election, exempts certain voters from the requirements to provide identification, and requires proof of citizenship when registering to vote. The bill makes the following specific changes or additions to current law:

- Requires all voters to provide identification at every election. Current law requires identification be provided only by those voting for the first time in the county who did not provide identification when registering to vote.
- Revises the array of acceptable identification documents, depending on whether the voter is voting in person or by mail as follows: Requires photographic identification be provided by every advance voter applying to vote in person and by every elector voting at the polls. The list of acceptable photographic identification forms includes:

- Current Kansas driver's license
- Current Kansas non-driver's identification card
- United States passport
- Employee badge or identification
- Debit or credit card
- Student identification
- Public assistance identification

Requires an election board member to verify whether the photo identification provided by a person voting at the polls bears a signature. If it does not, the voter would be required to provide an additional form of identification that provides the voter's signature.

Deletes "utility bill, bank statement,

Senate Doings Sen. Ralph Ostmeyer



paycheck and government check" from the list of acceptable identification for persons applying for an advance ballot to be transmitted by mail. The remaining acceptable identification forms would include:

Providing on the ballot the voter's current, valid Kansas driver's license number, non-driver's identification card number, or the last four digits of the voter's Social Security number

Providing with the application a copy of the voter's current, valid Kansas driver's license number, non-driver's identification card number, or other government document containing the voter's current name and address as indicated on the registration book.

Exempts the following persons from voter identification requirements:

- Persons aged 65 or older
- Persons with a temporary or permanent physical disability
- Members of the military on active duty, or their spouses, who because of their duty status are absent from the county on election day
- Members of the merchant marine, or their spouses, who are on assignment and absent from the county on election day
- Eligible voters currently residing outside the United States

Requires persons registering to vote to provide documentary proof of United States citizenship. Acceptable documents will include a United States passport, a birth certificate indicating the applicant was born in the United States, or a federal government issued document indicating the applicant is a naturalized citizen. A voter applying by mail will have to enclose a copy of one of these documents with his or her application.

Passed 28 to 12.

SB 159 — Authorization to Carry Advanced Ballots, addresses the issue of designating a person other than the voter to deliver a voter's advance ballot and the subsequent delivery of the ballot. The bill would:

- Require written designation by the voter of the person who will deliver the ballot.
- Allow the designee to return the voter's ballot by personal delivery or by mail.
- Require the designee to return the voter's ballot to the county election office within two business days after receiving the ballot, but not later than the close of polls on election day (the bill also allows an advance voter to return the voter's own ballot by personal delivery or by mail).
- Increase the penalty for violation of this requirement to a level 9 non-person felony. (Current law has the penalty for violation set at a class C misdemeanor).
- Make changes to statutory language dealing with disabled voters to conform to other sections of law.

Passed 40 to 0.

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Don't forget Friday is 'Thumbs Up' day. Salute someone!