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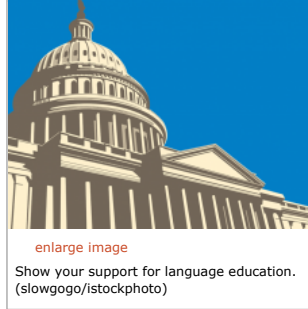
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Congressional Briefing on Languages



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WASHINGTON, DC, July 20, 2010—Members of Congress had a special briefing on the importance of developing language skills among a rising generation. Industry leaders in business, national security, education, and members of Congress shared their perspectives.

Business leader Alfred Mockett noted that "business may be global but markets are multi-local." That is, business markets are scattered

geographically and have different demands. But by being multi-local--many localized business centers operating in synch--global corporations understands on-the-ground sensitivities of local markets. "And that [type of cross-border understanding and cooperation] need to start in K-12." Alfred Mockett is CEO of American Managements Systems, a multinational tech corporation with annual sales of nearly \$1 billion.

Ambassador James F. Collins, former U.S. Ambassador to Russia, made the point that the nature of diplomacy has changed. "In the Cold War, we dealt with 12 people in Moscow. Now in the same region we deal with 300 to 400 million people, all of whom expect to be a participant in the dialogue." Collins pleaded that we, as a nation, have to train people in languages that are in demand, "so we are ready to speak to the world and to be heard in their languages."

Several speakers brought up the 2003 RAND Corporation survey of human resources managers at U.S.-based global corporations. One survey respondent called American graduates "linguistically deprived." Another said, "If I wanted to recruit people who were both technically skilled and culturally aware, I wouldn't even waste time looking for them on U.S. college campuses."

Despite the dire tone, there are pockets of excellence in American schools and college campuses. Other speakers at the hearing showcased examples and urged that it is not a question of how to do it, but rather how to bring it to scale.

"I'm here to represent 3.2 million members who believe in languages and global competence." With these words, John Wilson, executive director of the National Education Association (NEA), announced that teachers are ready to catalyze new practices in schools.

Congress has made great strides in the last few years ([learn more](#)), creating new legislation and allocating millions of dollars to support critical language acquisition among Americans. But too often, legislation passes without the promise of proper funding to turn ideas into reality. As the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) draws near, it is a critical time for members of Congress to understand multilingualism is not an option, but an obligation to the rising generation.

U.S. Representative Rush Holt (D-NJ) will introduce the Excellence and Innovation in Language Learning Act ([PDF summary](#)), aimed at creating language pipelines to meet business, national security, and other industry needs for language capacity. The bill includes \$400 million devoted to this effort. Rep. Holt's bill, along with two others, might become part of ESEA.

U.S. Representatives July Chu (D-CA) and Paul Tonko (D-NY) spoke to their Congressional colleagues in support of language learning and increased funding for language education in K-12, especially in early education.

With coordinated strategies at different levels of government, it is possible to meet the goal of developing a multilingual society—with every high school graduate speaking two languages proficiently—within a generation.

One participant offered a call to action: "As members of Congress are home for summer recess, inform your Senators and Representative what is important to your school community. Share practices that work--and needs that are not met."

The hearing was made possible through the work of the Asia Society Partnership for Global Learning, Joint National Committee on Languages, Committee for Economic Development, American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages, and National Education Association.

USERS' COMMENTS

[Josephine Bustos](#) | 07:20:10 04:10pm

I am in favor of school age children learning another language because this can only help them become well rounded individuals and also aid in understanding other cultures. Most Europeans speak two or three languages; we as Americans can do as well. Let us also teach our young immigrants the importance of learning the English language since this is the language spoken in this country. We need to have this as a requirement in order to integrate into the American culture.

[reply](#)

Phyllis Andersen | 07:01:10 08:10pm

How exciting!!! I teach Spanish at the college level but I volunteered to teach grade school children at my daughter's elementary school so that the children would have some access to second language leaning at a crucial age for pronunciation and fluency. Several children are now bilingual or fluent enough to travel to Spanish speaking countries and learn so much about themselves and others through their ability to directly interact with the people. They have formed bonds that they continue to develop through technology such as facebook and email. While teaching the elementary age students I realized that there were no advanced child friendly materials for parents to access for their children to continue to study independently. As a result I developed BiLingo Kidz, a software program that teaches vocabulary, sentence structure and culture through mini stories of four children from Latin America. The program uses 5 different native speakers from the respective countries of the children and beautiful artwork painted from over 6,000 photos taken in Latin America. THE RESULT: An excellent teaching tool that can be used in classrooms or independently at home.

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Kim West | 06:30:10 05:31pm

I am so excited that language learning is coming to the forefront. It is long overdue. KWest JHS 157 District 28 queens

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