

# SENATE VOTES TO SET ENGLISH AS NATIONAL LANGUAGE

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WASHINGTON, May 18 — The Senate voted on Thursday to designate English as the national language. In a charged debate, Republican backers of the proposal, which was added to the Senate's [immigration](#) measure on a 63-to-34 vote, said that it was equivalent to establishing a formal national anthem or motto and that it would simply affirm the pre-eminence of English without overturning laws or rules on bilingualism.

"We're free to say what we want, speak what we want, but it is our national language," said Senator [Lamar Alexander](#), Republican of Tennessee. The amendment was proposed by Senator James M. Inhofe, Republican of Oklahoma.

It is not clear, though, that the measure will be included in any final bill after negotiations with the House. Shortly after the Inhofe amendment was approved, the Senate also approved a weaker, less-binding alternative declaring English the "common and unifying" language of the nation, on a 58-to-39 vote. The question of which version survives would be decided in negotiations with the House.

The second amendment was proposed by Senator Ken Salazar of Colorado, one of several Democrats who said the Inhofe measure was needlessly divisive and would reduce multilingual government programs.

"We are taking a step backward from the progress America has made," Mr. Salazar said.

Senator [Harry Reid](#) of Nevada, the Democratic leader, said the Inhofe amendment was racist.

"Everybody who speaks with an accent knows that they need to learn English just as fast as they can," he said.

Under the Inhofe proposal, the federal government is directed to "preserve and enhance the role of English as the national language of the United States of America." It does not go as far as proposals to designate English the nation's official language, which would require all government publications and business to be in English.

Instead, it says government services and publications now offered in other languages would be unaffected. But the proposal declares that no one has "a right, entitlement or claim to have the government of the United States or any of its officials or

representatives act, communicate, perform or provide services or provide materials in any language other than English."

Critics said they fear the directive could lead government agencies to scale back their bilingual efforts, cause discrimination against people who do not speak English, disrupt emergency operations in communities with populations of immigrants and have other unintended consequences.

Mr. Inhofe, who is proficient in Spanish from his days as a pilot in Mexico, said critics were exaggerating the potential effects of his plan. His plan would also stiffen the language rules for immigrants seeking to qualify for citizenship under the new legislation, requiring them to demonstrate English proficiency and understanding of American history and government rather than simply to enroll in a language class.

President Bush, speaking about immigration on Thursday on a trip to Arizona, reiterated that under his proposal illegal immigrants would have to learn English. "If you learn English, and you're a hard worker, and you have a dream, you have the capacity from going from picking crops to owning the store, or from sweeping office floors to being an office manager," Mr. Bush said.

The House did not include a similar provision on English in the legislation it passed in December, but there is strong support among House Republicans for such a move.

Despite the clash over language, advocates of a broad immigration measure combining border protection with the possibility of citizenship for qualifying illegal immigrants successfully fought off repeated efforts to alter the measure.

In a crucial showdown, the Senate voted, 58 to 35, late Thursday to reject an amendment that authors of the legislation said would gut their bill by prohibiting temporary workers and many illegal immigrants from seeking permanent residency.

The Senate reversed a decision it made on Wednesday about how temporary workers could apply for permanent residency. The Senate initially voted to require that such applications come just from employers. But some senators said they had misgivings that the requirement would give employers too much power over workers. On Thursday, senators voted to give workers the ability to apply for permanent residency on their own if they have been working in the country for at least four years.

The Senate retained a requirement that a green card be granted only if the Labor Department certified a need for workers.

Immigrant groups praised the reversal. But some advocates for immigrants retained grave concerns about the emerging legislation.

Mary Bauer, director of the immigrant justice project at the Southern Poverty Law Center, said immigrants who participated in existing guest worker programs were frequently exploited. She said the programs failed to ensure that employers offered fair pay and housing.