



English MacGuffins

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In an [op-ed released yesterday](#) (also reprinted by the [Missouri Political News Service](#) and quoted by the *Post-Dispatch's* [Political Fix blog](#)), Sarah Brodsky argued that the proposed English-language amendment to Missouri's constitution is unnecessary:

Although official state business is not always understandable to ordinary Missourians, the reason probably has more to do with bureaucratic rules and jargon than with any language barrier. Nevertheless, the possibility that official state business will someday be conducted in a foreign language concerns legislators so much that they're trying to prevent it. In November 2008, Missouri voters will decide whether to tack an English-language amendment onto the state Constitution.

The proposed amendment is a bad idea. We needn't work to prevent this hypothetical problem, which will almost certainly never materialize on its own. Missourians will continue to speak English long into the future, both in official business and in their daily lives.

It's possible to make a case for official English legislation that would persuade many lovers of free markets and liberty, simply [on fiscal grounds](#) ; eliminating some forms of multilingual paperwork and bureaucracy can definitely save a few taxpayer dollars here and there. But that argument is essentially about administrative policy, and doesn't rise to the level of constitutional importance.

Other arguments for official English have more to do with government using language to promote a more cohesive culture □ which I find entirely unpersuasive. This legislation is about the use of language in official government business, and has nothing to do with the [many languages](#) people use in their homes and private lives. Culture isn't a real issue here.

Language legislation isn't something the Show-Me Institute would normally cover as a matter of course, although Sarah [has blogged about it a few times](#) . She comes down on the side of eliminating regulation when it's unnecessary and overreaching, and while she applies it here to an issue that doesn't fit neatly into any of our policy areas, it does fit with our general approach of advocating less bureaucratic regulation where possible.

Ultimately, a think tank like this one has no official opinions outside of the research and conclusions of its scholars □ and Sarah has made a good case for hers.

About the Author



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