

# Judge: Voter forms must be in English

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provision that allows for "any language usage required by or necessary to secure the rights guaranteed by the Constitution and laws of the United States of America, or the Constitution of the state of Iowa."

Attorney General Tom Miller, a Democrat, then concluded Culver had authority to offer the forms in foreign languages.

Staskal, in a ruling dated March 31, wrote that a state administrative rule permitting the use of other languages on official voter registration forms "plainly conflicts" with the 2002 statute. He called the rule "an arbitrary act in violation of law" and declared it "void in its current form as an improper exercise of agency power."

Mauro, a Democrat, said Thursday he respected Staskal's ruling, but that he was "deeply disappointed."

"When we came into office here, we believed that the information out there was correct, and that we were providing a service to the public, making it more convenient to participate," Mauro said. "I have never seen anything wrong with participation."

Culver, a Democrat, told reporters Thursday he will allow Mauro and Miller to decide whether an appeal should be filed. "I think we'll have to let the judicial process work itself



King



Culver



Mauro

out here," Culver said.

Miller said he was analyzing Staskal's ruling and he would explore an appeal to the Iowa Supreme Court or consider other action consistent with the decision.

"Our view is that although the Iowa English Language Reaffirmation Act requires all official forms to be in English, it does not prohibit government officials from providing materials in other languages as well," Miller said. "We argued that position to the district court. This principle can be particularly important in the area of voting rights of citizens."

King issued a statement praising Staskal's decision. "English is our official language. The English language unites us as a state and as a nation... I believe that, and I am thankful that our official English law has been upheld."

The ruling will have a chilling effect on voter registration for those whose first language isn't English, said Des Moines

immigration attorney Lori Chesser.

"It definitely is creating a barrier for them to voting," Chesser said. "I don't know how big of an effect that will be, but I think that will fall predominantly on people with less financial means."

The ruling could be taken as a sign against Spanish speakers' inclusion in every facet of government, said Jorge Espejel, the Mexican consul in Omaha.

"It's going to be affecting everything," Espejel said. "I think it's not a good decision for us. As you know, for the people who have become a U.S. citizen, it's better to know what they're signing in their own language. ... They are going to be afraid. It's not going to be easy for them."

Thom Bui said he's been teaching a voting class for older Vietnamese citizens in Des Moines. Part of the class includes his translation of voting forms from English to Vietnamese. The ruling basically nullifies those classes, said Bui, owner of Des Moines Asian & Latinos Foods, 1623 Sixth Ave.

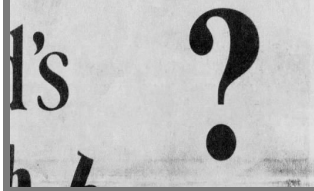
"There's some older folks, they like to vote but the problem is they don't know the language," Bui said. "Reading, they don't even know sometimes. That's how we help them out."

Craig Halverson of Griswold, state director of the Iowa Minuteman Civil Defense Corps, which opposes illegal immigration, said he was elated by the judge's decision.

"Our country has been English language all along. ... When I went to Greece, I learned how to speak Greek. But I am here, so I speak English. This shows that we still have some judges who will represent the American people," Halverson said.

Reporter Jennifer Jacobs contributed to this article.

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