An official publication of The American Legion National Headquarters

SPECIAL CONVENTION ISSUE 1991

THE DISPATCH

Monday, Sept. 2, 1991

English-only opposition talk down to America's majority

Stanley Diamond and his associates at U.S. English say their push to make English the official language of the United States Government is a concession to reality backed by most Americans.

"The bond of language is the strongest thing we have to unite our country. We respect all cultures that have settled in this country," Diamond told Legionnaires at a joint session of the Americanism and Children and Youth commissions.

"Eighty-two percent of Americans support us and for this to be a serious controversy means there is something very wrong with this country," he said, citing a recent national poll.

Diamond, a retired Army colonel and Legionnaire, is a founding member and chairman of U.S. English, organized in 1983 with 50 members and now a half-million strong. The San Francisco native refuted claims by U.S. English opponents who argue making English our official language is somehow anti-Hispanic. He said his group's goal is to promote unity, not divisiveness.

"English is critical to our survival," said Diamond. "The alternative is diverse groups promoting their own interests and pulling our very precious unity apart." Diamond said 18 states have passed bills supporting English as the official language, and three others have bills pending. U.S. English has led the fight to have election ballots and voting materials printed in English only.

The American Legion by resolution supports establishing English as the official language of the U.S. Government for the same reasons Diamond outlined. "We feel very strongly your resolution motivates all of us," he said.

He said the anti-Hispanic tag doesn't wash since three Hispanic-Americans are members of the U.S. English board. Diamond's wife is of Hispanic descent and their children are bilingual.

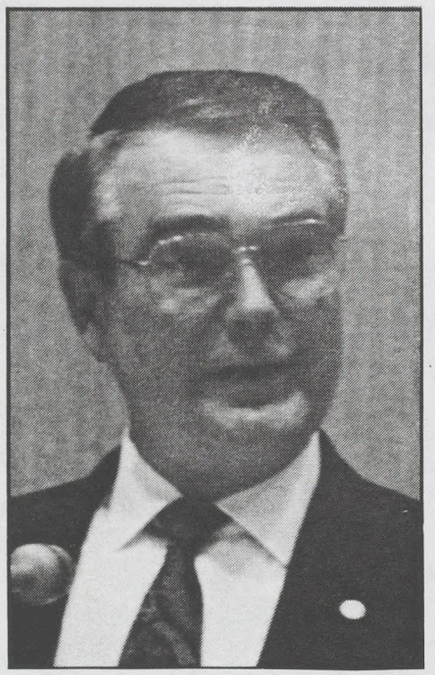
Last week, opponents protested a scheduled appearance at Arizona State University by Linda Chavez of U.S. English and the university cancelled the speaking engagement. "A university is supposed to be a forum for free expression," Diamond said.

He cited the importance of formally adopting English as Americans' official language by pointing to the political, religious and ethnic hatreds "official" languages have stirred in nations such as Yugoslavia, India and the crumbling Soviet Union.

Language always has been the single most powerful tool Americans have relied upon to do the nation's business, binding the melting pot nationalities from which America has drawn its unique strength. A survey of conventioneers revealed learning English does not repress a person's cultural identity.

Arizona Assistant Department Service Officer Bill Chambers grew up in western Nebraska and made friends with ethnic Germans and Russians because they could communicate in English. "People who came over here way back when had to learn to read and write English. If you want to get along, learn the language," he said.

Veterans TAP into job program



Thomas Collins

As Persian Gulf veterans return to the civilian ranks, many hope to resume the jobs they left behind when they were mobilized.

"The main challenge is to ensure that these veterans are aware of their re-employment rights," said Thomas Collins, assistant secretary for Veterans' Employment and Training with the Department of Labor.

Collins said that employers across the country did a good job in complying with re-employment laws during the Mideast crisis. A large number of National Guard and Reserve members were mobilized for the operation, which began in August 1990.

In a related matter, The American Legion conducted a survey among some of the leading firms around the nation to determine what kinds of benefits they offered their employees who were called up for service. Several companies indicated they helped make up the difference in pay and maintained benefits.

Collins, a retired Air Force fighter pilot who spent more than seven years as a POW in North Vietnam, said that his office also has spent a great deal of time implementing the Transitional Assistance Program (TAP), which is designed to help service people in finding employment and vocational assistance immediately after they leave the service.

TAP was established in the wake of the Pentagon's decision to reduce overall spending over the next five fiscal years, forcing many into early retirement.

"We hope to expand TAP in a partnership with the states," said Collins, who appeared before the National Economic Commission last week. "All levels of government need to be involved in the process of helping veterans adjust to civilian life."

Collins also took time out to present the Sam Murphy Award to Earnest Fender of Wyoming. The award is given annually to a Legionnaire who is active in veterans' employment issues.

The commission also heard from Leon Bechet, director of veterans' affairs with the Small Business Administration, and Jill Cochran, director of Education, Training and Employment, House Veterans Affairs Committee.

Navy faces cutbacks in funding , manpower

America's Navy must learn to stay afloat as it adapts to leaner budgets and force reductions in the next few years, according to a naval spokesman.

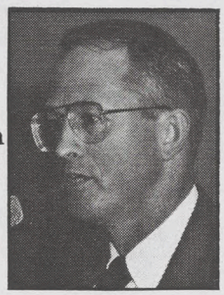
"The Navy's missions will not alter as these changes occur. Our duties will go on — we'll just have to find different ways to accomplish them," said Master Chief Bruce W. Baker, Naval Surface Force, U.S. Pacific Fleet.

All military forces must reduce their personnel 25 percent between fiscal years 1991 and 1995. The Navy must cut its own force from 590,000 to 500,000 during that time. Funding cuts also will force the Navy to scrap its goal for a 600-ship naval force, American Legion officials said.

"We're not going to sacrifice quality control as we downsize our forces," Baker said. "That's something we cannot afford to do. We must maintain a viable force."

Baker's comments were made at the National Security-Foreign Relations commissions forum last weekend. Also, Air Force Lt. Michael Coubrough, who was on Gen. Norman Schwarzkopf's command staff in Saudi Arabia, talked about his duties during the Persian Gulf War.

Delays in VA appeals less frequent



Charles Cragin

The Board of Veterans Appeals is working to shorten lead time in settling veterans' disability claims from its regional offices by boosting staff and entering the computer age, says board chairman Charles L. Cragin.

"I'm taking a Ford and telling the board to make a BMW," Cragin told members of the Veterans Affairs and Rehabilitation Commission last weekend. "Philosophically, we're headed in the right direction.

Cragin said word processing equipment was installed at two of the board's 21 "sections" at various locations, with six more sections coming on line by the end of the year. BVA has a support staff of 355 lawyers, physicians and administrative employees, and a $21 million budget for the current fiscal year.

Of the 4 million claims filed by veterans with VA each year, just 1 percent, or 46,000, are referred to the Board of Veterans Appeals for adjudication. Cragin said of that, one percent, a mere 2,400 cases, go to the U.S. Court of Veterans Appeals in Washington, D.C.

Cragin, appointed by President George Bush last February, said Legionnaires represent 20 percent of all appeal cases brought before the board. He said Legion service officers are knowledgeable advocates for veterans and vowed to listen to their suggestions as he promotes reform in his agency.

He told Legionnaires his primary goals are to ensure the board issues timely, quality decisions based on findings of fact and judicial precedents, and to strive for consistency in adjudicating cases. He said a recently-completed 40-page report outling new guidelines for handling cases will become effective Nov. 1.

He added BVA is working through Sprint to create a video teleconferencing network to reduce a veteran's travel time and expense.

Preparation guards against disasters

An ounce of preparation is worth the proverbial pound of cure, especially when disaster strikes in the home.

"It's important for families to be prepared for any type of emergency, whether its a natural disaster or in their own homes, such as a fire," said Wayne Blanchard, who heads the Family Protection Plan with Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). Blanchard was a guest speaker at the National Security Commission's Defense Civil Preparedness Committee.

Blanchard said that his program encourages volunteer groups such as The American Legion and local emergency agencies to work together in developing family safety programs.

"The bottom line is that you cannot expect the government or volunteer organizations to respond immediately after a disaster," Blanchard said. "You're often on your own."

Blanchard emphasized that families should know first-aid techniques and understand how to operate emergency equipment used in the home. He also said that families should be aware of how to set up or use emergency communications in the event or large disasters, such as earthquakes and hurricanes.

"One of the most stressful things in a disaster is being separated from your family, not knowing if they're hurt or alive," he said.

Since its inception in 1919, The American Legion has been a strong supporter of civil defense and disaster preparedness. Legionnaires led relief efforts in many areas in 1989 when Hurricane Hugo ravaged South Carolina and Puerto Rico, and the Loma Prieta earthquake near San Francisco.

The Legion commissioned a study on the effectiveness of FEMA in handling the two disasters. The conclusions were critical, in part, of the apparent slow responses in aiding disaster victims.

FEMA has a family shelter on display in the main exhibit hall at the convention center.

Spanish-American War vet has lifetime of memories

Nathan Cook and Commander Turner

Nathan E. Cook has witnessed and experienced a lot of firsts in his century-plus life. And he also has the distinction of achieving at least one noteworthy last.

Cook, 105, recently accomplished another first when he became a member of The American Legion, joining Phoenix Post 41.

Cook also has the distinction of an important historical last. He is the last surviving member of the Spanish-American War. A Navy veteran who had sea duty that took him all around the globe, he also served during the insurrection in the Philippines which officially brought the war with Spain to a close.

One of his memories of service included meeting two young ensigns at a naval hospital in Philadelphia —William Halsey and Chester Nimitz.

On the eve of the 1991 National Convention in Phoenix, National Commander Robert S. Turner took time to meet with Cook, who is said to be the second oldest living veteran in the United States.

Turner visited with Cook at his Phoenix VA Medical Center residence and presented him with the Legion's Distinguished Guest Medal.

"I was an enlisted man and you were an officer and it's proper that I salute you," Turner said, snapping to attention and saluting Cook.

Sacco gets top SAL command

Newly-elected National Commander Eugene L. Sacco has pledged to promote fund-raising for the American Legion's Child Welfare Foundation and increase volunteer efforts in VA hospitals as he leads The Sons of The American Legion in 1991-92.

Sacco, a member of SAL Squadron 276, Los Angeles, was elected to the top post Sunday morning.

By the time SAL members gathered in Phoenix for their 20th annual national convention, membership continued past 133,000.

The Californian's climb to National Commander in 1964, when he became a member. In addition to extensive experience at the squadron and detachment levels, Sacco served as National Vice Commander from 1981-82 and has served as National Executive Committeeman and vice chairman of the Rehabilitation Committee.

A senior collector with Home Savings of America, Sacco and his wife Susan reside in Pomona, Calif. the new commander operates a catering business.

Sacco, who also is a part-owner of a cookie company, has logged more than 2,000 hours as a volunteer worker in the Sepulveda VA Medical Center in southern California.

TODAY AT CONVENTION

- **POW-MIA Forum,** 9 a.m., convention center, Yuma 21-22, Plaza South. Program features:
- Carl W. Ford, Deputy Asst. Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs.
- Col. Earl Hopper, U.S. Army (Ret.), father of POW/MIA from Vietnam War.
- Millard "Mike" Peck, U.S. Army (Ret.), former chief of the Special Office for POW-MIA in the Defense Intelligence Agency.

THE AMERICAN LEGION
NATIONAL HEADQUARTERS
P.O. BOX 1055
INDIANAPOLIS, IN 46206

The American Legion