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Napolitano vetoes English-only bill

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PHOENIX - Arizona will not require that official actions be conducted only in English.

Gov. Janet Napolitano on Monday vetoed legislation that would have required that all "official action" of state and local agencies be conducted only in English. She said the measure is flawed.

"While I agree with the sponsors of this bill that non-English-speaking Arizonans should be encouraged to learn English, this bill does not accomplish that goal," the Democratic governor wrote.

She said the Legislature has not provided "appropriate adequate funding" to help schools teach the language to students classified by law as "English language learners." These are children who come from homes where English is not the predominant language and whose skills in using it are limited.

A federal judge has ordered the state to provide more cash to help these students read, write and speak English. But the Legislature has yet to enact such a plan.

"Under these circumstances, making English the only language for official action is contradictory at best," Napolitano said.

Gubernatorial press aide Jeanine L'Ecuyer acknowledged that Napolitano put no money into her own budget proposal this year to expand English-learners' instruction.

L'Ecuyer said the governor always believed that funding would be part of this session's negotiations with the Legislature. She said those talks have failed to materialize.

Monday's veto does not end the debate or the possibility that the measure eventually may become law.

The Arizona House of Representatives already has approved a virtually identical constitutional amendment. That measure, which also has passed a Senate committee, would put the issue on the 2006 ballot - exempt from any gubernatorial veto.

Rep. Russell Pearce, R-Mesa, the architect of both measures, said Arizona needs to cement English as the official language to promote national unity.

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