

WASHINGTON, DC (Today) - Rep. Mike Honda (D-CA) introduced a bill in the House of Representatives today – The Strengthen and Unite Communities with Civics Education and English Skills Act of 2009 – which helps new Americans integrate into the social and economic fabric of this country, through English language education, civics instruction and incentives for businesses to invest in the education of their non-English speaking employees.

“The Strengthen and Unite Communities with Civics Education and English Skills Act of 2009,” said Rep Honda, “recognizes the immense contribution immigrants make to the United States, and is a proactive and constructive step to address many of the questions surrounding the immigration debate. Over 19 percent of America speaks a language other than English at home and the Limited-English Proficiency population has doubled since 2000 and is increasing at a higher rate than the immigrant population. Despite these increases, there continues to be a 1-3 year waitlist for English literacy education in many areas, leaving employers and communities with limited resources to invest in their workforce.”

The Strengthen and Unite Communities with Civics Education and English Skills Act of 2009 provides community-based solutions that will accelerate the integration of newcomers through increasing resources for English language acquisition, civics, and basic education programs. This legislation provides businesses with tax credits if they provide English-as-a-second-language programs to their employees; incentivize teachers with tax credits when they teach ELL; and authorize more funding for such instruction.

Specifically, this legislation:

- * Ensures that our nation’s children and schools have adequate funding and resources for vital literacy programs for English language learners (80 percent of which are US citizens);
- * Provides incentives to employers and the private industry who offer adult education and ESL programs to employees.
- * Provides vital technical assistance and support to state and local communities seeking strong and productive strategies to respond to newcomers.
- * Requires the Office of Citizenship and Immigrant Integration in the Department of Homeland Security to further the integration of immigrants into their communities.
- * Contextualizes English literacy instruction in lessons on the rights and responsibilities of citizenship, naturalization proceedings, civic participation and U.S. history and government;