

March 18, 1999

TO THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES:

GOVERNOR'S VETO MESSAGE FOR HOUSE BILL 817

I am returning House Bill 817, "AN ACT TO AMEND SECTION 67-1-57, MISSISSIPPI CODE OF 1972, TO DELETE THE REQUIREMENT THAT AN APPLICANT FOR A PERMIT UNDER THE STATE LOCAL OPTION ALCOHOLIC BEVERAGE CONTROL LAW BE ABLE TO READ AND WRITE THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE; AND FOR RELATED PURPOSES," without my approval and respectfully present the following reasons for my veto:

This bill repeals the statutory requirement that an applicant for a permit under the State Local Option Alcoholic Beverage Control Law must have "the ability to read and write the English language." I believe that deleting that English language requirement would be an unwise public policy for our State and her people-- both citizens and immigrants.

For hundreds of years brave men and women from lands around the globe have journeyed to Mississippi and the rest of America in search of better lives for themselves and their children. Through their faith in God, their self-reliance, and their hard work, these families have built a great state and nation. That is the story of Mississippi and America for we are all immigrants or the children of immigrants.

Throughout that long process, one of the ties that bound Americans together was the English language. Learning to speak English--whether as a child or as an adult--helped to make the American dream a reality for millions. In the words of the distinguished author and former Executive Director of the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, Linda Chavez, "Rapid social and economic mobility has been the pattern of generations of immigrants; but the key has always been the learning of English."

It appears to me that the requirement in Mississippi Code Section 67-1-57 that an applicant for a liquor license be able to read and write English furthers our time-honored emphasis on the English language as a unifying force in American life. I can easily think of other policy reasons that support this statutory requirement. For example, the holder of a liquor license is ultimately responsible for completing and filing detailed Mississippi sales tax forms, all of which are in English.

This English language requirement has been part of our Code since the adoption of the Local Option Alcoholic Beverage Control Law. During all that time it appears to have aroused no challenge or controversy.

For all of these reasons I am reluctant to make this change, and I, therefore, veto this bill.

Respectfully submitted,

KIRK FORDICE  
GOVERNOR