

The US hasn't elected a bilingual president since FDR

By Vera Bergengruen
McClatchy Washington Bureau

WASHINGTON — The United States has not elected a president fluent in a language other than English in 72 years.

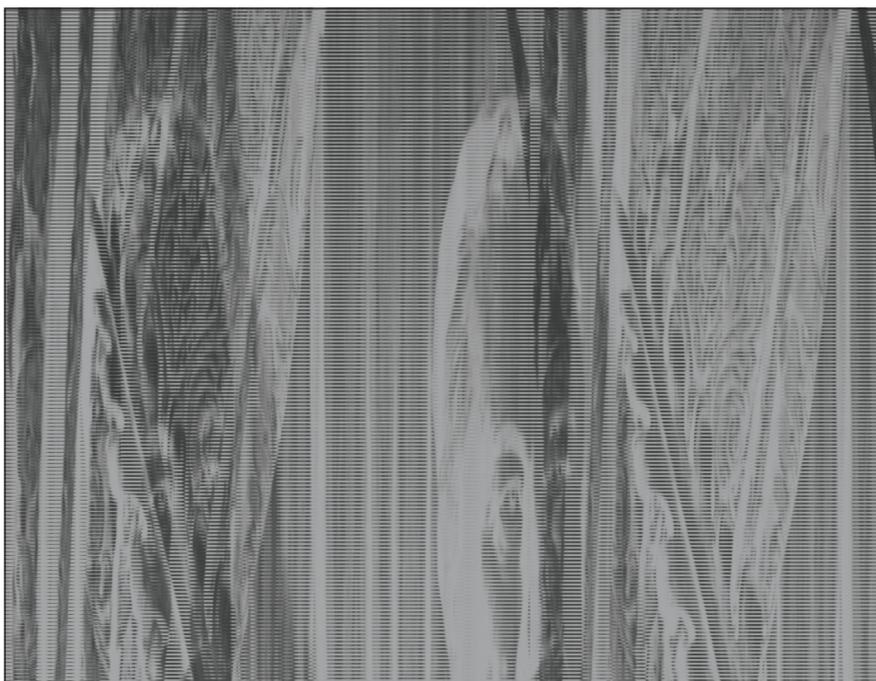
And in a field of 11 remaining presidential candidates, only two could change that: Jeb Bush and Marco Rubio.

The last president who spoke a foreign language fluently was Franklin D. Roosevelt, elected to his fourth term in 1944, who was taught French and German as a child.

Four of the nation's earliest presidents were multilingual, educated in classical languages such as Latin, ancient Greek, German, Italian and French.

In more recent history, the ability to easily communicate in another language has gone from asset to liability. Presidential candidates John Kerry in 2004 and Mitt Romney in 2012 found that speaking fluent French was turned against them by opponents who painted them as elitist — and even worse, European-style politicians.

Romney, who spent two years as a Mormon missionary in France, began a video for the 2002 Winter Olympics in Salt Lake City by introducing himself in one of the official languages of the international games: "Bonjour, je m'appelle Mitt Romney." The clip was used in a 2012 attack ad on behalf of former House Speaker Newt Gingrich, which compared it to a clip of John Kerry



President Franklin D. Roosevelt gives his first radio "fireside chat" in March 1933. Roosevelt was the last United States president to speak more than one language.

speaking French.

Another 2012 candidate for the Republican nomination, Jon Huntsman, a former U.S. ambassador to China and Utah governor, was slammed for speaking fluent Mandarin. A viral YouTube attack ad called him "China Jon" and the "Manchurian candidate" and included

clips of him speaking Mandarin, implying that voters should be suspicious of his motives. "American values or Chinese?" the ad said.

Now, the United States could have the chance to elect a bilingual president. Rubio, whose parents emigrated from Cuba, grew up speaking Spanish and

English in Miami.

Bush learned Spanish after meeting his Mexican-born wife, and has said that at home he speaks his wife's language more than English. He has been interviewed in the language countless times, confidently laying out policy position in accented but very clear

Spanish. One of Donald Trump's early attacks on the former Florida governor slammed him for speaking Spanish on the campaign trail.

"This is a country where we speak English, not Spanish," Trump said at the second Republican debate in September when asked about his comments that Bush "should really set an example by speaking English while in the United States."

But in an election year in which Hispanic voters have reached a record 27.3 million — a 40 percent increase since 2008, according to the Pew Research Center — Bush and Rubio's fluency could be a big advantage.

Millennials make up almost half of Latino eligible voters, according to Pew. While speaking Spanish may no longer be necessary to reach out to them the way candidates did for their parents' generation, fluency does show an understanding and acceptance of their culture.

Ted Cruz, the only other Hispanic candidate in the race, doesn't speak much Spanish and hasn't tried to in this campaign, though he did rattle off a Spanish phrase during his 2012 speech to the Republican National Convention.

Republican candidate Carly Fiorina lived in Italy and worked as an English teacher before going to business school, but she hasn't touted her Italian language skills.

While there has been a downward trend among U.S.

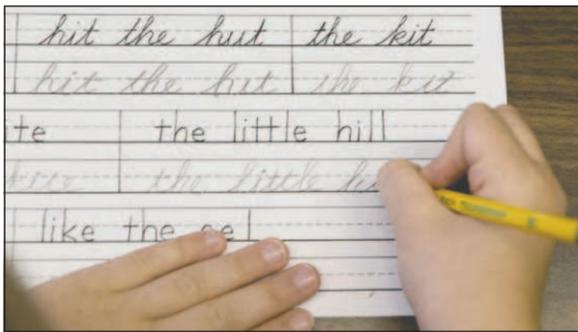
presidents when it comes to speaking foreign languages, the opposite is true for other world leaders. Many heads of state have to speak at least passable English in addition to their national language or languages, and a lot of them are proficient in one or two more of their neighbors' tongues.

The American education system has long lagged behind its international counterparts in encouraging second-language study.

"The United States may be the only nation in the world where it is possible to complete high school and college without any foreign language study, let alone with the mastery of another language," U.S. Education Secretary Arne Duncan said in 2010, calling it a "high-stakes issue."

"For too long, Americans have relied on other countries to speak our language. But we won't be able to do that in the increasingly complex and interconnected world. To prosper economically and to improve relations with other countries, Americans need to read, speak and understand other languages," Duncan said in a speech at the University of Maryland.

Only 25 percent of American adults say they speak languages other than English, according to Pew. Among those adults who are multilingual, 89 percent said they learned their language at home as children, while 7 percent said they learned it at school.



AP file photo

Cursive being left behind as teachers weight time, typing

By Kelsey Hamlin
The Seattle Times

OLYMPIA, Wash. — Upon hearing from a teacher that her son's handwriting needed some work, Suzi Allan sought help. She asked when his class would learn cursive writing. But like many schools, her son's doesn't teach it.

Allan was offered an online packet, if she wanted to teach her son at home.

No doubt about it, cursive is dying. Around the country, school districts have been dropping it, citing increasing demands on teachers' time, a need to focus on the Common Core and other state standards, and the fact that we're in the digital age.

Others argue, and not just out of nostalgia, that cursive is still necessary for some of the most important things: a signature, or the ability to read historical documents in their original form, like the Declaration of Independence.

The merits of teaching cursive have been debated nationwide, and the discussion reached the Washington state Capitol this session, if only briefly.

State Sen. Pam Roach, a Republican sponsored a bill to mandate cursive as in the state curriculum. But the bill didn't get a committee vote, and no one showed up to offer testimony.

"We're creating this chasm where the first generation can read our history and the other cannot," Roach said.

Roach was in disbelief, she said, when she handed her grandson a list of groceries written in cursive and he couldn't read it.

Fifteen states require cursive to be taught in their schools. In some state, the decision whether to include cursive instruction is made by individual school districts, sometimes by individual teachers.

That's what happened at Victor Falls Elementary in Bonney Lake, Wash., where Allan asked about penmanship lessons for her son.

"Cursive is no longer required," said Sarah Gillispie,

communications manager for the Sumner School District. Teachers can choose to teach it but "the system has moved away from handwriting to be more digitally based."

"It appears that Washington has almost always had a law about penmanship or handwriting," said Mary Paynton Schaff, a Washington state reference librarian, "but the state's interpretation of that term and what it represents has changed significantly since its original inclusion in the law by the first state Legislature."

Virginia Berninger, a University of Washington professor of educational psychology, was part of a team that undertook a five-year study of student development. They tested for relationships between types of writing and learning outcomes, as well as if those relationships differed by grade level.

So which writing form should be taught?

"We're arguing for a hybrid model," Berninger said.

But time is at a premium, a shared worry among teachers. How can they teach all three forms of writing: printing, handwriting and typing?

Ingraining a writing style doesn't take a lot of time. The study discovered that working on any form of writing for five to 10 minutes a day, maybe three times a week, is just as effective as dedicating a half-hour to an hour.

Berninger finds handwritten print connects to better reading skills because much of what is read is in that format. Studies show this is best taught from kindergarten to second grade.

Cursive specifically helps with spelling and forming sentences because of the way it connects letters together, making students perceive letters as whole-word units, Berninger said. Evidence gleaned from a study of 99 children between third and seventh grades showed it's best to teach cursive in third and fourth grade.

Typing correctly, using both hands without looking at them, strengthens communication between the left and right side of the brain, according to the study.

Tattoos and poker? Casinos woo millennials

By Philip Marcelo
The Associated Press

BOSTON — Casinos worried that millennials aren't getting into traditional gambling like their parents and grandparents are bringing in tattoo studios, mixed martial arts competitions and other offbeat attractions to attract a younger clientele.

In New England, where a regional casino war is afoot, Connecticut's Foxwoods is remaking one of its gambling floors — now christened "The Fox" — as a hip, fun scene in the sprawling 30-year-old casino complex.

The casino floor bar was redone in January to include a stage where a mostly female ensemble covers pop songs. Just off the gambling floor, a swank new tattoo studio/fashion retailer opened in the fall, not far from where Shrine, the casino's popular nightclub, is increasingly booking top electronic dance acts like DeadMau5 and Tiesto.

"It's kind of like the party place," says CEO Felix Rappaport. "It's really energized the casino floor."

In Rhode Island, the more modest-sized Twin River Casino removed 274 slot machines to make way for more poker and other table games favored by younger gamblers this past December. It's also been hosting mixed martial arts competitions at its event center, a nod to its popularity among younger fight fans.

Casinos are making the right move to draw in millennials if they're putting fewer slot machines on their floors in favor of table games, said Sunny Chopra, a 25-year-old from Falmouth, Massachusetts, as he considered betting at an electronic roulette wheel at Plainridge Park, a slots parlor and harness racing track in Plainville, Massachusetts.

"I've never played slot machines," Chopra said. "I'm not that old."

Casinos slow to pivot to millennials' preferences do so at their own risk, warned Steven Norton, a casino consultant based in Illinois.

Older members of the demographic are in their 30s, meaning they're entering their prime earning and spending years, he says. That's critical for an industry whose customers have historically been in their 40s and over.

"You want to develop good customers now so that we don't become the horse racing industry of the future, where all of our people have died off and we don't have any new blood coming in," Norton said.

It's too soon to determine whether any of these efforts will translate to sustained success with millennials, casino operators said.



STEVEN SENNE | AP photos

Patrons play poker in a designated area at Twin River Casino in Lincoln, Rhode Island. Casinos far from Las Vegas are experimenting with different ways to draw millennials. Twin River Casino removed 274 slot machines to make way in December for more poker and other table games favored by younger

But market research suggests new thinking is necessary, said Michael Mathis, president of MGM Springfield, a \$950 million resort casino expected to open in western Massachusetts in late 2018.

He pointed to a 2015 article by the Washington, D.C.-based Marketing Research Association suggesting current versions of slot machines are "widely viewed" by millennials as "antisocial, non-intuitive and generally boring."

To address the slot machine apathy, casinos in past years updated machines with more pop culture references, like Star Wars themed gambling machines. They also introduced electronic version of popular table games.

The newest trend? Electronic table games that feature live dealers.

Casinos are betting the blend of live table game action, easy slot machine-style play and lower minimum bets will appeal to younger and novice gamblers, says Carrie Nork Minelli, spokeswoman at Parx Casino outside Philadelphia, which unveiled a Shaquille O'Neal-themed electronic blackjack game where players are arranged "stadium-style" around a live dealer in late 2015.

Casinos are also increasingly launching "social casinos" — websites where players can play free, online versions of their slot machine and table game offerings for virtual credits that can't be converted to cash or redeemed.

The hope is that free online play generates paying customers at brick-and-mortar gambling halls, says Mario Maesano, senior vice president of marketing at Maryland Live, which launched a social casino just before Christmas.



Card dealer Wei Li (center left) deals a game of blackjack to patrons at Twin River Casino in Lincoln, Rhode Island.

At Connecticut's Mohegan Sun, where millennial-friendly nightlife and entertainment options like Vegas-style pool parties and rooftop concerts emerged almost four years ago, general manager Ray Pineault cautions the need to address the younger generation has to be balanced.

"You can't over emphasize millennials to the detriment of your other customers," he said. "They're still young and have less disposable income than their more established parents."

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