

Fresnan Grilled

4 Education Nominees Clear Rules Committee

By Sigrid Bathen
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Four governor's appointees to the strife-torn state Board of Education were recommended for confirmation Wednesday by the Senate Rules Committee after heavy grilling of Fresno City College administrator Robert Arroyo on his views of bilingual education.

A former Fresno school board member and advocate of strong programs for children who are not proficient in English, Arroyo was questioned intensively by Sen. Ray Johnson, R-Chico, an outspoken opponent of state-mandated bilingual education.

Arroyo responded in a clear, even voice to the senator's staccato series of questions. Johnson then surprised observers by voting to confirm Arroyo's appointment. "But let me tell you," Johnson warned, "I'll be watching you."

Also recommended for confirmation, after brief questioning by members of the committee, were second-term member and state board President Ann Leavenworth, a college government professor and former president of the Fresno school board who now lives in Santa Cruz; Josie Gray Bain, former associate superintendent of schools in the Los Angeles Unified School District; and Uvaldo Palomares, a San Diego educational consultant with wide experience in a variety of local and state educational programs.

Also seen as an advocate of strong bilingual programs in the schools, Palomares was subjected to none of the vitriolic questioning directed at Arroyo. Johnson was not present at the time Palomares was questioned.

Johnson, author of a bill to abolish bilingual education, frequently interrupted Arroyo when he attempted to answer the senator's questions. A student of languages, Arroyo holds a bachelor's degree in Russian, with a minor in Soviet studies, from the University of Illinois, and also studied Greek and Latin. He said he considers English as his first language, but he is also fluent in Spanish.

The board and the Legislature have been increasingly at odds on the methods of bilingual education, with English-only instruction fa-

vored by some bilingual education opponents like Johnson as the best way to teach Spanish-speaking students the "principal language" of California.

Under intensive questioning by Johnson, Arroyo explained that bilingual education is often misunderstood. He emphasized that such programs must be tailored to the needs of individual students, and that a rushed transition to English can do irreparable harm to a bilingual child's education.

"There are many, many methods and programs for teaching bilingual education, just as there are for teaching mathematics," Arroyo said. "There is enormous linguistic wealth in California, and it makes no sense for a child to forget his native language."

"I object to the notion that bilingual education is my reason for existence. It is one of a broad range of my experience. I have a great love for languages."

He said a student's transition into English should be accomplished "rapidly, but carefully," with respect for the child's native language. By ignoring the child's native language and culture, he said, "we are throwing away a wealth of human talent."

Also questioned about political and philosophical divisions among board members — divisions which have virtually paralyzed the policy-making body's ability to make decisions on many issues, including bilingual education — Arroyo said such differences have been exaggerated by the news media.

Arroyo was part of a four-member coalition on the board which sought to block the election of Leavenworth to a second term as board president. Arroyo said he nominated Palomares for the post — although both are new to the board — in an effort to break "intransigencies on both sides."

Responding to suggestions by Johnson that "there must have been a little coup going on," Arroyo said, "I would not deny there is a coalition, which I do not find distasteful. There are coalitions in the Legislature."

"But you don't normally make a freshman senator president pro tem," Johnson responded.