

Bilingual Ed Furor Mires State Board

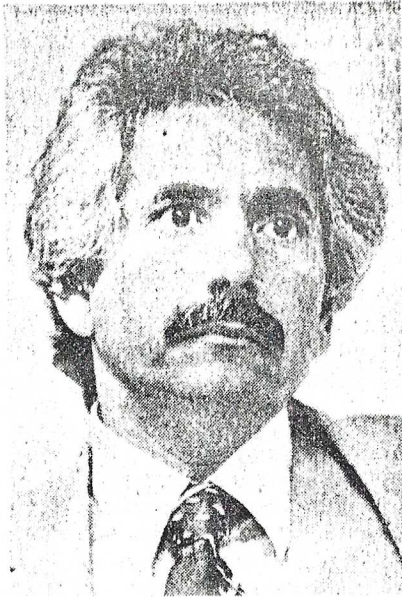
By Sigrid Bathen
Bee Staff Writer

When Robert Arroyo and Uvaldo Palomares attend their third meeting as members of the state Board of Education next month, they may legally discuss the many controversial issues before the board and vote on them. But they will do so without the Senate confirmation required for the governor's appointees.

And, if some state senators have their way, Arroyo and Palomares will not be confirmed as permanent members of the strife-torn board, which sets educational policy for California's public schools.

As the legislative session ended at midnight last Tuesday, the Senate leadership simply had not raised the matter of the two confirmations. Although two other board appointments — those of second-term board President Ann Leavenworth of Santa Cruz and Josie Gray Bain of Los Angeles — were approved by the Senate in the closing days of the session, Arroyo and Palomares were not mentioned, at least not publicly.

Sources close to the controversy say there was plenty of private talk — some of it overheard by reporters — among senators on the floor. One



Uvaldo Palomares

senator was heard grumbling about Arroyo and Palomares being "Chicano troublemakers."

Sen. Jim Nielsen, R-Woodland, sent an open letter to his colleagues in the Senate, saying the confirmations would be "premature" because of the appointees' views on bilingual education.

Nielsen pointed to Palomares' and Arroyo's decision to recall bilingual education regulations that were approved by the board last April. The controversial regulations were hotly debated among members of the board, which sets rules for local school districts. The rules were required by a law — debated with equal heat in the Legislature last



Lorenza Calvillo Schmidt

year — that emphasizes a rapid transition into English for students in bilingual programs.

"I actively supported this bill because provisions in it marked a direction in bilingual education that would encourage rapid transition to English rather than continued immersion in the dominant language," Nielsen wrote his colleagues in the Senate. "Two of the newly appointed members (Arroyo and Palomares) have attempted to stop the process.

"I am extremely concerned, and I am unclear as to the intent of the new members on this vital issue. Until this body has had an opportunity to assess the willingness of the



Robert Arroyo

state Board of Education to adhere to the legislative intent of the Senate, confirmation at this time would be premature."

Arroyo, a Fresno City College associate dean and former member of the Fresno school board, was intensively questioned by Sen. Ray Johnson, R-Chico, about his views of bilingual education during a Senate Rules Committee hearing on his confirmation earlier this month. However, Johnson concurred in the committee's recommendation that the four appointees be confirmed by the full Senate.

"I object to the notion that bilin-

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qual education is my reason for existence," Arroyo told the rules committee. "It is one of a broad range of my experience. I have a great love for languages."

A former professor of Chicano Studies at Fresno City College, Arroyo received his bachelor's degree in Russian, with a minor in Soviet studies, from the University of Illinois. He regards English as his primary language, is fluent in Spanish, and has studied Greek and Latin.

Under heavy questioning by Johnson, author of a bill to abolish bilingual education, Arroyo said bilingual education is often misunderstood. He said a student's transition into English should be accomplished "rapidly, but carefully." By ignoring the child's native language and culture, he said, "we are throwing away a wealth of human talent."

Palomares, who holds a doctorate in educational psychology from the University of Southern California and is a licensed clinical psychologist, heads the Human Development Training Institute, an educational consulting firm in San Diego. He said bilingual education is one of many issues he deals with as a consultant. Arroyo expressed irritation and Palomares confusion over the Senate's refusal to confirm their appointments, which have been rescheduled for Senate consideration in January. Under state law, the two may serve for one year without confirmation.

"I consider myself an educator,

not a politician," Palomares said in a telephone interview. "Nobody said anything to me at the rules committee hearing, then I hear all this rumbling. I'm confused more than offended. I'm really not important enough to warrant all this attention. "I may be a little pawn in a bigger chess game."

Arroyo blamed negative public sentiment about bilingual education as well as GOP irritation over the Democrat-backed reapportionment plan. He speculated that conservative efforts to block the appointments are part of moves to "get at the Democrats."

A legislative consultant with long experience in education, who requested anonymity, emphatically disagreed with Arroyo's assessment of the controversy.

"That is absolute fantasy," that source said. "If that is true, why did the Senate leadership allow it?"

He said the move to block the confirmations required the cooperation of Senate President Pro Tem David Roberti, a Democrat from Hollywood who is not a conservative.

The motion to confirm Leavenworth and Bain was made by Sen. Henry Mello, D-Watsonville, but made no mention of Arroyo or Palomares. A two-thirds vote is needed for confirmation of education board appointments, rather than the majority vote required for most appointments.

"There were some members who were negative (about Arroyo and

Palomares)," Mello said, "and some Democrats were reluctant to vote on the governor's appointments because they were upset with other things the governor has done."

Roberti could not be reached for comment. Sources close to the controversy said many legislators — both Republican and Democrat — are irritated by some of Brown's appointments to the state board, and by the conduct of the board itself, which has been increasingly beset by bitter political rivalries that have virtually paralyzed its ability to direct public education.

Before recent appointments, the consultant said, "there were some good solid people representing a wide diversity of constituents." Now, that source said, the board is heavily laden with "single-issue" appointees whose political motives and philosophical bias thwart passage of policies expressing "legislative intent."

In recent board discussions, Arroyo and Palomares appeared to side with strong bilingual advocates Lorena Calvillo Schmidt, who has long opposed the more moderate board majority on bilingual education.

Schmidt also reportedly led unsuccessful efforts to unseat Leavenworth as president and replace her with Palomares — a move supported by Palomares, Arroyo and board member Alan Seid, a Palo Alto psychiatrist. That move clearly played a part in legislative concern over Arroyo's and Palomares' appointments, and Arroyo was questioned in

some detail during the Rules Committee hearing about his part in a coup attempt against the Leavenworth administration.

In addition to serious disagreements over bilingual education, the board has been split over the equally controversial migrant education program, which seeks to provide educational opportunities to the children of migrant farm workers. The board has yet to agree on those regulations, despite the fact they were to have been delivered to the Legislature last April.

Schmidt, associate dean of students at the University of California, Irvine, recently appointed to her second term on the board by Brown, said in a telephone interview that she knew the chances of Palomares' and Arroyo's appointments being defeated on the Senate floor last week were "very high."

"I knew there was a move to have them rejected on the floor," she said, "and I'm pleased we were able to find a compromise. I fear if it had occurred now, the chances of their being defeated were very high — for a lot of different reasons, reapportionment among them. Bilingual education is involved to some extent."

Several legislative sources cited concern over an apparent voting alliance among the board's three Hispanic members on issues such as bilingual and migrant education, which affect large numbers of Hispanic children.