French Language Movement Depends Upon Independence

Gov. Edwin Edwards' move to consolidate the many overlapping state agencies is meeting with approval by the legislature and the citizens of Louisiana. How could it be otherwise, after so many years of do-nothing despite the proliferation of such agencies and commissions and boards all with dubious duties and only serving as a haven for non-working appointees?

Obviously, there can not be 100 per cent consolidation of every agency as originally proposed. One example is levee boards in which, as the governor pointed out, there are variances in surpluses and areas of responsibility. The solution here may have to wait the constitutional convention.

One agency that we believe should be left autonomous is the Council for the Development of French in Louisiana. We can expect that before the consolidation proposal is finally acted upon, there will be requests made to save many an individual's pet project. Too many of these could endanger the overall plan, but there are valid reasons why CODOFIL should be excluded from agency consolidation.

The Senate is of the same opinion. It voted 26-6 to let CODOFIL keep its independent status, although a floor leader asked that the bill be returned to the calendar for possible reconsideration.

In the short two years of its existence, the agency has worked wonders in removing the stigma that too many French-speaking Louisianians unfortunately believed to be attached to their mother tongue. This feeling has been replaced with pride in the French language and a resolution not only to preserve it but to perpetuate it in the schools and make Louisiana a bilingual state.

The benefits of such a goal are manifold. The educational status of our state, certainly not one to boast about over the years, will unquestionably be raised. Fluency in two languages leads to higher educational attainments in other fields. A good example of this is seen in the schools of Europe, where the majority of students learn two languages and academic standards are set at high levels.

On a more practical level, there would be added material benefits of tourism. Tourists from Canada and other French-speaking countries would be induced to visit a state where, besides the natural beauty and numerous attractions, would be found the lagniappe of a people who spoke the same tongue.

CODOFIL has reached its present successful stage because of its independence. It is doubtful whether the agency could be as aggressive and productive if it were lumped together with the commission under consideration. The commission consists of memorial cemetery groups, museums, and the like. With no intent of being facetious, it must be pointed out that CODOFIL is a living, viable agency, dynamic in its efforts to make Louisiana a bilingual state and thus enhance the state's educational status, heritage, pride, culture, and profits via tourism. It has no place with dormant, slow-moving paperwork agencies.

Legislation aimed at keeping CODOFIL autonomous and from being relegated to inferior status is not intended to be permanent. It only asks that CODOFIL continue to be an independent agency until 1975. By that time, the work begun will be well on its way and CODOFIL will go on moving forward of its own momentum.

That will be the time to consolidate. It's only a three-year wait, but that short period of time could determine the future of the French language in Louisiana.