Local legislator, cohorts, tussle over House bill to nix French

BATON ROUGE, La. (AP) - Rep. V.J. Bella of heavily French populated Vermilion Parish tried unsuccessfully to repeal an age-old law allowing legal documents to be written in French, saying such a law is no longer needed.

"What if we prohibited Italian restaurants from writing their menus in Italian," Rep. Sam Theriot of Abbeville said Monday, poking fun at Bella. "And in light of your district, how can you even consider suggesting repeal."

"I just want you to know that the Arab delegation is on your side, Mr. Theriot," said Rep. Ted Haik of New Iberia. He included in that delegation Reps. John John of Crowley and Bo Ackal of New Iberia.

Rep. Manny Fernandez of Chalmette said the Spanish delegation, including himself and Rep. Ron Gomez of Lafayette, also "join the French in turning away this outrage."

Rep. Louis Dischler got into the act as a one-man German delegation with a French grandfather "who would roll over in his grave if I didn't get up here to protest. Mr. Bella, shame on you."

Mike Thompson, a representative from Lafayette, got a little more serious, saying repeal would mean that people in his district who can speak only French would be hampered by repeal.

"Many wills to this day are still con- corted in the French language because that's the only language some people speak," he said. "Many would consider it an insult to ban them from using their native language. We went through a period years ago when kids were punished at school for speaking French on the school grounds. We're through with that."

Thompson's comments angered Bella, who said even without the statute on the books, legal documents could be written if

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