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LANGUAGE INDUSTRY LEADERS LOBBY CONGRESS

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WASHINGTON, DC -- On Wednesday, leaders from the language service industry gathered on Capitol Hill to sound the alarm over new, “disruptive” employee classification regulations that threaten to upend the \$45 billion-per-year industry’s business model.

Over 50 language industry professionals attended the Association of Language Companies’ (ALC) policy summit at the Center for Applied Linguistics to strategize an industry-wide response to the recent California Supreme Court ruling which narrowed the definition of who can be classified as an “independent contractor.” All agreed that specialist-industries like the language industry have reasons to be worried.

Language service companies (LSCs) traditionally utilize a mix of independent contractors and regular employees to complete specialized language service projects, like translation and interpreting. With the *Dynamex* ruling, the court set a new *de facto* standard that all workers are classified as an “employee” unless they meet a three pronged “ABC test.” The added cost of providing full benefits to every single contractor would likely put many California LSCs in danger of going out of business, or force relocation of operations to another state or country.

“In our view, the ruling was clearly meant to target businesses within the ‘gig-economy,’” said Rick Antezana, the President of ALC. “But there is a critical distinction between the gig economy and what professional translators and interpreters do, which we refer to as the ‘knowledge economy.’”

“The gig economy”, Antezana says, “differs fundamentally from the knowledge economy in that “gig jobs” are often commoditized repetitive assignments with a low barrier of entry for non-specialists.” The typical example would be drivers for car-sharing services like Uber, or food delivery services like Grubhub. Knowledge jobs on the other hand, while typically temporary, exclusively admit highly-trained and educated professionals whose success is dependent upon the highest quality of work. Examples include State Department contractors or ER interpreters.

“Most people with a driver’s license can be part of the gig economy, but to be a professional linguist takes years of education and training. Unfortunately, the court cast a very wide net in their ruling. That may cost us.”

After a round of morning sessions on the potential effects of *Dynamex*, the group brought their message to their Members of Congress on Capitol Hill.

The message was clear: this shake-up could be more than just a disruption for [the 4th fastest-growing industry](#) in the US, with a steady growth projection of [over 6% per annum](#). Over 80% of that revenue comes from around 6,000 small businesses. And the vast majority of those companies are located in California.

But the economic impact will be felt well outside of state lines, ALC members say. The fact that language service companies are found in almost every sector of the economy—from medical to government, technology to legal, education to finance-- means that this decision has major economic implications for hospitals, courts, schools and universities, government offices, military bases and others who depend on language services.

“We’re focused on looking forward,” said Antezana. Two additional advocacy events are scheduled in 2019. The first is January 17-19 in Huntington Beach California, the location of the 2019 ALC UnConference. The second is May 1-4 in Washington DC during the ALC’s Annual Conference. “We’ll be back on the Hill in May to do our part in making sure there is a solution that’s amenable to all sides.”

The Washington Leaders Forum event was organized by JNCL-NCLIS, in partnership with ALC.

The ALC is a national trade association representing businesses that provide translation, interpretation, localization, language testing, and language training services in the United States. Their members help others to communicate across linguistic and cultural barriers, providing services from translation and interpretation, to localization and language training. More information can be found at www.alcus.org

JNCL-NCLIS represents over 125 national, regional and state organizations encompassing virtually all areas of the language field: the major and less-commonly taught languages, including English and English as a second language, bilingual education, the classics, linguistics, exchanges, research, technology, and translation. More information can be found at www.languagepolicy.org.