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BILINGUAL EDUCATION

The advocates of Federal spending as the solution for all problems took a beating the other day. They conducted a survey of their "clients," and their clients said in effect, "Get lost!"

The question posed to hundreds of parents of Spanish-speaking and Vietnamese-speaking children in Montgomery County, Maryland, was, "Do you want your public school instruction to be given in your native language, split between your native language and English, or in English?" The survey-takers were stunned when 99% said, "English!"

The bureaucrats, who see at stake their jobs in the Federally-financed program called ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) are "disturbed" by the results of the survey. They are now trying to say that maybe the parents "didn't understand," and that the survey was "small" and "preliminary."

Indeed, the parents do understand the program better than those who have a vested interest in Federal spending for foreign language instruction in the public schools. The parents want their children to hurry up and get into the mainstream of America.

They know that the best way to do this is to plunge them into an English-language school where they have to learn English fast in order to survive. That's the route by which millions of foreign immigrants have passed through the melting pot and entered the mainstream of America.

Chi Luu is the most recent dramatic example of how immigrant children can learn so quickly. He fled Vietnam at the bottom of a small boat only six years ago, arriving in America not knowing a word of English. This month he graduated as valedictorian from City College of New York with a 3.98 grade point average. He ranked first among the 1,700 graduates and will enter MIT in the fall under a graduate scholarship.

Do you think it ever crossed Chi Luu's mind, upon arriving at our shores, to file a "national origin discrimination" suit complaining that he was denied his "human rights" because he was not provided with free high school classes in his native Vietnamese? Yet, the Federal Government is spending hundreds of millions of dollars on our so-called

"bilingual education" program.

There is nothing "bi" about the program. Language instruction is now given in 70 different languages, including Aleut, Navajo, Cambodian, Haitian, Arabic, Russian, and a score of nationalities I never heard of. Since 80% of the program involves Spanish-speaking children, "bilingual education" is a sort of Affirmative Action program for Hispanics engaged to teach the classes.

Like many liberal Federal spending programs, the idea passed Congress in 1968 without debate or public discussion and with a modest appropriation of only $7.5 million for a "pilot project" under Title VII. Meanwhile, the Legal Services Administration filed suit on behalf of 1,800 Chinese-speaking students in San Francisco, claiming they had been denied special instruction in English.

The Office for Civil Rights in the Department of Health, Education and Welfare got into the act, asserting the right of the plaintiffs not to be discriminated against on the basis of national origin. In its decision in Lau v. Nichols, the Supreme Court adopted the position that immigrants have the right to instruction for "linguistic deficiencies."

The Supreme Court said that some remedy was needed for the problem, but didn't say what. The Chinese children in the Lau case could have been given extra instruction in English. But the Office for Civil Rights took the position that they had to be taught mathematics, geography, history, and other academic subjects in Chinese.

The civil rights militants then started threatening cutoffs of Federal funding from schools that didn't offer instruction in the native languages of all immigrants, no matter how few might be in the area or how costly this might be to the school district. Naturally, Congressional appropriations increased to hundreds of millions of dollars per year as the bureaucrats expanded their programs.

Just as great oaks from little acorns grow, expensive Federal programs grow from little "pilot projects." Now the bureaucrats are talking about "maintenance" of the immigrants' native tongue rather than merely about a transition to English. Many people believe that the "bilingual education" actually prevents immigrants from learning English, which is the contrary of the original intention.