Bush Should Reject Clinton's Wrong Policies

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Congress and the Bush Administration should clamp down on the federal bureaucracies that are trying to turn America into a bilingual nation. Various departments are not only doing this but are punishing people and businesses who don't cave in to their high-handed demands, even when not authorized by any law. This policy got underway bigtime in August 2000 when President Bill Clinton tried to make new law with his Executive Order 13166 directing federal agencies to offer all government services in foreign languages. In the last hours of the Clinton Administration, Janet Reno and other executive department heads issued implementing regulations.

But the U.S. Supreme Court cut the ground out from under Clinton's Executive Order by ruling in Alexander v. Sandoval in April 2001 that no one has a constitutional or civil right to demand government benefits in a language other than English. The High Court rejected the argument that someone can sue for foreign-language services by charging discrimination under the "national origin" category of the Civil Rights Act.

Martha Sandoval had demanded that Alabama give her a driver's license test in Spanish. She had lived in the United States ten years but never learned English.

The Bush Administration should have immediately rescinded Clinton's unauthorized Executive Order. Instead, it issued new regulations to continue Clinton's anti-English-language policy.

Rep. Ernest Istook (R-OK) tried to delay enforcement of this Executive Order and its regulations until the costs could be ascertained. But on October 11, 2001, 63 Republicans joined 198 Democrats and one Independent to kill Istook's amendment.

Meanwhile, the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) has been harassing businesses that want their employees to speak English in the workplace, and the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) has been harassing doctors and hospitals to force them to hire translators in order to provide their services in foreign languages. No law requires this nonsense and Congress should stop it forthwith.

EEOC forced an already bankrupt company, Premier Operator Services of DeSoto, Texas, a family-run business that had provided operator services for long-distance carriers, into a $700,000 settlement because of its rule requiring its employees to speak English while on the premises.

EEOC forced a $2.44 million settlement of a class action lawsuit against the University of Incarnate Word, a private university in San Antonio, on behalf of 18 Hispanic housekeepers who refused to speak English while on the job. Some of them were born in the United States but continued to speak Spanish.

It's no surprise that these costly settlements have been followed by hundreds of complaints filed with EEOC against English-only policies.

HHS wants every recipient of federal funds, including doctors who treat Medicare or Medicaid patients, to be prepared to pay for translation services, oral and written, in all 6,800 languages spoken around the world. Friends and relatives are not considered sufficient to satisfy the translation requirement.

Professionals must be hired, and the cost must be paid by the doctor or hospital. The translator's fee is often higher than the Medicaid reimbursement for the medical service provided.

The University of Utah medical center publishes health brochures in 24 languages and has already spent over $400,000 for translation services. Yet it's still the target of a federal investigation.

The whole world is moving to the adoption of English as the global language of politics, commerce, and travel. So why are we allowing bureaucrats to undermine English usage in the United States?

Taiwan's Premier has just promised to make English that nation's second semi-official language. Minister of Education Huang Jung-tsuen is so eager for his entire nation to learn English that he wants to start "pre-schoolers learning English" because "English is the language which can connect Taiwan to the world."

America's immigrants should realize that English is the language that can connect them to mainstream America, academically, economically and culturally. They should reject the ploys of the politicians who discourage this by toadying to them in their native language and, instead, take a lesson from one of America's most successful immigrants.

Billy Wilder, one of the all-time great Hollywood film makers, fled from Hitler and came to America in 1933. He didn't know a word of English when he arrived.

Wilder avoided the cafes and homes where other refugees met to drink coffee and speak German. Instead, he lay on his bed in his rented room and listened to the radio so he could learn 20 new English words every day, and he quickly made himself into an American.

Unlike his friends who secretly hoped they could return to Germany after Hitler was defeated, Wilder said, "I never had that hope. America was my home. I had a clear-cut vision: This is where I am going to die."

Billy Wilder became a fabulous success in America and made dozens of movies that will be enjoyed forever. We want immigrants who want to learn English and become Americans.