The Liberals Like Language Apartheid

Sept. 6, 2000

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"Surprising," "remarkable," "totally unexpected" were the superlatives with which the New York Times reported the rise in second- grade test scores in California two years after the passage of Proposition 227, ordering the public schools to terminate Bilingual Education. The bureaucrats and payrollers whose jobs depend on the Bilingual Boondoggle had predicted "catastrophe" because they didn't believe that little kids could learn English so fast.

Bilingual education is a tax-paid multi-billion-dollar bureaucracy whose real purpose is to provide jobs for an army of Spanish-speaking payrollers. There never was any research that proved it is the way to teach English to immigrants, and now the proof of its failure is obvious.

Bilingual education always was a misnomer because it doesn't teach two languages; instead, it keeps immigrant children languishing in Spanish-speaking classes for six years or more, often failing to graduate. The new test scores are a personal vindication of Silicon Valley entrepreneur Ron Unz, who organized and largely financed Prop 227 in 1998.

California second graders classified as limited in English increased 9 percentage points in reading scores over the last two years, rising from the 19th percentile in national rankings to the 28th. In mathematics, the same students increased 14 points, from the 27th to the 41st percentile.

Some bilingual advocates are busy trying to deny the facts, but Ken Noonan, the superintendent in Oceanside (near San Diego) who strictly implemented the new law with his 5,000 Spanish-speaking students, discovered that they learned how to read English within nine months! That's better than a lot of public school children who never had a foreign-language problem in the first place, and far better than children in neighboring districts where the administrators skirted compliance with Prop 227 and now claim that other factors must explain the difference in scores.

Yes, there is an additional factor to explain Oceanside's success story: Noonan also started a phonics

reading program, the common-sense system that the public school establishment has been fighting for years. Phonics is essential to learning how to read, and it's especially helpful to Spanish-speaking kids because Spanish is a completely phonetic language.

Noonan's earlier opposition to Prop 227 was colored by his personal experience with his Mexican mother who never learned English. It took the shock treatment of Prop 227 to teach him that 5-, 6- and 7- year-olds can really "learn formal English, both oral and written, far more quickly than I ever thought they would," and, of course, far more easily than adults.

Bilingual education was an expensive tax-financed remedy for a non-existent problem. America didn't suddenly develop a problem with non-English-speaking immigrants in the 1970s.

Millions of non-English-speaking immigrants had been coming to America for a couple of centuries. Sometimes the older generation, like Mr. Noonan's mother, never learned English, but when their children went immediately into schools where only English was spoken, they learned English rapidly and learned to speak it without a foreign accent.

That is called the immersion method. It worked just fine until liberal busybodies, with too much tax money at their disposal, decided to experiment on vulnerable immigrant children whose parents didn't know how to combat the system.

Of course, immigrants who come to America want their children to speak English! They know that speaking English is the sine qua non of becoming an American.

Speaking English is the entry key to American cultural, social, academic and economic life. Failing to teach immigrant children English as their primary language creates a language apartheid that results in a permanent, non-English-speaking subculture, and that is unfair to everyone.

The liberals who sit astride tax-funded bureaucracies are like the German philosopher Friedrich Hegel who, when told by a contemporary that his theories did not comport with the facts, replied, "So much the worse for the facts." On August 11, President Clinton in Los Angeles issued Executive Order 13166 to proclaim the inability to speak English as a protected civil right.

Our laws require that naturalized citizens must demonstrate "the ability to read, write, and speak words in ordinary usage in the English language." But Clinton's EO 13166 orders every federal agency to "develop and implement a system by which LEP [Limited English Proficiency] persons can meaningfully access [taxpayer-provided] services."

Any agency not complying with this EO will be found guilty of discriminating on the "basis of national origin" in violation of Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

Clinton thus makes it the job of the government to seek out all those who can't be bothered to learn English and make sure that they get their food stamps, welfare checks, and other taxpayer-paid benefits. Will this new federal outreach also include providing ballots for the November election with subtle innuendoes that these "services" depend on voting for Al Gore?