

NABE Honors Enemy of Bilingual Education

By James Crawford and Stephen Krashen

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Like many of our colleagues, we have been saddened by the decline of the National Association for Bilingual Education over the past year, especially its retreat from advocacy for English language learners. But we are truly stunned by NABE's decision to honor [Ruben Navarrette Jr.](#) by inviting him to present the keynote address at its Feb. 7-10 conference in San Jose.

Navarrette, a syndicated columnist, has built his career by attacking bilingual education. He started out in the 1990s as a media consultant for [Ron Unz](#), the sponsor of anti-bilingual initiatives adopted in California, Arizona, and Massachusetts. Navarrette went on to work for various newspapers but never forgot his English-only roots. Writing in support of Unz's ballot measures, he denounced bilingual classrooms as "[linguistic prisons](#)" where children don't learn English but are trapped, against their parents' wishes, by a school bureaucracy that's "addicted to the additional funding provided for bilingual students." (Several of his major works, including "[Bilingual Programs Failing](#)" and "[It's Time To Dismantle Bilingual Education](#)," can be accessed at Unz's [English for the Children](#) web site.) He has also specialized in journalistic assaults on Hispanic leaders, civil-rights advocates, "racist" liberals, and supporters of public education. Not surprisingly, Navarrette has been a [big booster of the No Child Left Behind Act](#). But above all, he has distinguished himself as an enemy of everything NABE stands for -- or, at least, used to stand for -- and as a hero to anti-bilingual crusaders everywhere.

The excerpts below make it clear that Navarrette has not changed his position on bilingual education. Why is NABE rewarding him with the honor of presenting the keynote speech at its conference?

The World According to Ruben Navarrette Jr.

"We have an ugly and indeed racist system now in place in which a whole category of students are being exploited because of their race. That's not new. What is new is that those doing harm aren't called racists. They're called liberals and they support bilingual education." -- [Arizona Republic, Feb. 21, 1999](#)

"The lengths to which the education bureaucracy, and its supporters in government, will go to avoid being held accountable for the performance of students in bilingual classes should dispel once and for all the misperception that bilingual classes represent something done for Hispanics when, in reality, they are something done to Hispanics." -- [Dallas Morning News, Dec. 14, 2001](#)

"A lifelong activist, [LULAC President Hector] Flores, 62, supports affirmative action and bilingual education; I oppose both. He opposes vouchers; I think they're a swell idea.

He is a fan of the late United Farm Workers President Cesar Chavez; in college, I found myself in a nose-to-nose shouting match with Mr. Chavez after accusing him of growing out of touch with the farm-worker masses." -- [Dallas Morning News, Dec. 16, 2004](#)

"The Thernstroms also happen to be two of my favorite people. That's not something I could have said a couple of decades ago, when -- because of their opposition to racial preferences and bilingual education -- I might have considered them hostile to minority progress. Only later would I realize I had that backward, and that it was these sorts of programs -- and others cooked up in the laboratory of liberalism -- that kept minorities from progressing." -- [San Diego Union Tribune, Nov. 16, 2005](#)

"It also wouldn't hurt to do away with bilingual education and teach children in English. Accomplish all that, and you won't have to worry about throwing out tests because students will pass them." -- [San Diego Union Tribune, May 14, 2006](#)

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