

## **OBEMLA's Commitment to Endangered Languages**

Dang T. Pham, Deputy Director, OBEMLA

It is very good for me to get out of Washington at this point and to come to Arizona. This is my first time in Flagstaff, but it is the fourth time in Arizona. I think as a former refugee from Viet Nam, I understand clearly what the issue is when your language is not being used every day; I know very well that sense of losing something. So it is natural and proper that I have a commitment and that I work for the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Bilingual Education and Minority Languages Affairs (OBEMLA), which shares my commitment to help American Indians to regain and preserve some type of education in their own language.

Before I get into my remarks, I would like to bring the greetings of the White House, of Secretary Riley of the Department of Education, Dr. Eugene García, and the entire staff of OBEMLA.

On October 20, 1994, President Clinton went to Framingham, Massachusetts, to sign into law the Improving America's Schools Act of 1994, which people sometimes refer to as the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). You should know that ESEA was passed by the House of Representatives on September 30 by a large majority vote, 262 to 132, and finally in the Senate, 77 to 20. With only 56 Democrats in the Senate, we nevertheless got 77 votes, which shows tremendous efforts by both sides of the aisle to prove to you that the administration's education bill is not just a Democrat issue or a Republican issue, but an American issue. I think that set the whole tone of the ESEA, which now becomes law.

*[The Deputy Director then launched into a discussion and explanation of the new ESEA, and especially the new connections between Title I (formerly Chapter I), Title VII (Bilingual Education), and Title IX (Indian Education). The changes shift much more responsibility to the states and local schools and communities, loosening direct control and long-distance decisions from Washington. However, the changes have little effect on our concerns for indigenous language stabilization. The Deputy Director concluded with an interesting account of his own history in this country, including his studies at Boston College, his work for Governor Dukakis in Massachusetts, his involvement in the governor's campaign for the presidency in 1988, and his recruitment in 1991 by Governor Clinton of Arkansas for his campaign in 1992. Following are his concluding remarks, which Dr. Joshua Fishman immediately recognized as making this evening's program "an historic occasion."]* Dr. Pham continued:

On behalf of OBEMLA, we are very proud to be part of this university's efforts to revitalize the indigenous languages of Indian communities, and we assure you that we certainly have a commitment to make this happen. Remember, this is the first time ever in the history of the Department of Education that something like this has happened.