

Seven Words You Can Never Say at HHS

The recent announcement of the seven words you can never say at Health & Human Services (HHS) reminded me of the late George Carlin's routine, "Seven Words You Can Never Say on Television" (1). Policy analysts at the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) in Atlanta were told of the list of forbidden words at a meeting last Thursday, December 14, with senior CDC officials who oversee the budget, according to an analyst who took part in the 90-minute briefing (2). The forbidden words are "vulnerable," "entitlement," "diversity," "transgender," "fetus," "evidence-based" and "science-based." In some instances, the analysts were given alternative phrases. Instead of "science-based" or "evidence-based," the suggested phrase is "CDC bases its recommendations on science in consideration with community standards and wishes," the person said. In other cases, no replacement words were immediately offered.

This is the latest attempt by government departments to distort fact. As an example, the New York Department of Education tried a similar tactic in 2012 (3). Among the words were dinosaur, birthday, and Halloween. Some of the reasons given were that dinosaurs suggest evolution which creationists might not like; Halloween was targeted because it suggests paganism; and birthday because it isn't celebrated by Jehovah's Witnesses; The Bush administration waged a similar war on climate change (4). That war has been extended by the Trump Administration as part of their war on any science that the Trump administration does not like (5). Science that does not fit Trump's agenda or ideology is insulted or called "fake news". Climate change is fact and not a hoax dreamed up the Chinese as Trump has claimed (6).

Mr. Carlin is not alive to make fun of the latest war on free speech but perhaps others will take up Carlin's calling. Seven words they might suggest be banned include stupid, moron, fool, clown, weird, dumb and incompetent-all frequently used by President Trump on Twitter (7). The CDC is a scientific organization. Appointing unqualified politicians to head scientific organizations to carry out a political agenda is like mixing oil and water. No matter how times you say it, the water will not float on top of the oil. Science relies on a precise vocabulary and is not Republican or Democrat, conservative or liberal, or right or left. In my view, those that banned these words made an indirect attack on fact and should be "ashamed" (7).

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