

FREEDOM FROM RELIGION *foundation*

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Sent via U.S. Mail

Eric D. Hargan
Acting Secretary and Deputy Secretary
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
200 Independence Avenue, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20201

Dr. Brenda Fitzgerald
Director, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
1600 Clifton Rd
Atlanta, GA 30329-4027 USA

Re: Banning or discouraging the use of certain words in CDC budget

Dear Mr. Hargan:

We are writing on behalf of the largest association of freethinkers (atheists, agnostics) in North America over concern about Center for Disease Control's attempt to restrict thought by restricting language used in budget proposals. The Freedom From Religion Foundation has more than 30,000 members nationwide. FFRF works to uphold the constitutional principle of the separation of between state and church, and educates the public on matters relating to nontheism.

According to many news reports, CDC staffers compiling the budget were given a list of words to avoid, including "vulnerable," "entitlement," "diversity," "transgender," "fetus," "evidence-based" and "science-based."

The ban was not placed in the interest of brevity or clarity. In fact, the suggested alternatives are more verbose. Rather than "science-based" or "evidence-based," the suggested replacement is: "CDC bases its recommendations on science in consideration with community standards and wishes."

To suggest CDC bases its recommendations on science "in consideration with community standards and wishes" is far worse than the ban on words in the budget. Thought control and basing science on "community standards" violate CDC's "Pledge to the American People," including CDC's pledge to "provide an environment for intellectual and personal growth and integrity" and to "base all public health decisions on the highest quality scientific data that is derived openly and objectively," and to "place the benefits to society above the benefits to our institution." CDC cannot be "on the cutting edge of health security" or "put science into action" if it is rewriting the definition of scientific inquiry to mean propitiating the Religious Right. This smacks of what notoriously happened to science in the Soviet Union with yhr political suppression of research, scientists and the promotion of Lysenkoism.

Your misguided policy is anti-intellectual, compromises integrity, is not based on objective or open scientific data, and places the benefits to your institution above those to society — clearly intending to ingratiate the CDC with the Religious Right.

That the agency tasked with studying and controlling diseases should ban anything that is evidence- or science-based in any of its documents or policies is Orwellian. Science does not comport with political ideology or “community standards or wishes.” It follows the evidence. Language should, too.

George Orwell understood that people could be controlled by controlling language. His novel, *1984*, features a language entirely controlled by the government: “Newspeak.” As his protagonist explains, “The whole aim of Newspeak is to narrow the range of thought.”

“Political language . . . is designed to make lies sound truthful and murder respectable, and to give an appearance of solidity to pure wind,” Orwell wrote in *Politics and the English Language* (1946). CDC’s pursuit of science should not be infected by this political virus.

The great science communicator and astrophysicist Neil deGrasse Tyson has said, “the good thing about science is that it's true whether or not you believe in it” (Real Time with Bill Maher, Feb.4, 2011). He later explained that science is what made America great and why that was so. Tyson’s explanation bears repeating:

How did America rise up from a backwoods country to be one of the greatest nations the world has ever known? We pioneered industries. And all of this required the greatest innovations in science and technology in the world. And so science is a fundamental part of the country that we are.

But, in this, the 21st century, when it comes time to make decisions about science, it seems to me people have lost the ability to judge what is true and what is not. What is reliable and what is not reliable. What you should believe, and what should you not believe.

And when you have people who don’t know much about science standing in denial of it and rising to power, that is a recipe for the complete dismantling of our informed democracy. (“Science in America,” April 19, 2017)

The pursuit and language of science should be free from partisan and ideological taint. In fact, a prohibition against “faith-based” science would be appropriate. We look forward to hearing that this Orwellian ban has been lifted.

Very truly,



Dan Barker and Annie Laurie Gaylor

Co-Presidents

DB/ALG:als