

## Republican Perspective

19 April 2017

by John Littig

### You Won't Believe This One

In the fitness center of Ottawa's Carleton University, someone complained to the gym management that she found that the presence of a scale triggers her anxiety. She requested the scale be removed. Presumably, the scale traumatized her by reminding her that she is fat.

Now you would assume that management would simply tell her not to use the scale. Not good enough. Apparently her anxiety was triggered not by actually using the scale but by its mere presence within her view.

So---and you won't believe this part---they actually *removed the scale* so that this one gym user would not be emotionally distressed. Don't stop reading---this is not a joke.

Of course a controversy erupted, because there are apparently still some sane members of the campus community. There has been a backlash and ridicule of the decision to remove the scale. One student suggested banning mirrors because they could be equally distressing. Another suggested banning calculators because they reminded him he is flunking a math class. One social media post summarized: "Are you for real, Carleton? What a sick joke."

Stepping away from the absurdity for a moment, let's consider the merits of this decision: how it will benefit the afflicted student. Presumably, she will go on to live in a world beyond ivied Carleton. There she will doubtless encounter other anxiety-triggering events and objects. Will the drill sergeant, the employer, the highway patrolman, or anyone else in the real world beyond academia leap to accommodate her need to be shielded from reality? Doubtful.

In fact, while there is not absolute consensus among psychologists, the preponderance of thought is that confronting rather than running away from problems is the better course. Most laymen (oops---laypersons) would agree. So it's likely that the intuition of those who ridiculed the management decision was correct: hiding from the problem is a bad decision.

Two things strike me about this incident. First is the fact that a very small minority (or even a single complainer) is able to alter life for so many others who are just trying to go to work, class, the gym, whatever. That seems to happen all too frequently, with the many having to accommodate the needs---real or imagined and no matter how frivolous or dubious---of one or a very few who claim offense or emotional trauma. And this is most prevalent in the academic world, where administrators seem incapable of saying no, get over it, buck up, case dismissed.

Second, I often wonder if the complainer is just a prankster, looking for the most absurd possible offense to allege, just to see if it will be taken as legitimate and then to savor the ensuing chaos. There are daily examples of supposed emotional trauma in the news, and it almost seems as if they are competing in an absurdity derby.

After all, these ever-escalating claims of offense are emanating from college campuses--and college kids are notorious pranksters. Back in the day, it was panty raids. Today it's a contest to see who can come up with the most absurd complaint and yet be taken seriously.