

# HIJAB                      ARTWORK                      SPARKS CONTROVERSY

Catholic League president Bill Donohue comments on the reaction to a controversial portrait of the Statue of Liberty:

Occasionally, a controversial issue will arise that draws inane comments from all sides. Such is the case of artwork hanging in the Santa Ana office of Rep. J. Luis Correa: The painting depicts the Statue of Liberty wearing a hijab.

A group of local conservatives, We the People Rising, is demanding that it be removed, saying it violates separation of church and state.

A conservative pundit, Katherine Timpf, replies that the painting does not violate the First Amendment, arguing that “trying to use the Establishment Clause to remove this painting is far more egregious than trying to use it to remove someone’s office nativity scene.”

The liberal congressman, Rep. Correa, defends the portrait saying that determining “what is proper [and] what is not” would violate the First Amendment guarantee of freedom of speech.

A liberal pundit, Chelsea Hassler, defends the portrait saying it is a “display of multiculturalism and tolerance.”

The Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR) branded criticism of the artwork “Islamophobic.”

All five are mistaken.

The artwork does not violate the Establishment provision of the First Amendment. Indeed, it does not come close to being a state-sponsored religious exhibit. We the People Rising ill serve the conservative cause by trying to make this a

constitutional issue.

Timpf is correct to contend that the position adopted by We the People Rising is flawed, but so is her position. To say that invoking the First Amendment to remove this painting is far worse than seeking to remove a nativity scene from a congressman's office is astounding. Not to Christians it isn't. Her interpretation of this artwork as a political statement, rather than a religious one, is irrelevant: there are plenty of good reasons why this painting does not belong in a congressman's office.

Rep. Correa's notion that judgments over "what is proper" would violate the First Amendment is ludicrous. He has a right to decide what pictures he wants in his office, but no artist has a right to have his work hung there. Denying a submission is not a constitutional violation.

Hassler's remark that the painting is an expression of "multiculturalism and tolerance" is just as risible. To reconfigure a universal patriotic symbol to have a sectarian message is a demonstration of intolerance.

CAIR's labeling of the artwork's critics as suffering from Islamophobia is nonsense. Those who object to playing games with our national symbol—they would include millions of veterans—are acting rationally when they express their dissatisfaction. There is nothing phobic about objecting to offensive fare.

Rep. Correa's legal right to have the hijab-adorned Statue of Liberty is only part of this issue: reasonable Americans have every right to question the moral propriety of hijacking our national symbol to make a cheap point. Whether that point is religious or secular does not matter. Tampering with the Statue of Liberty is what matters.