

1991

Iannone, Carol: Letters Opposing Nomination of (1991): Correspondence 54

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**PEOPLE FOR
THE AMERICAN WAY
ACTION FUND**

Defending Constitutional Liberties

May 3, 1991

The Honorable Claiborne Pell
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Pell:

CLAY:

I write on behalf of the 290,000 members of People For the American Way Action Fund to urge the Senate Labor and Human Resources Committee to carefully review the nomination of Carol Iannone to serve on the National Council on the Humanities.

The primary role of the National Council on the Humanities is to review grant applications to the National Endowment for the Humanities. In addition to a commitment to the humanities and a record of distinguished service and scholarship, a member of the Council must be fairminded. Questions have been raised about Ms. Iannone's credentials for the position. In addition, some of the nominee's writings raise concerns about her ability to be fairminded in reviewing NEH applications.

Specifically, the nominee's essay in the March 1991 Commentary, "Literature by Quota" is highly critical of recent prestigious awards to noted black authors, including Alice Walker, Gloria Naylor, Toni Morrison and Charles Johnson. Ms. Iannone appears to view the awards as an "assault on the ethic of excellence and merit." She makes the inflammatory assertion that the award to Alice Walker for The Color Purple was less a recognition of literary achievement than an "official act of reparation...to the black woman..." She describes Charles Johnson's award-winning work as "hard to take... seriously as literature." Ms. Iannone does not provide mention of works she deems more deserving.

In raising this concern, however, we are not quarreling with the representation of varying political and literary viewpoints on the NEH panel. But, the committee needs to satisfy itself that all applications to NEH, including those submitted by minorities, will get a fair reading. We urge careful review of Ms. Iannone's nomination for a seat on the NEH Council.

Sincerely,

John H. Buchanan, Jr.
Policy Chair

