



Washington State Senate

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January 19th, 2016

Hon. Peter Goldmark
Commission of Public Lands and
Chair, Washington Board on Geographic Names
MS 47000
Olympia, WA 98504-7000

Washington Committee on Geographic Names
PO Box 47030
Olympia, WA 98504-7030
Attn: Mr. David Bergvall

Re: Request to review and Coordinate the renaming of geographic names that are racial or ethnic slurs

Dear Commissioner Goldmark:

This letter requests that the Washington State Board on Geographic Names, assisted by the Committee on Geographic Names, undertake a statewide comprehensive review of existing geographic names that contain words that are considered a racial or ethnic slur.

While it is unfortunate we to have this conversation in 2015, the fact remains these relics of a less tolerant past still exist throughout Washington. Maintaining these offensive names are not representative of our state's values of inclusiveness and tolerance, and I see an opportunity to honor those values through this comprehensive review.

My understanding from contacts with your staff is that identifying these place names from existing databases would not be unduly burdensome, and that a comprehensive list of names statewide could be generated quite readily.

There have been several proposals for renaming specific geographic features that have been forwarded to the state board as well as to its national counterpart, and I had the honor of helping accomplish the renaming of two sites in the North Cascades National Park after a decade-long effort. While these efforts are important and laudable, I believe we must approach this issue far

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more systematically, as there are likely many more geographic names in our state alone that most would find to be racially or ethnically offensive.

Therefore, it is my hope that the state Board on Geographic Names would direct the Committee on Geographic Names to undertake this review at its earliest convenience. Once these names have been identified on a comprehensive list, the Committee could develop a schedule for considering name changes to be taken up at its scheduled meetings, with public comments and recommendations to be considered at those meetings. Consistent with the Committee's procedures outlined in RCW 43.30.293, the Committee could then solicit the recommendations of the United States Board on Geographic Names prior to developing its recommendations to be forwarded to the state board.

Once a comprehensive candidate list for potential renaming is generated, it will of course be appropriate to develop a workload that recognizes the Board's and Committee's resources. I would hope that this schedule would allow for consideration of the entire list within a reasonable period of time, such as over the remainder of this biennium and perhaps the next biennium. If staff resources are not presently sufficient to accomplish this work in that timeframe, I am ready to do my part to secure the necessary additional budgetary support in the Legislature for this purpose.

The Board and the Committee on Geographic Names working with their national counterpart Board serve to ensure consistency in place names on all of our local, state, and national maps, whose importance for emergency response and a myriad of other purposes is obvious to all. But the Board and Committee also have a responsibility to ensure that the official recognition of geographic names avoids racist terms.

I look forward to your response to this request.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Pramila Jayapal". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name being more prominent.

Pramila Jayapal
Senator
Ranking Member, Senate Committee on Natural Resources & Parks