

# The Columbus Dispatch

## Obama a ‘dictator,’ says ex-Ohio congressman after Mount McKinley name change

Jack Torry and Randy Ludlow

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Angry Senate and House Republicans from Ohio question President Barack Obama’s legal authority to remove President William McKinley’s name from the country’s tallest mountain and restore its original Native American name of Denali.

Rep. Bob Gibbs, R-Lakeville, whose district includes Canton, where McKinley lived as an adult, said lawmakers are sending a letter to the White House on the issue, pointing out that Congress created Mount McKinley National Park in Alaska in 1917.

“Some people are saying this isn’t worth fighting for,” said Gibbs. “But I think it’s disrespectful of President McKinley’s legacy.”

The name Denali — meaning “the high one” or “the great one” — has been a political battle for years between Ohio and Alaska, with lawmakers from both states working to either keep or change the name.

Obama “thinks he is a dictator and he can change the law,” said former Rep. Ralph Regula, who retired in 2008 after serving 18 years. “The law says it’s Mount McKinley, and he can’t change a law by a flick of the pen. You want to change the Ohio River? You want to go around the country and start changing the names of these places because it is politically expedient?”

Regula, a Republican whose district included Canton, assailed Obama’s move as a “political stunt” and “ridiculous,” adding that the president “is trying to appease a small group in Alaska who are really hot on this name change.”

“This is just show business,” Regula said. “He’s going to Alaska, and he wants to make a big splash up there,” referring to Obama’s three-day trip to Alaska that began on Monday.

Although legislation creating Mount McKinley National Park was signed into law in 1917 by President Woodrow Wilson, the Obama White House said a 1947 law gives Interior Secretary Sally Jewell and the federal board on geographic names the authority to “provide for uniformity in geographic nomenclature and orthography throughout the federal government.”

When Congress added land to the park in 1980, lawmakers called the entire area the Denali National Park and Preserve, but the federal board on geographic names continued to refer to the mountain as McKinley.

“The question is whether the mountain itself statutorily retained the name Mount McKinley after the 1980 name change,” said Trevor Burrus, a constitutional legal scholar at the libertarian-leaning Cato Institute in Washington. “The answer, I believe, is no.”

“There is no post-1980 statute establishing the name of the mountain as Mount McKinley,” Burrus said. “In the absence” of any guidance from Congress, Jewell and the federal board on geographic names have the power to change the mountain’s name, he said.

Campaigning for president on Monday in Michigan, Ohio Gov. John Kasich said the name McKinley “ought to stay,” adding that “you just don’t go and do something like that.”

Saying he was “deeply disappointed in this decision,” House Speaker John Boehner, R-West Chester, said “McKinley served our country with distinction during the Civil War as a member of the Army” and led the nation “to prosperity and victory in the Spanish-American War as the 25th president.”

But Sen. Sherrod Brown, D-Ohio, cautiously defended Obama’s decision, saying, “This announcement is about honoring the Athabascan people who call Alaska their home and its highest mountain, Denali.”

“President McKinley is a great Ohioan, and streets and schools throughout the Midwest bear testimony to his legacy,” Brown said. “I will continue to work with the administration to ensure that future generations of Americans are aware of McKinley’s legacy.”

Historians regard McKinley, a Republican who never visited Alaska, as an average president. After his assassination in 1901, McKinley was replaced by his more dynamic vice president, Theodore Roosevelt.