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Demands to Rename Donald J. Trump State Park Gain Ground

By LISA W. FODERARO DEC. 18, 2015

YORKTOWN, N.Y. — Donald J. Trump, who is the leading Republican contender for president, is known for splashing his name across everything: casinos, office buildings, golf courses, apartment towers and hotels.

For the most part, even his detractors have grudgingly accepted this as one of the brash real estate developer's peccadilloes. But after making inflammatory comments about women, Mexican immigrants and, most recently, Muslims, some critics are demanding that his name be removed from one very public place: a state park.

The park is in Westchester and Putnam Counties in New York, straddling the Taconic State Parkway. Called (no surprise) Donald J. Trump State Park, the property was donated to the state in 2006 after Mr. Trump's plan to develop a golf course there was derailed by environmental and permitting roadblocks.

Since then, the state Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation has made virtually no investment in the 435-acre park, which has no dedicated maintenance staff and, unlike most Trump properties, exudes a feeling of decay and abandonment. Despite a sign stating that the park is open from dawn to dusk, a

kiosk at the entrance was empty on a recent visit — no trail map and none of the usual warnings about ticks and Lyme disease.

Nonetheless, the large green and white signs on the parkway for the Trump park have rankled residents who do not care for his politics. A petition with more than 550 signatures on [change.org](https://www.change.org) is called “Rename Donald J. Trump State Park to ... anything else.”

The creator of the petition, Andrew Cheung of Brooklyn, wrote: “Donald Trump’s behavior and public statements have been a source of embarrassment for this great nation. He has shown himself to be a bigot, and it is embarrassing that the state of New York has a park named after him, which countless citizens must drive by daily.”

On Monday, the movement to strip Mr. Trump’s identity from the park gained momentum when State Senator Daniel L. Squadron, a Democrat from New York City, formally called on Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo to change the name.

“As you know,” Mr. Squadron wrote in a letter to the governor, “Mr. Trump’s rhetoric in his Presidential campaign has become increasingly hostile to the core values of our state and nation. His discriminatory proposals are unbecoming of a campaign for our country’s highest office. Mr. Trump has shown that he is unworthy of having a New York State Park named in his honor.”

Mr. Squadron added that he planned to introduce legislation to replace the current name with a “more appropriate one.” He urged the state to begin a renaming process that involves the public and “does not compromise our state’s long history and core value of respect for diversity.”

Another state lawmaker, Assemblyman Charles D. Lavine, a Democrat from Long Island, also joined Mr. Squadron this week in saying he would push the Legislature to drop Mr. Trump’s name.

United States Representative Sean Patrick Maloney, a Democrat whose district includes much of Trump Park, suggested renaming the park for Pete Seeger, the famous folk singer and environmental activist, who died last year.

On Dec. 7, after the massacre in San Bernardino, Calif., Mr. Trump outraged many in the United States and abroad when he called for a “total and complete shutdown of Muslims entering the United States,” citing the threat of terrorism from the Islamic State. When he announced his decision to enter the presidential race, he said that Mexico was “sending” its least valued citizens to the United States, including “rapists” and those involved in drugs and crime.

A spokeswoman for the Trump campaign, Hope Hicks, noting that Mr. Trump leads the Republican field of candidates who are seeking the party’s presidential nomination, said “he is a proud resident of New York who employs thousands of people.”

“The state cannot remove his name,” she said. When Mr. Trump gave the land to the state parks agency, there was an agreement that the park would bear his name.

It is not the first time that the Donald J. Trump State Park has become a flash point, however. In 2010, the park was on a list of 58 state parks and historic sites that were set for closing because of budget cuts.

At the time, Mr. Trump bristled at the prospect, saying, “If they’re going to close it, I’ll take the land back.” Officials in Albany said they would not give the park back. Ultimately, all the parks and historic sites were kept open anyway.

On Wednesday, the state parks office declined to respond to Mr. Squadron’s request for a name change. Officials in the Cuomo administration who did not want to be identified speaking about what they considered a sensitive topic said removing someone’s name from a state property because of political considerations — whether a park, a bridge or a highway — was a slippery slope.

While declining to give a public statement, the governor’s office referred a reporter to remarks Mr. Cuomo made on Monday about Mr. Trump on CNN.

In the CNN interview, Mr. Cuomo, a Democrat, said that Mr. Trump was “fanning the flames of hate” with his comments about barring Muslims from

entering the country. “One billion Muslims were just alienated with one sentence,” he added.

Mitchell L. Moss, a professor of urban policy and planning at New York University, said that the state park should never have been named for Mr. Trump. “Public parks should be named with care,” he said. “We should not go the route of naming public infrastructure or parks after individuals who have yet to contribute to the public sector.”

Seeking a name change for an institution because of the views of the person it is named after is not unusual. Last month at Princeton University, some students demanded that the university change the name of the Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs because of Wilson’s racist views.

Wilson served as Princeton’s 13th president, from 1902 to 1910, before becoming president of the United States. Members of Princeton’s Black Justice League are now calling attention to his racist legacy, including his observation that “segregation is not humiliating, but a benefit.”

Mr. Trump’s comments have become a lightning rod as well. On the change.org petition, many signers — including people in Westchester County and New York City, but some from as far away as Idaho and Alabama — have cited his remarks during the presidential campaign.

“I grew up in Yorktown and my parents still live there,” Rebecca Capua of Brooklyn, who signed the petition, wrote on change.org. “It was bad enough having this park named after him before he ran for president. Why don’t we name it after Mussolini or someone less terrible?”

A version of this article appears in print on December 19, 2015, on page A17 of the New York edition with the headline: Calls Rise to Drop Trump’s Name at a Public Park.