

OUR VIEW: Idaho lawmakers not always fair with words

By Murf Raquet, for the editorial board

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We appreciate the Idaho governor and Legislature's concern for offensive words.

We also applaud their efforts to remove such language from Idaho code.

Gov. C.L. "Butch" Otter signed into law Tuesday a bill that would strike "retarded," "lunatic" and similar words from some 73 state laws.

Unfortunately, the bill only covers part of the offensive language problem in the state.

In signing the bill, Otter said the words were "just as hurtful to people with disabilities as racial slurs are to minorities," according to an Associated Press story.

Really?

Tell that to the five American Indian tribes who have been trying to have the word "squaw" removed from about 100 place names in Idaho.

The last attempt in 2001 failed because some members of the House couldn't bring themselves to admit the word had any derogatory meaning at all.

"Our history books are being rewritten to be politically correct," then-Rep. Twila Hornbeck, R-Grangeville, said at the time. "Our dictionaries are being rewritten to be politically correct and I find that offensive."

Hornbeck lost her seat in 2002.

Granted, the makeup of Idaho government has changed a bit in 10 years, but it remains predominantly Republican.

We agree the common meaning of retarded and lunatic have changed over the years and often are used in a cruel context. Replacing those phrases in Idaho code with ones such as "intellectually disabled" will go a long way to satisfy those who would be offended.

Unfortunately, the law won't stop hurtful language from being used elsewhere. There is no limit to how rude and disrespectful people can be in casual conversation.

It's also too bad people will continue to be offended by place names on the official Idaho map.