



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Tony Avella

NBC News- Parents Fight to Change Textbooks Over Disputed Water Claims

TONY AVELLA June 7, 2015

A group of Korean-American parents in New York is stepping up efforts to ask the state legislature to pass a bill introduced last year that would require school textbooks to include the name "East Sea" when referring to a body of water between Korea and Japan often called the "Sea of Japan."

"It's a common area that does not belong to Japan," Christine Colligan, co-president of the Korean American Parents Association of Greater New York, told NBC News.

The bill, sponsored by state Senator Tony Avella and passed last year by the New York State Senate, must also be approved by the Assembly before heading to the governor's desk. Colligan said that members of her group, which advocates for Korean-American parents of schoolchildren in the tri-state area, traveled to Albany in late April to speak with assembly members on the education committee, which discusses the bill before it is sent for a vote.

On June 3, the group also delivered petitions with 250 signatures supporting the legislation to the district office of State Assemblywoman Catherine Nolan, a New York Democrat who chairs the Committee on Education, Colligan said.

For many Koreans and Korean Americans, the Sea of Japan reference carries strong connotations of the Japanese colonial period, Colligan said, during which Japan ruled over Korea as a colony from

1910 to 1945. In the early 1990s, both the North and South Korean governments raised objections to the name Sea of Japan, with the North asking it to be called the "East Sea of Korea" and the South the "East Sea."

The Japanese government, however, maintains that the Sea of Japan "is the only internationally established name" for that body of water. Citing its isolationist policy from 1603 to 1867, Japan has also dismissed South Korea's claim that the name Sea of Japan was a "result of expansionism and colonial rule," saying it was already in use during the early 19th century.

The International Hydrographic Organization, which charts major bodies of water, adopted the name Sea of Japan in 1929.

At the very least, Colligan said, students should see both names in print. "When you have that in the textbook, it has a great impact and impression," she said.

The group's efforts to lobby the New York State Legislature comes a little more than a year after Virginia signed into bill into law that also requires use of both Sea of Japan and East Sea in school textbooks.

With the New York State Legislature entering the final few weeks of its current session, Colligan said she and other Korean Americans hope to see the bill pass.

"Truth is, I think it's really better for the Japanese nation, and also the students and all the country, for the future and [for] world peace as well," Colligan said.

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