

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Dryden, NY

Contact: Kathy Russell
Dryden Groton Plus - Human Dignity Coalition
607-351-0907
kathystute@gmail.com
Ken Wolkin
HalftownMustGo
585-478-8147
kwolkin@uw.edu

**Dryden Town Board Passes Resolution
Supporting Cayuga Nation Self-Determination**

On March 17th, 2022 the Town Board in Dryden, NY passed a resolution calling on the federal government to honor the traditional Gayogohó:nq' (Cayuga Nation) decision to remove Clint Halftown as a representative to the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) and Department of Interior (DOI). The resolution includes a provision requiring that a copy be sent to state and federal elected representatives and appointed officials, including Governor Kathy Hochul, US Senator Chuck Schumer, Secretary of the Interior Deb Haaland, and President Joe Biden.

“As the Town of Dryden stands on Gayogohó:nq' territory, it was our civic duty to express our solidarity with the Gayogohó:nq' Council of Chiefs and Clanmothers,” said Dryden Town Board member Leonardo Vargas-Mendez. “Our passing of the resolution affirmed that we respect the Haudenosaunee Confederacy’s Great Law of Peace and its institutions of self-governance.”

Dryden is the first municipality in Gayogohó:nq' territory to pass this resolution, which has been spurred on through the #HalftownMustGo campaign. Organizers from HalftownMustGo drafted the resolution over many months while consulting with scholars, attorneys, and the Council of Chiefs. Dozens of community organizations throughout the area have formally endorsed the resolution and asked local governments to pass it. One such organization, Dryden Groton Plus - Human Dignity Coalition, brought the resolution to the Town of Dryden’s attention.

The Town’s action follows its passage of the Two Row Wampum Campaign Resolution in August 2013. That resolution honored the 400-year anniversary of the Two Row Wampum Treaty, an agreement between the Haudenosaunee and European settlers committing to noninterference in one another’s governance affairs, while proceeding in relationships of peace and friendship.

Dryden’s resolution outlines how the US federal government is violating the self-determination of the Cayuga Nation, thereby also violating the principles of the Two Row Wampum. Such a violation would necessarily contradict the BIA’s self-description as “a partner with tribes to help them achieve their goals for self-determination.”

The Gayogó:nq' Council of Chiefs has stated on multiple occasions that Clint Halftown has no authority to use the collective rights or name of the Cayuga Nation. Nevertheless, as Kathy Russell of the Dryden Groton Plus-Human Dignity Coalition points out, Halftown and his government have used the status granted by U.S. government recognition to exercise the power afforded to sovereign nations to create a court system and hire a non-native police force. "He's usurped his authority," she said. She informed the Town Board before their vote that because the US treats Halftown as a "federal representative," he receives funds through contracts and grants.

By continuing to recognize Halftown, the US government is enabling actions that oppress traditional Gayogó:nq' citizens and violate their human rights. The resolution cites Halftown's February 2020 overnight demolition of a community garden and schoolhouse "used for learning language and longhouse ways" as just one example.

"Harm is being done and we have a chance to help right those wrongs," Russell said. She hopes Dryden is the first of many municipalities to take that chance to heart.

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Author attribution: The Dryden-Groton Plus - Human Dignity Coalition is a local group of community residents who promote human dignity for all people. "We seek to change the reality that the world, as it is, does not value white people and people of color equally. We are working to build rural communities where all people can feel that they belong and are respected." <https://www.facebook.com/groups/1390226291175696>