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LEGISLATORS CALL ON BIDEN ADMINISTRATION TO REMEDY VIOLATION OF INDIGENOUS SELF-DETERMINATION IN BULLDOZING AFTERMATH

TOMPKINS COUNTY, NY – Nine Tompkins County Legislators are calling on the federal government to heed the 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 legislators' letter comes as a reaction to the August 3rd bulldozing that occurred under the direction of Clint Halftown and the Halftown Council. "The non-Native 'Cayuga Nation Police' demolished a building used by Gayogohó:nq' community and citizens to gather for their ceremonies, as well as the home of an elder Gayogohó:nq' woman, violently injuring her in the process," the letter states. It also points out that those bulldozing the buildings neglected to disconnect electric and gas lines going to the house, putting those present "at grave risk."

The legislators reference public-facing materials of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy, of which Cayuga Nation is a member, which describe the governance system of the Confederacy and make clear that Halftown has no role in their government. "To date, the United States has failed to receive the Sachems' [Chiefs'] governance decisions and has therefore been violating Cayuga Nation sovereignty for nearly two decades," according to the letter.

The legislators' letter is the latest in a slew of similar statements from local governments over the past year—including from Seneca County, the City of Ithaca, and several towns within Tompkins and Seneca Counties. Many of these communications cite a May, 2021 letter from the Gayogohó:nq' Council of Sachems in which they ask people of the U.S. to bring this violation to the attention of the U.S. government.

"The U.S. needs to stop recognizing Clint Halftown and his Council. The rightful and only form of governance for the Cayuga Nation is our Chiefs and Clan Mothers," said Leanna Young, a Heron Clan Gayogohó:nq' mother who was present at the bulldozing on August 3rd. Young was one of several Gayogohó:nq' citizens who addressed the Tompkins County Legislature on this issue in September, 2021. "Clint Halftown literally haunts the dreams of our children, having now bulldozed their grandmother's home and twice demolished our sacred place of prayer." Young encouraged those appalled by these actions to demand that their representatives and government officials "do all in their power to end Halftown's tyranny and his Council's campaign of cultural genocide currently devastating our community at the northern end of Cayuga Lake."

Ithaca resident Maddie Halpert was also present at the bulldozing, having spent the day volunteering at a Gayogohó:nq' youth cultural program that Young coordinates. The youth program was held at the soon-to-be-bulldozed house earlier that day. "I'm glad folks in the County are finally making a statement," said Halpert. "The fact is the accountability they're calling for is long overdue and people are getting hurt," Halpert added.

At least some legislators are hopeful about the impact their letter might have. "I'm glad to join with so many of my colleagues in speaking up to right our government's harmful mistake," said Tompkins County Legislator Veronica Pillar, "Now we need the federal government to hear our call and meet the urgency of this moment."

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The HalftownMustGo campaign is organized by people of the U.S. living on Gayogohó:nq' land, working in relationships of care with Gayogohó:nq' citizens and governance. We take collective action to prompt President Biden and his administration to meet with the Council of Chiefs and heed the Gayogohó:nq' removal of Clint Halftown. Visit HalftownMustGo.org.