



Tompkins County Legislature

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September 2, 2022

Joseph R. Biden
President of the United States of America
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Biden,

We, the undersigned members of the Tompkins County Legislature, urge all levels of elected and appointed officials in the U.S. government to address our government's violation of Indigenous sovereignty in its years-long failure to heed the **Gayoghó:nq' Removal of Clint Halftown from his Representative Role, and remedy this situation as soon as possible in the name of the safety of those involved, including Tompkins County residents.**

The sovereign nations of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy, including the Gayoghó:nq' or Cayuga Nation, have lived sustainably since time immemorial in the region that now includes most of New York State, including Tompkins County, before the arrival of European colonists. The Two Row Wampum Treaty, the 1613 agreement between the Haudenosaunee Confederacy and European settlers that was later extended to the United States, commits to noninterference in one another's governance affairs while proceeding in relationships of peace and friendship.

According to the Haudenosaunee Confederacy's Great Law of Peace, the Gayoghó:nq' (Cayuga Nation) are governed through a system with Sachems (Chiefs) and Clanmothers. The Haudenosaunee Confederacy is clear in their public-facing materials about the workings of this governance system, which they describe as the oldest continuous democracy on earth (e.g., see HaudenosauneeConfederacy.com). The current condoled Sachems have made it clear in numerous public communications that Clint Halftown has never been a condoled Sachem and does not have a role in their government. Any past role he may have had in serving as a temporary representative has been explicitly revoked by his Clanmother, as per the Great Law of Peace.

To date, the United States has failed to receive the Sachems' governance decisions and has therefore been violating Cayuga Nation sovereignty for nearly two decades. In this time, the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) and Department of Interior (DOI) have affirmed Halftown's role as a representative of the Cayuga Nation to the U.S. and at other points considered his so-called "Council" as the U.S.-recognized government of Cayuga Nation.

The U.S. certainly has not been neutral or uninvolved in what is sometimes described as an "internal issue". In other words, in open contradiction of the Gayoghó:nq' Council of Sachems and Clanmothers, the DOI and BIA continue to recognize Clint Halftown as a representative of the Cayuga Nation to the United States. Halftown frequently references this U.S. recognition to leverage cooperation from U.S. law enforcement and to suppress valid questioning of his legitimacy. We write this letter in part to call upon our U.S. government to cease empowering one man while ignoring requests for meetings from the entire Council of Sachems.

Due to the continued recognition of the Halftown by the U.S. government, many federal funds owed to the Gayoghó:nq' people, including HUD grants and COVID relief funds, are distributed directly to Clint Halftown. Halftown, in turn, does not appear to have distributed these funds appropriately, often withholding them from at least the traditional community residing in Seneca Falls.



Inclusion through Diversity

In February of 2020, Clint Halftown ordered the overnight demolition of Gayogohó:nq' community buildings in Seneca Falls, including a schoolhouse used for learning language and longhouse ways, and gardens. On August 3rd, 2022, at the direction of Clint Halftown and the Halftown Council, the non-Native "Cayuga Nation Police" again destroyed a building used by the traditional 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 building destruction occurred without the electric or gas lines being turned off, putting all those nearby, including at least one Tompkins County resident, at grave risk. In the immediate aftermath of this destruction, the "Cayuga Nation Police" continue to surveil and intimidate Indigenous residents with militarized forces and drones.

In multiple public communications, including a widely distributed May 15, 2021 letter, the Council of Sachems have invoked the 1794 Treaty of Canandaigua, which says their nation may make complaint with the President of the United States and as such have expressed their desire to meet with the President. In order for the United States to honor our legal treaty obligations, President Biden must meet with the Gayogohó:nq' Council of Sachems and must remedy this situation by ensuring that all level of the U.S. government properly receive and accept the decisions of Sachems and Clanmothers, including heeding the removal of Halftown.

Until President Biden is able to remedy this situation on the nation-to-nation level as needed, we call on all relevant elected and appointed officials to make public statements denouncing the human rights abuses currently being perpetrated against our Gayogohó:nq' neighbors and to clarify the United States' role in enabling this situation. The Council of Sachems has issued previous statements directly asking those within the U.S. to hold the U.S. government accountable for its failure to heed the Council of Sachems and Clanmothers' removal of Halftown, and it is within that spirit that we put forth this request.

We ask that those we are addressing take these actions not only for the wellbeing of our Indigenous neighbors, or because the U.S.'s actions require this accountability in our nation-to-nation relationship, but also for the sake of the safety of Tompkins County residents who have been present at the recent bulldozing, and at homes of their Gayogohó:nq' friends who may be at similar risks of violence in the future.

We thank NYS Assemblymember Anna Kelles for taking leadership in already making a statement to this effect since the August 3rd, 2022 bulldozing.

We ask Senators Schumer and Gillibrand to meet in person with Gayogohó:nq' Sachems and citizens most directly involved in this situation while the Senate is on recess to better understand this situation and be moved to the appropriate action.

We affirm that the undersigned Tompkins County Legislators intend to engage with the Gayogohó:nq' Council of Sachems and Clanmothers in all matters pertaining to government-to-government relationships with the Nation from our local positions on Gayogohó:nq' homelands.

Sincerely,



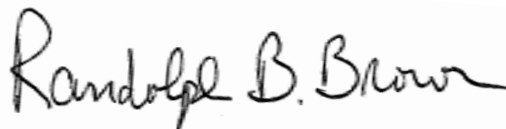
Veronica Pillar, District 2
Tompkins County Legislature



Travis Brooks, District 1
Tompkins County Legislature



Anne Koreman
Tompkins County Legislator, District 5



Randy B. Brown
Tompkins County Legislator, District 8





Deborah Dawson
Tompkins County Legislator, District 10



Shawna Black
Tompkins County Legislator, District 11



Amanda Champion
Tompkins County Legislator, District 12



Gregory N. Mezey
Tompkins County Legislator, District 13



Lee Shurtleff, District 9
Tompkins County Legislature

CC: President of the United States of America, Joseph R. Biden
United States Secretary of the Interior, Debra Haaland
United States Department of Interior, Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary, Indian Affairs, Bryan Newland
United States Bureau of Indian Affairs Director, Darryl LaCounte
United States Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA), Eastern Regional Director Kimberly Bouchard
New York State Governor, Kathy Hochul
United States Senator, Charles Schumer
United States Senator, Kirsten Gillibrand
New York State Assemblyperson, Anna Kelles
New York State Senator, Thomas O'Mara

