



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

George D. Maziarz

## Senecas commend initial Select Committee hearing

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We recently testified at the first meeting of the New York State Senate Select Committee on State-Native American Relations. A forum of this nature has long been missing in the state capitol. This new committee embodies what Senator George Maziarz and the other senators who serve on this committee recognize is the urgent need for a productive dialogue between the State of New York and the Indian Nations and tribes located within the state.

For too long, New York State's leaders made decisions that impacted the Seneca and other native peoples without having an adequate understanding of our history, our culture, and our sovereign and treaty rights. We see the work of the Select Committee as an important first step in a dialogue to change this state of affairs.

The Seneca people have lived in what is today known as western New York for thousands of years. In just a few decades, we have made ourselves into the fifth largest employer in the region. Today, we have a \$1.1 billion economy that supplies nearly 6,000 good-paying jobs providing full benefits. We have invested some \$900 million in construction projects over the last nine years.

We are proud of the significant contribution in the form of millions of dollars that the Seneca Nation and our business enterprises contribute to the western New York economy. These dollars circulate in western New York, and for the most part stay in the region.

We told the Select Committee of the need for greater leadership in economic development efforts. That is why earlier this year the Seneca Nation of Indians invited a number of public-sector and quasi-public-sector economic development groups from Western New York and Pennsylvania to meet to discuss how we can work collaboratively on our economic development goals. We recognize that outreach and collaboration are the keys to success.

The Seneca Nation has recently begun a long-term effort to diversify our economy -- we understand that tobacco and gaming are not future growth industries on which we can rely solely. We also recognize that we are not an island. We will continue to be a catalyst for economic growth in the region. A financially and economically vibrant Seneca Nation of Indians benefits the region as a whole. With the right partners, we can grow together.

Our past and future are in western New York. The western New York business community is beginning to understand the unique attributes and opportunities for partnership that the Seneca Nation and our businesses bring to the table. We all want the tide to rise, and to lift all boats.

We hope that the Regional Economic Development Councils will recognize this as well, and that they will reach out to and work with the Indian Nations and tribes within their respective areas.

We have always been here and are not going anywhere. Unlike some national and multi-

national corporations, we will never relocate outside of the region and most of our revenues and profits are spent or re-invested within it. We are committed to this area like no other. We hope that New York State's leaders recognize this, and also recognize that the Seneca are hard-wired toward diplomacy, and communication should not be reserved for times of conflict. A more formal State-Indian relationship can not only help avoid conflicts, it can lead to cooperation and collaboration, and -- perhaps -- opportunity.

Let us hope that the historic first steps of the Senate's Select Committee on State-Native American Relations is the beginning of a long and productive dialogue the will benefit Indians and non-Indians alike.

*By David Kimelberg and Richard Nephew. Richard Nephew is a citizen of the Seneca Nation of Indians and Chairman of the Seneca Nation's Council. David Kimelberg is a citizen of the Seneca Nation of Indians and the CEO of Seneca Holdings LLC, the investment arm of the Seneca Nation.*