



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

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Governor Needs to Make Seneca Nation Pay Up

Senator Pam Helming

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It's no secret Governor Cuomo seems to enjoy taking federal officials to task for policies he believes to be detrimental to New Yorkers. In fact, the Governor has gone

as far as creating an agenda titled “New York’s Declaration of Independence from Washington.” This plan is best described as a point-by-point response to what he believes are perceived harms caused by the federal government.

But, strangely enough, the Governor has been uncharacteristically quiet when it comes to stopping the very real harm being caused by a sovereign government located right here in our backyards: the Seneca Nation.

Since 2017, the Seneca Nation has unlawfully withheld \$255 million in payments from New York State, negatively affecting local taxpayers and job opportunities right here in the Finger Lakes region. This action also undermines one of the Governor’s key upstate economic development initiatives. If this was the action of our federal government, there is no doubt Governor Cuomo would be fiercely fighting and redressing in every possible way.

In April, an arbitration panel ruled in the Governor’s favor and ordered the Seneca Nation to immediately pay the \$255 million owed to the state. Yet, this sovereign nation is still refusing to pay the money that New York is lawfully and rightfully owed. I had hoped the Governor would respond to this continued unlawful defiance by taking immediate action to level the playing field and ensure other venues are not unduly harmed by the Seneca Nations continued refusal to abide by their agreements.

But the Governor’s response has been uncharacteristically passive, saying, “They signed a contract saying they would honor the arbitration decision. What does that mean? Apparently not much.”

Each day this money is withheld from our state, the Seneca Nation further harms our local communities. In addition, the Senecas’ refusal to pay their fair share gives them the financial leverage to offer extravagant promotions to entice gamblers away from upstate racinos and non-tribal casinos. The Seneca’s goal is clear – they want to drive these major employers, who pay their obligations on time, out of business.

It is imperative that the Governor both fiercely fight in federal court and remedy the direct harm being caused by the Seneca Nation to our local communities and key employers – just as he most assuredly would do if all of this harm were being done by the federal government.