



Saint Regis Mohawk Tribe

Chief Beverly Cook
Chief Ron LaFrance Jr.
Chief Eric Thompson
Sub-Chief Shelley Jacobs
Sub-Chief Michael L. Connors
Sub-Chief Cheryl Jacobs

NEWS RELEASE

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For more information:
Communications Department
Saint Regis Mohawk Tribe
Tel: (518) 358-2272

Big Business, Big Polluters of Our Land

Tribal leaders participate in Congressional Roundtable on Environmental Justice

Akwesasne, NY - Environmental *injustice* is widespread throughout Indian Country. Within the U.S., there are 1,322 Superfund sites; 532 of these impact tribal territories. Akwesasne, the [Saint Regis Mohawk](#) Reservation, is affected by sixty years of persistent pollutants from two superfund sites and one area of serious concern that is permanently endangering our community, our way of life and our culture.

During a Congressional Roundtable discussion organized by Democratic Congressman Raul Ruiz from California, tribal leaders engaged members of Congress on how to move the environmental injustice discussion in Indian Country forward and to determine a strategic approach for improving the inclusion and active participation of Tribal leadership in overcoming the complexities with existing remediation practices. Chief Eric Thompson remarked, “The historical impact is far-reaching. The roundtable led to meaningful discourse regarding the big businesses and big polluters of our land as it relates to the health of our people. There is a lack of accountability, in our opinion, with regard to the large corporation's for the persistent pollutants and damage to our water and air. Failure to actively participate in remediation efforts and not being held to remediate to the levels our people demand is an injustice. We feel that the lack of federal funding required to ensure a clean environment endangers our people and way of life and is a violation of the federal trust responsibility to the Indian Nations.”

The Nations represented were urged to continue the momentum by working together to propose legislative solutions to address the complex issues with existing remediation policy. [Red Lake](#), the [Navajo Nation](#), the [Payullip Tribe](#), the [Miccosukee Seminole Nation](#) and the [Ponca Tribe of Nebraska](#) spoke to their environmental *injustice* history, health disparities and remediation status. The Saint Regis Mohawk leaders spoke specifically about the impact of Superfund sites located near their territory. “Two contaminated Superfund sites and one area of environmental concern are located directly upwind and upstream from our territory,” remarked Chief Thompson. “Efforts to control the emission of contaminants are insufficient and negligent and this is recurrent throughout Indian Country.”

Congressman Ruiz is committed to changing the existing paradigm and including more leaders in the dialogue regarding the disrespect of tribal lands. Congressman Ruiz was joined by Congressman Raul Grijalva (D-AZ), a Natural Resources Committee member and Subcommittee on Indian, Insular, and Alaska Native Affairs, Congressman Patrick Murphy (D-FL) and Congressman Mark Takano (D-CA). Members listened to each Nation's environmental concerns including Superfund site impact and

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proposed recommendations on how to increase the involvement and collaboration of tribes and relevant federal agencies during the pre-remediation, remediation and post-remediation processes. Sub-Chief Michael Conners shared, “Over the past three years, we’ve developed a strategy to build relationships with members of the legislature and in particular, Congressman Ruiz, who has taken the lead on environmental justice for Indian Country. We look forward to working together with Congressman, Ruiz and other key members of Congress.”

“We fully expect this to be a first step towards a different approach to legislative discussions about environmental justice and remediation. Congressman Ruiz is an emergency physician and an activist, dedicated to finding alternative, creative solutions to complex issues. Too many of the health disparities facing Indian Country are directly related to our environment and come at a devastating cost to the individuals, their families and our communities in addition to often overwhelming Indian Health Services budgets,” stated Chief Beverly Cook. “The public health issues that are directly linked to contaminants affect our way of life and our culture. We are aiming to strengthen provisions to prevent this from happening in the future and have meaningful input and consultation concerning injustices of the past.”



Environmental Justice Roundtable Discussion held by Congressman Raul Ruiz, D-CA, on June 14, 2016 in Washington, DC. Saint Regis Mohawk Tribal Sub-Chief Michael Conners, Chief Beverly Cook and Chief Eric Thompson speak to health issues directly related to industrial pollution that impact the community of Akwesasne.

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The Saint Regis Mohawk Tribal Council is the duly elected and federally recognized government of the Saint Regis Mohawk People.