



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

George D. Maziarz

Senator Maziarz announces Select Committee on State-Native American Relations to be formed

GEORGE D. MAZIARZ May 3, 2011

| ISSUE: **NATIVE AMERICANS**



Senator George Maziarz (R-C, Newfane) today announced that the New York State Senate will soon pass a resolution to establish a Select Committee on State-Native American Relations. The purpose of the Select Committee, to be comprised of a bipartisan group of yet-to-be-named senators, is so the Senate has a mechanism to advance meaningful dialogue between state and Native American leaders on matters of common interest.

Senator Maziarz, who will lead the Select Committee, said, “We need a way to try to solve problems, plain and simple. We need legislators to stay educated on the issues facing Native Americans. We need to treat each other with respect and work together for the benefit of everyone living within the state’s borders. This Select Committee will have important work to do and I look forward to the progress we can make.”

Senate Majority Leader Dean G. Skelos said, "I applaud Senator Maziarz for leading this new panel and addressing an issue that is critically important to many areas of the state. New York is home to many Indian nations and it is vital that we maintain a positive relationship with Native Americans and be able to understand each other's concerns and work together as we move forward."

A variety of matters of concern to both the State of New York and Native Americans are expected to fall under the purview of the Select Committee, including revisions to the outdated Indian Law, education on reservation lands, the protection and preservation of Indian culture, economic development and taxation, social services, and self governance.

Native American leaders from around the state expressed support for the Senate's commitment to strengthening the lines of communication. The state already has formal government-to-government relationships with many Indian nations, including the Senecas, Tonawanda Band of Senecas, the Tuscaroras, the Cayugas, the Oneidas, the Onondagas, the Mohawks, the Poospatuck, and the Shinnecock.

The Select Committee will help facilitate discussions between the state and these governments.

"The Seneca Nation's leaders, and its people, are pleased with this demonstration of potential progress in our relationship with state government," said President Robert Odawi Porter. "This is just the sort of resourceful, forward-thinking leadership we've sought. A committee such as this one can help form the basis for settling our differences with the state.

"By the Senate establishing this Select Committee today, it is taking a step in the right direction to provide a forum for the discussion of issues that affect our nations," said J. C. Seneca, a Seneca Nation Council Member. "The relationship between State Government and the Indian nations has not always been a productive one, but the Senate's commitment to improving this situation is evident by the creation of this Select Committee. We call upon the Assembly to create a similar Committee and the Governor to re-establish the Office of Indian Relations that was discontinued in 1995."

Randy King, Chairman of the Shinnecock Indian Nation's Board of Trustees, said, "The Shinnecock Nation deeply appreciates this move by the State Senate, and looks forward to working with our partners in government to provide new opportunities for our Nation and the people of New York State to grow and prosper together. We applaud Senate Majority Leader Dean Skelos and Chairman Maziarz for their foresight in creating this committee."

New York State ranks 9th in the nation in terms of the size of its Native American population. According to the 2010 federal census more than 100,000 New Yorkers noted their American Indian ancestry.

"There certainly have been efforts made in the past to promote positive relations between the state and Native Americans," Senator Maziarz added. "But we need to function in a 21st century framework."

The operations of Select Committees are governed by the Legislative Law and the Senate Rules. A Select Committee may hold hearings, educate the Senate on its findings, and advocate for policy reforms, and it cannot formally approve legislation in the manner of other Standing Committees. A similar committee to the one announced today exists in the United States Senate and the legislative bodies of more than a dozen other states.

Senator Maziarz will serve as Chairman of the Select Committee on State-Native American Relations. Other committee members will be named by the Majority and Minority Leaders of the State Senate after it is established through a resolution of the Senate.

#####