



Nuclear issues cloud 10th anniversary of Indigenous Peoples Declaration

By MIKE DESMOND · AUG 9, 2017

Preservation of the environment dominated Tuesday's celebration of Indigenous Peoples Day at the Buffalo History Museum. It was a celebration of the 10th anniversary of the [United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples](#).

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The declaration was adopted by the U.N. General Assembly in September 2007 by a majority of 144 states in favor, 4 votes against - including the United States and Canada - and 11 abstentions. According to the U.N., it "establishes a universal framework of

minimum standards for the survival, dignity and well-being of the indigenous peoples of the world and it elaborates on existing human rights standards and fundamental freedoms as they apply to the specific situation of indigenous peoples."

The nuclear issue is important locally because of the West Valley Demonstration Project in Cattaraugus County, which left behind a vast amount of nuclear material. Congressman Brian Higgins objected to nuclear waste being trucked from Canada to South Carolina via the Peace Bridge, a strategically important bridge over a vital waterway.

"Now you're going to allow trucks carrying nuclear waste to go over that bridge," Higgins said. "It could potentially contaminate one of the most



important waterways that connect Lake Erie and Lake Ontario, an important source of drinking water, an important source of fresh water."

Lynda Schneekloth, with the Interfaith Climate Justice Community, cited the efforts of Indigenous peoples to block some construction projects potentially damaging their lands, like a controversial pipeline in the West.

"The recent actions at Standing Rock, because it was a great reminder and a way to stand in the way of the forces of destruction," Schneekloth said. "We stand there with persistence. We stand there with the attitude of protection and with love of the our Earth and with [singing and dancing and prayer](#), we will not be overcome."



Prayer for peace and unity

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Seneca Nation President Todd Gates said Indigenous peoples must be conscious of environmental issues because of cultural values in planning for future generations.

"As president, it's just a role I'm filling now. There's somebody who will come and take my place and, hopefully, we develop the leaders of the future and I wish there were younger people here to realize this," Gates said. "Because we have to tell them the truth about what's going on and how do we move forward and how do we protect this Earth that has sustained us for this long."

The event included musical performances, a movie and a lantern ceremony on the shore of Mirror Lake as darkness fell.