

Re: June 14, 2021 article entitled “Seneca County Board of Supervisors battler for right to enter executive session to review ‘options for future court proceedings’ against Cayuga Nation”

Albert Einstein said “the definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over and expecting different results.” After listening to the Seneca County board of supervisors discuss the Cayuga Nation at the end of its July 13 meeting, it appears, sadly and predictably, that a majority of the County’s town supervisors are intent on serving as living examples of Mr. Einstein’s definition.

After the U.S. Supreme Court threw out Seneca County’s latest attempt to tax Cayuga Nation property last month, exposing the County’s decades-long legal strategy for the fantasy it is, most members of the board still believe they can sue the Nation and its reservation out of existence. Speakers were emotional and frustrated, referencing the Indian Affairs advisory board’s collective “200 years of experience” fighting the Nation, and pledging to carry on the fight, not with “bows and arrows and guns,” but with more lawsuits. After losing case after case, board members are still clinging to their own version of reality, as demonstrated by comments like the Nation has “no reservation” and is “not sovereign.”

It is hard to admit you are wrong, especially when being wrong means you have spent millions of dollars in taxpayer funds chasing taxes you will never collect. That dynamic likely explains why most board members wanted to discuss their strategy about the Cayuga Nation in executive session. Better to vent their frustrations behind closed doors, where racist references to Native Americans as “marauders and thugs” can be kept from the public’s ears, and where lawyers can privately explain that the board is out of options, sparing supervisors the embarrassment of having their foolish legal strategy and waste of public assets exposed.

Despite the majority’s continued embrace of a failed strategy, it was refreshing to hear some voices on the board speak out in favor of a new approach to relations with the Nation. One supervisor said after “41 years” it was time to “try something new.” The Nation tried something new in the early 2000s, after hundreds of years of broken promises, broken treaty commitments and thefts of its property, reacquiring land in its homeland and building business to support its citizens. This approach has worked. In a place of little economic development, the Cayuga Nation and its business operations have prospered.

The Nation applauds those supervisors who were honest enough to call the County’s antagonistic strategy the failure that it is. These supervisors could learn from the Nation’s experience starting twenty years ago and convince the County that it is time for a new plan. The Nation will not hold its breath waiting for the County to change course, but it will welcome positive relations if reasonable voices prevail.

Very truly yours,