

# Hochul to apologize to Seneca Nation on behalf of New York

## Hochul made that commitment in a meeting last week in Albany with J.C. Seneca, the new president of the Seneca Nation elected in November.

*Seneca Nation of Indians President J.C. Seneca said Hochul committed to issuing an apology on behalf of the state last week.*

*Will Waldron/Times Union*

*Gov. Kathy Hochul's apology will be for the state's historical abuses of Native American communities, including forced schooling.*

*Will Waldron/Times Union*

*The Thomas Indian School in western New York, now closed, forced Indigenous children to abandon their culture and language while there.*

*Will Waldron/Times Union*

*Gov. Kathy Hochul has held a positive relationship with the Senecas that's grown tense at times.*

*Will Waldron/Times Union*

ALBANY — Gov. Kathy Hochul has agreed to travel to the Seneca Nation territories in western New York and apologize for the historical abuses endured by its members at the hands of the state.

Hochul made that commitment in a meeting last week with leaders from the Seneca Nation, according to J.C. Seneca, its new president elected in November.

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“My ask of the governor last week was to ask the governor to come to our territory, to come to Seneca, and apologize on behalf of the state of New York and all those many years of what happened,” Seneca said. “And she agreed. She’s going to come.”

The request came after Seneca brought up the Thomas Indian School, a facility that once operated in Erie County.

It was opened as a private institution in 1855 to care for and educate children who were part of the Seneca, Mohawk, Oneida, Onondaga, Cayuga and Tuscarora communities, according to the National Museum of the American Indian.

New York took ownership of the school two decades later and continued that mission. Children who were either orphaned or whose family couldn’t care for them were brought to the school.

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But the institution did more than care for those children, many of whom were kidnapped from their families, according to historical accounts. It closed in 1957.

“We expressed those things, the atrocities that occurred there — the abuses, the sexual abuse, mental abuse, physical abuse, everything that happened,” Seneca said. “The taking of children from their families and putting them in the school.”

Those children were forbidden from engaging in the same cultural practices they had experienced back home and weren’t allowed to speak their native language. Parents were restricted from contacting their children and vice versa.

That forced separation and assimilation has left lasting damage, Seneca said. It’s personal for him; his father was forced into the institution.

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“The devastating effect that it had on our people then and still today with the intergenerational trauma that has affected our people — we have to find a way to heal,” Seneca said.

Seneca said he was inspired to make the request for Hochul to apologize after former President Joe Biden apologized in Arizona for the federal government’s involvement in similar forced schooling programs.

A spokesman for Hochul did not confirm her plan to issue an apology Tuesday but said she is committed to “strengthening the government-to-government relationship between the Seneca Nation and the state of New York.”

“Last week, the governor met with President J.C. Seneca and other leaders of the Seneca Nation for a productive and meaningful conversation,” said Matthew Janiszewski, the spokesman. “We are committed to a continued dialogue around the unique challenges facing the Seneca Nation and further respectful collaboration in the years to come.”

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Hochul’s administration has had a positive relationship with the Senecas, but it’s been tense at times.

Hochul used her power as governor to freeze the nation’s bank accounts as leverage to collect \$564 million in casino revenue that was owed to the state under the Seneca Gaming Compact, a decades-old agreement that expired in 2023.

It granted the Senecas exclusive casino rights for much of western New York in exchange for a share of the revenue from those operations. A new compact has yet to be worked out.

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Seneca said he no longer wants to share casino revenue with the state but is willing to come to the table for negotiations. Those are expected to resume in the near future.

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