

*Audio Podcast about the Symposium on the Science of Disproportionate
Environmental Health Impacts*

CHRISTINE GUITAR: OK. Next with me I have Chief James Ransom of the St. Regis Mohawk Tribal Council. Hi there, Chief Ransom.

JAMES RANSOM: Hi. How are you?

CHRISTINE GUITAR: Great. Can you tell us a little bit about your tribe and what your purpose in participating in this panel is today?

JAMES RANSOM: Sure. I serve as tribal chief for the St. Regis Mohawk tribe. We call our community (in Mohawk) which is Mohawk for “land where the partridge drums.” We’re located on the St. Lawrence River in upstate New York, half the community in Canada, half in the United States. We’re bordered by a federal Superfund site, two state Superfund sites. We have the St. Lawrence River that’s contaminated with PCBs, PAHs. We formed the brunt of environmental pollution for the last 50 years from industry. We used to have a pulp and paper mill across the river from us on the Canadian side. We have chemical factories there as well. And so I’ve spent the last 30 years of my life addressing environmental contamination in my community.

CHRISTINE GUITAR: And now from what you just said, I think it is sort of self-explanatory, but you’re a discussant for the panel on multiple and cumulative effects and I just heard you list a couple of those potential sources. Can you talk to us about what you see the science presented in the panel—how you see that potentially affecting your community in either a positive or negative way?

JAMES RANSOM: Well, I really came here with a simple message and that’s that from my perspective the larger Western society has gone in a direction that is really not in the best interests of everybody in that—I use quotes around progress—that in the process of making progress it’s really gone away from a balance between the society and the natural world and the relationships involved therein. And that the solution I see that we need to restore that balance and the ways it changed the economy has become the most important criteria and it overwhelms environmental issues. And that the people that are closest to maintaining balance, Native American tribes, minority communities, you know, any earth-based society, we end up bearing the brunt of the environmental harm and the disproportionate effects because of where we live. The decision-makers you know are, as I said yesterday, in the halls of Washington many miles away from where the pollution is occurring and, you know, there’s a disassociation because of that. I think this conference is about empowering people and giving them the opportunity to participate in meaningful ways with the federal government and industry and coming up with solutions in today’s world.

CHRISTINE GUITAR: Chief Ransom, thank you very much.