



The 2020 Democratic presidential debates in Miami on June 26 and 27 attracted a lot of attention from voters and television viewers as well as more than a dozen climate change organizations, which used the second debate as an opportunity to emphasize the importance of fighting climate change.

The group held an “Underwater Climate Rally” at the Freedom Tower, near the debate venue, to ensure the issue of climate change is a top priority during the presidential election.

Seminole Tribal members Valholly Frank and Kelli Tigertail, both from Big Cypress, participated in the event along with dozens of other activists.

At the ripe young age of 16, Frank has become a seasoned climate activist; she is a plaintiff in a lawsuit against the state. Reynolds v. State of Florida argues that the state has shirked its responsibilities and endangered its youth by failing to protect the environment and their future. She spoke at the rally.

“We are suing on behalf of all the people of the state of Florida and those who will be born,” Frank said. “The government ignoring climate change is violating our right to life and property. There is no fight for human rights or animal rights if we don’t solve the climate crisis right now.”

Tigertail told the crowd that all of Florida is Seminole land, but the original inhabitants were the Tequesta.

“Indigenous people are still being displaced because of climate issues,” Tigertail said. “Black and brown people will be the first to be affected by climate change; you saw that after Hurricane Maria in Puerto Rico, Liberty City was the last to get power after the last hurricane and Opa Locka residents had to deal with big piles of debris in front of their homes that affected their air quality. Let’s be here for climate issues, but don’t forget the racial issues, too.”

Many of the protesters believe there should be a debate about climate change only.



Valholly Frank, at far right, participates in a rally about climate change June 27 in Miami. (Courtesy photo)

“It is the singular issue because everything else will be affected by it,” Frank said. “Climate change is a problem maximizer; it makes every other issue a lot worse than it already is.”

Caroline Lewis, founder of The CLEO Institute, moderated the rally. The CLEO Institute’s mission is

to break down scientific data and educate communities about climate change at a grassroots level.

“This is a climate crisis, a climate emergency, a planetary disruption and we have to face this crisis head on,” Lewis. said “Climate change is a threat multiplier, everything we worry about is heightened by a changing climate.”

Climate change is already impacting people around the world. Parts of Miami Beach see flooding during King Tides and some high tides. Frank’s commitment to the cause is personal.

“Since my community is at sea level, we will be the first to be affected by sea level rise,” she said. “I have a deep sense of home; my ancestors survived in the Everglades. This place is why I’m alive and I want to keep it alive.”

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Originally Printed by The Seminole Tribune