



Notes from the Chief

What I'm working on for You

Osiyo.

It was a historic achievement for the Cherokee Nation recently as the tribe negotiated, finalized and signed a Joint Venture Construction Program agreement with Indian Health Service to provide a new world-class health facility at our WW Hastings Hospital campus in Tahlequah.

Later this spring we will break ground on the new facility, which is planned to be more than 450,000 square feet. Cherokee Nation will construct the facility at a cost of between \$150 and \$175 million. IHS will provide the staffing, including doctors, nurses and other professionals, a cost estimated to be more than \$80 million annually for at least 20 years and likely longer.

This historic project will be transformative for generations of our citizens in northeast Oklahoma. Our plan was to take a big step forward for Cherokee health care; instead, we took a giant leap of faith and surpassed anything we could have hoped for.

Once complete, sometime in late 2019, this will be a state-of-the-art health care center and the absolute crown jewel in our health care system. This is far and away the largest project IHS has ever helped a tribal government achieve. Our hospital is twice as big as the next largest IHS joint venture. It is something monumental, and it's something we should all be proud of.

IHS will work through Congress to secure the funds for staffing and operations for the life of the building. IHS saw Cherokee Nation as a good partner to deliver quality care, and together we are making the health of Indian Country our top priority.

During my tenure as Principal Chief, no issue has been as important to me as ensuring our health care services continue to grow with our tribe. It's been my mission to help drive down the extreme health disparities our Indian communities face. I've worked with passion and purpose, and today we are

aggressively striving to improve the wellness of our tribe, both individually and collectively.

We wisely invested \$100 million of our businesses' profits to expand and refurbish smaller clinics, and now we have a significant public-private partnership in place with IHS that will create construction jobs, health care jobs and an enormous positive economic impact in our region. This is the next step to ensuring Cherokee health care is the best in Indian Country and that our citizens reap the benefit.

Cherokee Nation operates the largest tribal health system in America, and we desperately needed a new hospital, as the current 190,000-square-foot facility is more than 30 years old. It serves nearly 400,000 patient visits per year when it was built to handle only about 60,000 per year. This agreement will allow our health department to better meet the demand and needs of our Cherokee Nation citizens and other Native Americans who access our health system.

A special thanks goes to the leadership in Congress who championed our cause. U.S. Representatives Tom Cole (R-OK) and Betty McCollum (D-MN) led a bipartisan effort to reopen this IHS construction program, as well as Cherokee Nation citizen and Rep. Markwayne Mullin (R-OK) for representing our needs with the federal agencies.

It's a golden moment in our Cherokee history. In three short years when we dedicate this new massive health complex, we will know in our hearts that the next several generations of Cherokees – our children and grandchildren – will have a better future. They will have more opportunities to live healthier lives. They will have access to cutting-edge, modern medicine. For me, there is no better feeling in the world than knowing this is on the horizon for you and the ones we all love so deeply.

Wado,

Bill John Baker



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