



## Notes from the Chief

*What I'm working on for You*

Osiyo -

Cherokee artisans are some of the most talented in Oklahoma and across all of Indian Country. They preserve our culture and heritage through their work across various mediums. It's critical for us as Indian people to ensure Indian art is truly created by enrolled citizens of federally recognized tribes.

That's why Cherokee Nation, along with the leadership of the Chickasaw, Choctaw, Muscogee (Creek) and Seminole Nations, is supporting Oklahoma House Bill 2261, which is being considered now in the Oklahoma State Senate after passing the Oklahoma House of Representatives by a 90-0 vote. The bill is authored by Rep. Chuck Hoskin (D-Vinita) and Sen. John Sparks (D-Norman), Cherokee Nation citizens, and proposes a change in the definition of who can sell Indian art.

The proposal defines "American Indian tribe" as any Indian tribe federally recognized by the Bureau of Indian Affairs and, further, defines "American Indian" as a citizen or enrolled member of an American Indian tribe.

This issue is important for us because it ensures people who falsely claim tribal citizenship will not be able to market themselves and their crafts as Native. Oklahoma should take a strong position in preserving the integrity and authenticity of American Indian arts. As the home of 39 federally recognized tribes and more than 500,000 tribal citizens, Oklahoma should be the pacesetter for protecting tribal culture. Each of the 39 tribes in Oklahoma is a sovereign government with a unique history and culture and has been acknowledged and confirmed by the U.S. Constitution, treaties, federal statutes, executive orders and judicial decisions.

Today, the sale of American Indian art and craftwork in Oklahoma is regulated by both federal and state laws, and strengthening our state laws guarantees the integrity of Native American art and the artists themselves.

Oklahoma Indian artisans are renowned worldwide for beadwork, jewelry, basket weaving and fine arts like painting, pottery and sculpture. As the popularity of Indian art expands, so does the sale of items misrepresented as authentic American Indian products. Purchasing authentic American Indian art and crafts in Oklahoma from an enrolled citizen of a federally recognized Indian helps preserve our rich and diverse cultures, and it significantly increases entrepreneurship and economic development in Indian Country.

H.B. 2261 will provide a direct economic benefit to Cherokee artists by helping to decrease the availability of fraudulent Cherokee art in the market. Additionally, if the availability of fraudulent items decreases, the demand for authentic art will increase.

Closing the loophole about who can sell Indian art will protect not only the artists but individual consumers, galleries, art collectors and museums, especially smaller museums with fewer financial resources. Nothing in H.B. 2261 prevents individuals who claim to be tribal descendants from selling arts and crafts in Oklahoma. However, the claim "Indian made" or "Indian art" simply would not apply.

I strongly encourage you to contact your state senators and ask them to support H.B. 2261.

Bill John Baker



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