



Notes from the Chief

What I'm working on for You

Osiyo -

Cherokee Nation and the state of Oklahoma recently teamed up to file a restraining order to stop the disposal of radioactive material near the Arkansas and Illinois rivers.

Sequoyah Fuels Corporation operated a uranium processing plant near Gore from 1970 through the early 90s. The plant converted yellowcake uranium into fuel for nuclear reactors. After it closed in 1993, more than 11,000 tons of uranium-contaminated waste was left at the site. In 2004, Sequoyah Fuels agreed to spend millions relocating the waste off-site. The radioactive waste has been stored in large bags on top of concrete pads at the site ever since.

Many Cherokees worked at this facility over the years, and many of us know men and women who were employed at the facility, and though memories of Sequoyah Fuels may have faded, sadly the threat of radiation has not. We know the radioactive waste can't stay where it currently sits, but the Cherokee Nation was informed last month by Sequoyah Fuels that it could not find a suitable place to relocate the waste. The company said it would begin burying the waste in underground cells at the current site.

That's when our attorney general's office, secretary of Natural Resources and the state of Oklahoma stepped in. We will not stand idly by and let a private company unilaterally determine the future of two important rivers and the safety of the Cherokee community of Gore. The Cherokee Nation is a staunch defender and protector of our natural resources.

The Arkansas riverbed is no place for radioactive waste. According to scientists, uranium is highly toxic and has a half-life of 4.5 billion years. Our goal is to work with the company, along with the state, to minimize the threat by finding and securing a proper storage solution.

Protecting the lands and the natural environment is a priority for us today and for future generations

who call the Cherokee Nation home. Cherokee Nation established the office of the secretary of Natural Resources last year to address these very specific kinds of issues, because as a tribal government, we have a responsibility to protect the land, water and air. We will unequivocally fight for the rights of our people to live safely in their communities. Our children, our grandchildren and their children deserve to inherit a natural world free of hazardous pollution.

We will do what is best for the Cherokee Nation, Sequoyah County and Oklahoma so we will pursue an expert review of disposal options for the materials and examine the impact to the community and the environment. We need to sit down and negotiate a solution that everyone can agree on. I believe we have the ability to find an answer and an agreement that will be palatable to all parties.

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