



Notes from the Chief

What I'm working on for You

Osiyo -

A new day has dawned for health and wellness in the Cherokee Nation, as we recently broke ground on a new state-of-the-art outpatient health care facility, located at the W.W. Hastings Hospital campus in Tahlequah. When complete in the fall of 2019, this nearly 470,000-square-foot facility will be full of cutting-edge medical technology, more doctors, nurses and specialists, and will be known as the largest American Indian health center in the country.

I can't tell you just how monumental this milestone is and what it will mean for future generations of Cherokees and other Natives. It will also be transformative for northeast Oklahoma. Between W.W. Hastings Hospital, this new outpatient facility, Northeastern Health System next door and our partnership with OSU Health Science Center to train residents, Tahlequah is set to be a hub for medical technology in rural Oklahoma.

We have worked aggressively to improve access to quality health care and the wellness of our tribe, both individually and collectively, since the day I took office more than six years ago. Since then we've built new health centers in Jay and Ochelata and expanded health centers in Stilwell and Sallisaw. As the final piece of our health care capital expansion plan, the new outpatient facility is definitely the crowning jewel.

For our nation to achieve so much in just a few short years makes this mission extremely personal for me. It means our health services can now adapt with the needs of our tribe, and we can continue to improve the gaping health disparities between our Indian people and other ethnicities.

Thanks to our historic joint venture with Indian Health Service, they will provide about \$80 million annually for operating costs and staffing doctors, nurses and other medical professionals. With IHS's arrangement to pay salaries, we will be able hire more than 800 new medical personnel, almost tripling

our current staff.

Cherokee Nation will pay to construct the \$200 million facility, which will have 180 exam rooms, a new surgical center with additional capacity for MRIs and endoscopies, and expanded dental, optometry and auditory testing that will revolutionize the services we provide for our people. Much of this is technology we haven't offered in the past due to space and budget constraints.

It is the largest project IHS has ever helped a tribal government achieve, and it was so badly needed. Cherokee Nation already operates the largest tribal health system in the United States. Our current 190,000-square-foot hospital in Tahlequah is more than 30 years old and was built to handle only one-third of the current patient load it sees every day. That puts a tremendous workload and unjust pressure on our staff and the antiquated building. We have simply overburdened W.W. Hastings Hospital for too long, which has been serving as a health center and a hospital.

In addition to new health care jobs, we anticipate construction of the facility to generate more than 350 construction jobs. New jobs, shorter wait times and better services will positively impact so many lives.

In late 2019, we will gather once again to dedicate this new world-class health complex. And when we do, we will know that the next several generations of Cherokees will have a better future. Our Cherokee people will be able to live longer and healthier lives because they will have real access to modern medicine. This is a wonderful moment in our tribal history and the start of a brighter, better future ahead.

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