



Notes from the Chief

What I'm working on for You

Osiyo -

Cherokee people have always valued education. When Cherokees were forced to relocate and walk the Trail of Tears more than 175 years ago, our ancestors had to rebuild our tribe and society. They started with education. Once they arrived in Indian Territory, Cherokee Nation leaders dedicated 60 percent of the tribe's treasury to education. They knew rebuilding after such a traumatic event should start with educating our children and showing them a brighter future is possible.

Today, that investment in public education is more important than ever for the future of the Cherokee Nation and the state of Oklahoma.

Recently, Cherokee Nation issued \$5 million to schools in our 14-county jurisdiction for the academic year. Those dollars come through our car tag program, and since 2002, we have contributed more than \$45 million to public education.

We are investing in our children, investing in our communities, and investing in our future as Cherokees and as Oklahomans. When our tribal citizens across Oklahoma purchase a Cherokee Nation tag, 38 percent of those dollars is earmarked specifically for public education. This year, that money is being invested into 107 area schools.

For the Cherokee Nation, supporting our local school districts is important to our long-term success. The partnerships we have carefully cultivated with area school districts are some of our most important. School districts have complete discretion on how to use the funds from our car tag compact. The funding will enable schools to execute their strategic plans.

In South Coffeyville, the money will be utilized for technology upgrades, while Hulbert Public Schools will purchase a security camera system for the district to provide more safety for students. At Ketchum

Schools, the funds will go toward teacher salaries, and Salina Schools will repair a leaking roof at the high school. Owasso Schools will use the money for after-school tutoring and cultural activities for students.

We are happy to provide these dollars, especially as gaps in the state's education budget continue to grow and Oklahoma public education continues to be underfunded by state policymakers. Schools operate with fewer resources and more pupils than ever. Across Oklahoma, we continue to trend in the wrong direction with investments to education, as fewer dollars are allocated to our children and schools.

For individual students, this Cherokee Nation investment is critical so they can grow into everything God intended them to be, but collectively for northeast Oklahoma, it is just as important so we can continue developing a diverse economy with an educated workforce.

Thank you to all the Cherokee Nation citizens who have purchased a tribal tag. That decision makes our academic partnerships possible and keeps them flourishing. As a tribe and sovereign government, we remain blessed to be able to make a positive impact on Oklahoma's future.

At Cherokee Nation, we will continue to play our role as a benefactor to public education. We will make our ancestors proud by prioritizing education.

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Bill John Baker



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