



## Notes from the Chief

*What I'm working on for You*

Osiyo -

The lack of diversity in the sciences is not a new problem, but we live in a day and age where we can help bridge that gap. At Cherokee Nation we are committed to encouraging, supporting and mentoring our youth so we can substantially increase the numbers of Cherokees in science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) studies and careers.

Across America, STEM fields are one of the few areas where there is continued job growth. Almost 80 percent of the fastest growing occupations depend on some mastery of science or mathematics. For Indian Country, and especially here in our home in northeast Oklahoma, we must ensure our students are prepared for the 21st century global economy. Kids who excel in science and math aren't just smart, but they will be the world's creative problem-solvers going forward. Every time we address workforce development for Indian people and for Oklahoma, STEM absolutely must be part of the discussion. Those careers – researchers, engineers, health care providers – are essential to our health, happiness and safety. They are the cornerstones of our future.

We need boys, and we, especially, need girls in the STEM pipeline. We have to get away from the stereotype that boys are better than girls in math and science, so we need more women in these STEM-related fields to ensure innovation, creativity, competitiveness and, in the long run, economic growth.

Women make up half of the total U.S. college-educated workforce but only 29 percent of the science and engineering workforce. To change this statistic, Cherokee Nation has pledged to be a partner in mentoring more Cherokee girls to consider careers in STEM. Cherokee Nation Tribal Councilor Janees Taylor, a certified public accountant, is on the advisory board of the Native American Council for the Million Women Mentors, a group committed to increasing the interest and confidence of girls and young women to pursue STEM careers. Efforts by the American Indian Science and Engineering Society

are also targeting Native girls for STEM careers.

Cherokee Nation has some of the best and brightest minds in America. We need to continue exposing them to what is possible through STEM education. Starting early to inspire children to consider careers in STEM fields is essential. K-12 outreach summer programs for girls play an important role in inspiring them to pursue science and engineering in middle school and high school.

Right now at Sequoyah High School, nine young ladies are on the robotics team, and this fall, Cherokee Nation provided robotics kits to dozens of schools within the tribe's 14-county jurisdiction to encourage STEM activities. Robotics teams at six area schools that we helped sponsor will compete in the VEX Robotics World Championship later this month, and I am so proud to say Bell Elementary School from Adair County earned a top 10 worldwide score during the state competition.

From competing in robotics to a fulfilling and challenging career in STEM is a short jump if we can create a pipeline of students, find passionate mentors and support our kids through college and into the workforce. A more diverse scientific workforce with plenty of Cherokee Nation citizens in the labor pool will be better for all of us and for advancements in technology and sciences.

And, the perfect place for STEM students to launch their careers is in our 470,000-square-foot outpatient health facility at the W.W. Hastings health campus in Tahlequah, which is under construction. Once it is opened in 2019, we plan to hire more than 800 health care professionals – doctors, nurses and medical specialists. We have agreed to partner with OSU Medical School to offer localized education and classes, with a hope of developing Cherokee medical practitioners.

We are ready for more Cherokee women to be involved in science and math and pursue new frontiers in technology. Mary Golda Ross, a Cherokee from Park Hill and an engineer and rocket scientist who helped America's space program reach the moon, was ahead of her time in the 1960s, but in the 21st century, our children can see any achievement is possible and attainable through passion and hard work. As leaders and adults, it is our job to make sure they dream big and reach those destinations.

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