



# Notes from the Chief

*What I'm working on for You*

Osiyo -

Cherokee Nation has created a workplace policy emphasizing the importance of protecting our children, one of our core values as Cherokee people and part of our history and heritage going back generations. I am so proud we created a new opportunity for our tribal employees who choose to open their homes as foster parents. I recently signed a human resources policy that will offer Cherokee Nation full-time employees five additional days of paid leave when a Cherokee child is placed in their Cherokee Nation Indian Child Welfare certified home.

We continue to lead the way in Oklahoma and across Indian Country when it comes to progressive policies. Cherokee Nation is one of just a handful of entities across the country making this commitment to our workforce, but the commitment is really aimed at Cherokee children in need. When a foster placement is made into a family, it is often an emergency situation and can be at all hours of the day or night. We do not want our workers struggling to juggle work as they attend to the needs of a foster child and the required doctor appointments, school transfers or daycare enrollment and, most importantly, the bonding and trust time that must develop during placement. If parents are unable to take time off work, the child is yet again negatively impacted.

I have talked and written about the need for more foster and adoptive parents for Cherokee Nation children since my first day in office. Sadly, the need today is just as strong as it was in 2011. Right now, the tribe has 15 employee-led families that are open for foster placement through Cherokee Nation's Indian Child Welfare. We need more. I know the job of a foster parent is rewarding, and I know it does come with some unique and trying challenges. However, lack of workplace support should never be a reason a family closes their home to foster children.

At Cherokee Nation, we made a decision that if we asked our people to step up as foster parents, then we must step up as an employer and support the service our foster families are providing. This is an

important way we can support our workforce and grow our database of foster parents. The five additional days of paid leave for full-time employees can be used during the first full year after placement.

Our ICW department is one of the strongest programs in the state and in the nation. As the largest tribe in the United States, we have more children involved in these kinds of cases than any other tribal government. Cherokee Nation Indian Child Welfare has custody of approximately 80 children during any calendar year but intervenes as a party and participates in more than 1,600 cases per year throughout the United States. Nationally, Native children are overrepresented in the nation's foster care system, and we have to address those statistics. We must ensure our children have safe, stable homes and remain connected to their Cherokee culture.

At Cherokee Nation, we strive to be the employer of choice in northeast Oklahoma. During my tenure as Principal Chief, we have raised minimum wage to \$9.50 an hour and created an eight-week paid maternity leave program for mothers and six weeks of paternity leave for fathers.

For more information on Cherokee Nation's Indian Child Welfare programs and services, visit <http://www.cherokeekids.org>.

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