



Notes from the Chief

What I'm working on for You



Osiyo -

As the Chief of the Cherokee Nation and the son of public schoolteachers, it has troubled me to see the inaction at the state level as teachers across our great state struggle. The time for action is now, and Cherokee Nation is taking the lead by granting our certified teachers the pay raise they deserve.

Recently, I proposed—and the Cherokee Nation Tribal Council approved—a lump sum payment of \$5,000 to all certified teachers, effective immediately. Additionally, certified teacher pay will increase by \$5,000, effective the beginning of teacher contracts in FY18-19.

Over the past decade, the state of Oklahoma has made drastic budget cuts to public education. At the same time, teachers continue to meet additional demands beyond simply fulfilling the daily lesson plans. From monitoring student safety to test preparation to finding ways to help students in need of food or school supplies, Oklahoma teachers go above and beyond the call of duty each day and with fewer resources each year.

We have the best colleges in Oklahoma (several in our jurisdiction like Northeastern State University and Rogers State University), which train our brightest minds for the educational workforce. Yet, sadly, when they graduate, they often leave to teach in other states or are forced to leave the children they love teaching for higher-paying jobs. The state absolutely must address teacher pay this legislative session because we are in a crisis. However, Cherokee Nation will not wait any longer.

This pay raise is in keeping with Cherokee Nation's longstanding commitment and support of public education. We started the first institution of higher learning for females west of the Mississippi River. We established a system of free public education well before Oklahoma statehood. We continue to achieve excellence today at Sequoyah High School, the Cherokee Nation Immersion School and through our support of public schools and students across northeastern Oklahoma.

In addition, we recently issued \$5.4 million to 108 schools through our car tag compact. The amount given annually has doubled since 2010, and since 2003, Cherokee Nation has contributed more than \$50 million to public education through the compact.

Cherokee Nation is unwavering in its commitment to public schools, students and teachers. Our pay raise reaffirms that commitment and, I hope, sends a message to state leaders that they should follow Cherokee Nation's lead and raise pay for all certified teachers in the state. The Cherokee Nation understands the role of teachers. It is a profession that we know is of extreme value and importance. Teachers impact so many lives and should be rewarded as such.

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Bill John Baker



17675 S. Huskoge Ave.
Tahlequah, OK 74465
918-453-5000

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Cherokee Nation P.O. Box 948 Tahlequah, OK 74465