



Notes from the Chief

What I'm working on for You

Osiyo -

Across the country, the mission of the federal Johnson-O'Malley program is to provide the books, fees, equipment and other necessities that Native children need but would not otherwise be provided through the school. Successful JOM programs instill tribal pride in our youngest citizens and incorporate unique tribal culture and heritage lessons in the base education curriculum.

At Cherokee Nation, we strive to ensure every Indian child in our 14-county service area receives the educational opportunities they deserve. We serve more than 26,000 students in 71 schools. As we add more students and schools every year, the JOM per student allocation keeps dwindling. Sadly, federal funding has been frozen since 1995 and capped at 278,000 students nationally.

Indian Country has grown by leaps and bounds in the last decade. American Indians are one of the fastest-growing populations in America, according to U.S. Census data, and I am sure the upcoming census will reflect a sustained growth rate.

This month, Tulsa, the heart of Indian Country, hosted the national JOM conference. The latest national budget for JOM, which was included in the fiscal year 2018 omnibus funding bill, is a mere \$15 million, and the president's budget request to Congress for fiscal year 2019 would eliminate JOM funding entirely. The National Indian Education Association says the amount to fully fund our JOM programs is more than \$42 million. At Cherokee Nation, our JOM dollars used to be about \$125 per student. Today, it's a little more than \$35 per student. Cherokee Nation will continue to fight for continued funding of the JOM program. This program is in desperate need of increased funding, not elimination.

As the son and grandson of professional educators, I know we can and we must do better. We have a responsibility to keep pushing for greater successes and raising the bar for our JOM programs.

Recently, the U.S. Senate approved S.943, a JOM modernization bill that would update the law and require a new student count based on current data. A new student count would lead to increased funding for the JOM program. S. 943 is awaiting action in the House Education & Workforce Subcommittee on Early Childhood.

Last week, Secretary of State Chuck Hoskin Jr. and some of our Tribal Councilors met with Congressman Todd Rokita's office (R-IN). Rokita leads the committee that has jurisdiction over S.943. Hoskin and Tribal Councilors urged the congressman to approve this important bill. In the meantime, reach out to your congressman and advocate for this bill. Let them know every Indian child deserves an education that meets his or her needs. We want our Cherokee youth to become everything God intended for them.

The lack of federal dollars coupled with the state funding crisis hurts our kids. Over the past few years, Oklahoma is the worst state in the nation for K-12 school funding cuts. Since 2008, Oklahoma has slashed public education funding by almost 24 percent, far and away the biggest cuts in the nation.

However, we continue to do more for Native students with less in Oklahoma. This is where tribal partners like Cherokee Nation come to the rescue of Oklahoma students and public education. Across the state there are more than 130,000 American Indian school children in our public schools – the highest number in the country – and our students continue to lead the nation in math and reading scores.

The testing shows what our children can do with decreased money. Just think of the possibilities if we kept our promises to our youth and fully funded their educational experiences.

At Cherokee Nation, we will keep pushing for more and better educational opportunities for all Indian children in Oklahoma. JOM cultural enrichment initiatives are vital to our long-term success as a tribe. I will keep advocating for JOM programs and funding because it means a healthier and brighter future for Oklahoma and for all of Indian Country.

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