

State of the Nation Address – Chief Hoskin – September 2, 2023

First Lady, Deputy Chief Warner, Mr. Speaker, members of the Council, members of the cabinet, members of the judiciary and ladies and gentlemen.

It is my honor and duty to report to the Cherokee people on the state of the Cherokee Nation.

I am proud to report that the Nation is strong and even prouder to report that we are on a path to continue getting stronger.

How we measure that strength, my fellow Cherokees, is more important than whether we simply declare that we are strong.

And, most important is that we press forward, building on our strength.

We are not a people content to speak only in the past tense. We have never been a nation merely satisfied with where we are.

We are not a nation that rests, because we know that resting is falling behind and we are not a people who were meant to fall behind.

As I remarked at our recent Inaugural ceremonies, this nation is a young and energetic nation ready to meet the challenges in front of us.

We are a nation full of citizens who possess the collective capacity - and Cherokee goodness - to build a great Cherokee society and make the 21st century a great Cherokee century.

And, so, let us measure our strength by reflecting not only on where we have been, but where we are headed on issues that impact all of us.

We start at our foundation: The sovereignty of the Cherokee Nation.

We stand today as a nation meeting its responsibilities as a government, asserting our rights, but always looking to do more and go further.

From an expanding criminal justice system, to protecting our most vulnerable citizens, to exercising our rights to hunt, fish and gather, to leveraging our strength to build up our economy, today we are realizing so many of the dreams of our ancestors.

We are pressing the government of the United States to keep its promises to the Cherokee Nation.

That includes keeping the solemn, sacred and exclusive promise to seat our Delegate to Congress and on that mission we shall not rest.

Storms, my fellow Cherokees, are always on the horizon when it comes to protecting and defending the sovereignty of the Cherokee Nation.

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In the coming year the opponents of tribal sovereignty will continue to press their tired old case to move this country backwards, to retreat from justice and to push the United States to escape its obligations to the Cherokee people.

But we will meet their insistence on turning back the clock with a greater commitment to moving this country forward. We will match their isolation with our solidarity. We will meet their lies with the truth. We will take the defense of tribal sovereignty wherever it leads us, be it the courts, the halls of Congress, the state legislature or out in the communities. The enemies of sovereignty will work hard but we will work harder, and we shall not rest. And in that same spirit, anyone who extends a hand of friendship to the Cherokee Nation will be met with that same hand of friendship. On that basis we can make our tribal lands, and the entire region, a place of growing prosperity and opportunity for everyone.

Our progress on healthcare can be felt near and far. Our workforce is growing, and we have new staff and services for citizens both here at home and at-large.

We broke ground on a new outpatient center in Salina and a new hospital here in our capital city.

But we cannot rest when it comes to moving towards our goal of a world class system of wellness for the Cherokee people.

Last year we extracted \$100 million from the opioid industry to make those corporations pay for the damage they have done to our citizens and our nation.

The Public Health and Wellness Fund Act, on which the Deputy Chief and I worked with the Council, turns those dollars into a once in a generation opportunity to heal.

We will soon unveil plans for constructing new drug treatment facilities across this reservation over the next five years.

This fall the first Cherokees students will be receiving full scholarships in exchange for coming back home and working for our people in the fields of mental health and addiction recovery.

That investment, a \$5 million permanent endowment, will help us return to the fundamental principle of Cherokee wellness: the Cherokee people taking care of the Cherokee people.

And, in the coming year in Stilwell we will complete our first Wellness Center and we will unveil plans for another \$35 million wellness center right here in Tahlequah.

I am also pleased to report on our success in the area of food sovereignty and security.

Last year we opened the 1839 Meat Company. This year through our partnership with the United States Department of Agriculture we will commit over \$10 million over three years to bring locally grown and raised food to elders and Cherokee families in need across this reservation, and that includes meat from our own meat processing plant.

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That, my fellow Cherokees is food sovereignty in action.

The strength of the Cherokee Nation of course, resides in our communities.

That is why we have made historic investments over the past four years to build, expand or improve community centers across the reservation.

From Dewey to Marble City, from Kansas to Kenwood, from Vian to Greasy, from Catoosa to Hulbert, from South Coffeyville to Stilwell and from Bowlin Springs to Belfonte, we are making progress to build strength in our communities.

In the last four years, across 128 projects and over \$20 million, we provided grass roots community organizers with new and better facilities to do what they do best: Caring for elders, making safe places for kids and creating hubs for the revitalization of our language and culture.

But we must do more, Deputy Chief Warner and I will send legislation to the Council to expand the community building capital program under the Housing, Jobs and Sustainable Communities Act.

As long as the Cherokee people are willing to organize and build up their communities, the least we can do is provide them with a community building.

And, across this reservation let us replicate what we are doing in Kenwood.

A year ago in Kenwood no one could make a cell phone call or use a smart phone because there was no cell service.

Today, thanks to the Cherokee Nation, Kenwood is connected.

But this has always been about something more than a cell tower. Kenwood is organizing around this new era of connectivity and doing so alongside the new park and community center which is under construction.

There is pride in what Kenwood can do because we are not focused on what Kenwood can't do.

And that, my fellow Cherokees, should be our attitude in every single Cherokee community.

But, as we understood in Kenwood, we cannot expect Cherokees to seize opportunities in commerce, education, employment or healthcare if they are cut off from the world of connectivity.

And, so, we will soon unveil a plan to eliminate more gaps, building cell towers and bringing high-speed internet and cell service to 16 more Cherokee communities over the next three years.

But we must do more than invest in buildings and technology. We must also invest in people.

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Former councilman Shawn Crittenden, and his Gadugi Corps task force, have been hard at work to plan our newest and I think most promising program.

Gadugi Corps calls upon Cherokees both here at home and at-large to serve their fellow Cherokees with the full support and resources of our Nation.

We have a nation of citizens full of optimism and a willingness to serve.

They look around and see an elder suffering, or they see a Cherokee child in need of guidance, or they see a community in need of repair.

Their first instinct is not to look away. Their first instinct is not to hope the government comes along and solves the problem.

Their first instinct is to reach out to that elder, be a mentor to that kid or roll up their sleeves to help make their community better.

Those Cherokees- and there are so many of you here at home and across the country- deserve a government that matches that spirit of “Gadugi,” the Cherokee word for working together.

And so, to match your spirit Deputy Chief Warner and I will send legislation to the Council for a \$2 million investment into the new Gadugi Corps program for volunteer and national service.

Language and culture have been central to all our efforts and that must continue.

In 2019 we set a course to revitalize Cherokee language.

Since that time, we have quadrupled our master / apprentice language program, expanded our immersion school, utilized new technologies, built a language village, launched Speaker Services to help lift up our elder fluent speakers’ quality of life and we opened the doors on our state-of-the-art language center.

Over the last four years we have invested over \$83 million into the cause of language revitalization under the landmark Durbin Feeling Language Preservation Act.

But, we cannot rest. We must continue building, investing and innovating if we are to continue on this mission.

And so, on October 10th of this year we will assemble the largest gathering of first language fluent Cherokee speakers since before Oklahoma statehood, right here in Tahlequah.

At that gathering Deputy Chief Warner and I will propose a permanent reauthorization of the Durbin Feeling Language Preservation Act to set us on a dedicated path to revitalizing our precious language in the decades to come.

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We must also recognize that for centuries our culture and our national identity has been injured by the pilfering, theft or other dispossession of our precious cultural materials, our archives, and even the remains of our ancestors.

My fellow Cherokees, it is the 21st century. Cherokee Nation is in a position of strength. The law is on our side and our cause is righteous.

And so this year we will launch an historic effort to bring home what belongs to us.

The Cherokee Nation Repatriation Project will begin a new dialogue with institutions and governments across the country that hold Cherokee cultural patrimony or the remains of our ancestors.

Our message will be plain and simple: The days of our culture, heritage, history and ancestral remains being housed in museums, archives and warehouses far from home are over.

In the name of our ancestors and for the sake of our descendants, let us bring about a restoration and bring all of this back home where it has always belonged.

My fellow Cherokees on all of these vital matters we shall not rest.

And we shall not rest on other critical matters such as housing, education, the environment, creating jobs and investing in our own workforce.

We shall not rest.

We shall not rest because we are the Cherokee Nation. We are the Cherokee people, a great people whose triumphs are greater than our tragedies.

We are a people who mean to surge forward and we do not intend to fall behind.

My fellow Cherokees our Nation is strong. It is strong because it rests upon a foundation of our people and our sovereignty.

Our strength is growing because we are investing in those things that build up a great Cherokee society.

Today let us celebrate unity and let us celebrate progress.

But, for this young Nation the hour is always late, the tasks are always urgent, the challenges are always real, and the opportunities always abound.

And so, we have precious time to celebrate and reflect before we get back to work building this nation even stronger.

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I am so proud to serve as your Chief, so proud to serve alongside our Deputy Chief and so proud to work with the Council.

I stand ready to gather up with all of you to get to work building up this great nation.