



# CHEROKEE PHOENIX

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193 YEARS OF JOURNALISM

## Runoffs decide last 4 Council seats

Candessa Tehee, Joshua Sam, Melvina Shotpouch and Johnny Jack Kidwell win runoff elections held July 24.

BY CHAD HUNTER  
Reporter

TAHLEQUAH – The Cherokee Nation’s July 24 runoff election decided who would serve on the remaining four Tribal Council seats.

In the tightest race, Dist. 2 voters in Cherokee County seated Candessa Tehee by just seven votes, according to data from the Election Commission.

“I am honored and grateful for the support I’ve received over the course of this election,” Tehee said. “My family and I want to thank everyone who made

this possible. I look forward to serving all Cherokee citizens as the Dist. 2 Cherokee Nation Tribal Councilor as we build a strong and united future together.”

Dist. 7 voters in western Adair County favored Joshua Sam, who won with 51.79% of the vote, according to EC data.

“I want to thank all of my Cherokee friends and neighbors for their support in this campaign,” Sam said.

In Dist. 10, Melvina Shotpouch secured her win with 59.1% of the vote. The district encompasses Ottawa County and portions of Mayes and Delaware counties.

“I am humbled and proud to have had



Candessa Tehee



Joshua Sam



Melvina Shotpouch



Johnny Jack Kidwell

INAUGURATION  
TIME: 10 a.m.  
DATE: Aug. 14  
SITE: Chota Room in the Cherokee Casino Tahlequah

the support of so many Cherokees to return to the Tribal Council,” Shotpouch said. “Preservation of Cherokee heritage and culture has been my passion for most of my adult life. As your Tribal Councilwoman, I will continue to work hard.”

The open At-Large seat went to Johnny Jack Kidwell, who prevailed with

60.3% of the vote.

“My family and I are grateful for the support and trust you have placed in me to serve you on Cherokee Tribal Council,” Kidwell said. “I look forward to the years ahead as we work together for a

SEE RUNOFF, 2



## CN HOSTS HHS HEAD

From left are Cherokee Nation Health Services Deputy Executive Director of External Operations Brian Hail, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Secretary Xavier Becerra and Principal Chief Chuck Hoskin Jr. touring the tribe’s health centers in Tahlequah. Becerra visited the CN in July.

The Cherokee Nation in July welcomes Health and Human Services Secretary Xavier Becerra as part of his first official visit to a tribal reservation.

BY STAFF REPORTS

TAHLEQUAH – With more than 2,000 Cherokee Nation citizens signed up under Oklahoma’s recent expansion of Medicaid, the CN recently hosted U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Secretary Xavier Becerra, Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services Administrator Chiquita Brooks-La-

Sure, and Indian Health Service Acting Director Elizabeth Fowler during a visit marking Becerra’s first visit to a tribal reservation. According to a CN press release, Principal Chief Chuck Hoskin Jr. and Deputy Chief Bryan Warner welcomed Becerra, Brooks-LaSure and Fowler at the tribe’s Outpatient Health Center in Tahlequah for a roundtable discussion on Oklaho-

ma’s recent expansion of Medicaid with local, state, federal and tribal leaders. “I want to thank Secretary Becerra, CMS Administrator Brooks-La-Sure, and IHS Director Fowler for visiting the Cherokee Nation reservation to see first-hand how we continue to lead by example in the field of health care,” Hoskin said. “Oklahoma’s expansion of Medicaid was a fitting backdrop to host Secretary Becerra and federal leadership. More than 2,000 of our health system’s patients enrolled in Medicaid in just the first few weeks of the expansion. This means more Cherokee families are going to have

“I look forward to continuing these critical discussions in the future as we implement new and innovative opportunities to improve upon our tribal health care system.”

Principal Chief Chuck Hoskin Jr.

SEE VISIT, 2

## Year after McGirt, CN shares safety, sovereignty plans

The tribe’s efforts result in a record number of cases filed, more funding, new hires and efforts to expand its legal system.

BY STAFF REPORTS

TAHLEQUAH – On the one-year anniversary of the U.S. Supreme Court’s ruling in McGirt v. Oklahoma, the Cherokee Nation celebrated the decision by announcing its path forward to protect sovereignty and enforce its justice system.

According to a CN press release, this work is a continuation of the Nation’s efforts over the past 12 months, which have resulted in a record number of cases filed, additional funding, new hires and other efforts in expanding its legal system.

“One year ago, the Supreme Court issued one of the greatest victories for Indian Country of our time. It was an overdue recognition of what should be straightforward facts: our reservations have not been disestablished, and we have sovereignty on our land,” said Principal Chief Chuck Hoskin Jr. “Despite attempts at fearmongering, the past year has proven wrong those who unfortunately continue to spout anti-Indian rhetoric, and who mislead the public on McGirt to undermine our rights. Criminals did not suddenly all run free, local police officers still have the resources they need,

SEE MCGIRT, 3



Cherokee Nation officials have been coordinating with the Oklahoma Department of Transportation to get “Entering the Cherokee Nation Reservation” signage erected.

COURTESY

## CN marshals, attorneys dealing with McGirt fallout

Since the McGirt v. Oklahoma ruling in 2020, the tribe’s Attorney General’s Office has taken on more than 1,200 criminal cases.

BY CHAD HUNTER  
Reporter

TAHLEQUAH – Officials with the Cherokee Nation Marshal Service and Attorney General’s Office reported to the Rules Committee on July 13 that their offices are still dealing with fallout from the U.S. Supreme Court’s McGirt ruling.

During his report to the committee, Marshal Service Director Shannon Buhl said his 41-officer force conducted 83 prisoner transports in June alone.

“If you can imagine going to 13 jails throughout our county picking up one or two prisoners, getting them to court,” he said. “It has pretty much taken up a lion’s share of the marshals’ time. Between that and special operations, high-risk warrant services, chasing really, really bad men and women, we’ve been busy.”



Shannon Buhl



Sara Hill

“It has pretty much taken up a lion’s share of the marshals’ time. Between that and special operations, high-risk warrant services, chasing really, really bad men and women, we’ve been busy.”

Marshal Service Director Shannon Buhl

Responding to a previous question regarding firearms training that came out of the committee, Buhl noted that in nine officer-involved shootings over the past 15 years, “we have had zero bullets not hit exactly what the marshal was aiming at.”

“So that is not the norm for police in the United States,” he added. “I chalk that up to the training my officers have and the time they spend on the range. We spend approximately \$250,000 a year just on ammunition costs so we don’t have those issues.”

Council Speaker Joe Byrd expressed appreciation for “what you guys do” in the Marshal Service.

“Here as a tribe, we’ve taken the lead in a lot of ways on training,” he said. “There’s really not too many plac-

es we can go to learn from another tribe because we are the leaders. We’ve set the bar real high.”

Also reporting to the committee, Attorney General Sara Hill said that since the U.S. Supreme Court’s landmark McGirt v. Oklahoma ruling in 2020, her office has taken on more than 1,265 additional criminal cases.

“So we continue to be quite busy at the AG’s office,” Hill said. “We have also been continuing to push out the municipal MOAs.”

The memorandum of agreements donate revenue from traffic and misdemeanor citations back to municipalities within the reservation.

SEE FALLOUT, 3