

**Testimony for the Record
Submitted to the
House Natural Resource Committee
for the Hearing
“Examining 50 years of the Indian Self-Determination and
Education Assistance Act in Indian Country”
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Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, thank you for inviting me to participate in today’s hearing and for this opportunity to share our perspective on the importance and impact of the Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act in the Chickasaw Nation.

The Chickasaw Nation, like any modern nation, is complex, and we have a long history of perseverance, determination and progress.

In our more recent history, the combined efforts and hard work of Chickasaw Nation leadership beginning in the 1970s and 80s, along with certain United States congressional acts, enabled the Chickasaw Nation to gain greater control over the management of our health, education and social services funds, most notably the Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act of 1975.

This Act enabled First American tribes to exercise our sovereignty more fully by assuming responsibility for administering programs and services through compact agreements with the federal government.

Inseparable Part of this Country and State

Our history and the history of Oklahoma, as well as the United States, are forever intertwined, and we are honored to be a part of this great country and state’s past, present and future.

The 1786 Treaty of Hopewell was the beginning of the official relationship between the Chickasaw Nation and the United States. Though this relationship has been marked by a series of changes throughout our history, the Chickasaw Nation built a relationship with the United States based on each entity’s inherent sovereignty.

Treaties, compacts and other agreements with the United States throughout our shared history are examples of the Chickasaw Nation exercising our sovereignty in our relations with other sovereigns.

Today, we may not negotiate treaties, but we regularly compact, and each of our compacts provides examples of this exercise of sovereignty. Over the years, successful compacts have supported and strengthened our powers of self-governance and self-determination.

Our longstanding relationship with the federal government changed significantly with the advent of Oklahoma statehood in 1907 when the government of the Chickasaw Nation was reduced to a single official, Governor. For decades following statehood, the President of the United States appointed the governor of the Chickasaw Nation, who had previously been elected by the Chickasaw people.

This occurred despite the fact that the Act of 1906 passed by Congress provided that the government of the Chickasaw Nation, which consisted of executive, legislative and judicial departments, would remain in “full force and effect.”

In the 1960s, Chickasaw citizens increased their efforts to reestablish the democratic government structure enshrined in the tribe’s Chickasaw Constitution. Those efforts were part of a growing movement that began to shift federal Indian policy toward self-governance.

These steadfast efforts resulted in federal legislation in 1970 that ended the practice of Presidential appointment and re-empowered the Chickasaw people to elect the governor of the Chickasaw Nation. That first election of the Chickasaw Nation Governor since Oklahoma statehood was a significant step toward reasserting our self-governance.

For more than 30 years, Chickasaw Nation compacts with the federal government have been key to effective and strong intergovernmental relationships. These legal agreements among sovereigns are carefully crafted to preserve the sovereign recognition and rights of each party, balance competing governmental interests, and serve all citizens and residents.

As a result of these agreements, we have been able to accomplish a great deal for those we serve. We continue to build productive partnerships with local, tribal, state and federal governments.

Sovereignty and Self-Determination are the Foundation

In 1970, President Richard Nixon issued a “Special Message to Congress on Indian Affairs,” which refocused federal policy on self-governance and economic independence of tribal nations.

This resulted in passage of the Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act of 1975. This Act empowered us to better meet the needs of those we serve, because, being closer to the people, we have a more intimate understanding of those needs and how to best meet them.

This was a major step forward in the recognition of our sovereign rights, tribal sovereignty and self-determination.

Sovereignty is the foundation of our right to establish a government that serves the Chickasaw people. It enables our government to secure the rights of our citizens and is vital to the success of our businesses and other economic development efforts.

The Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act was monumental in enabling tribes to exercise our sovereignty more fully by assuming responsibility for administering programs and services through agreements with the federal government.

By empowering tribes to negotiate with the federal government to run our own programs and deliver our own services, it gave us the ability to tailor them in ways that better meet the specific needs of those we serve.

Since then, we have continued to work toward more effective and comprehensive services, just as we have also continued working toward greater financial self-sufficiency.

Today, we continue to build upon a diverse and sustainable economic foundation that enables us to develop new programs and services, and to partner in the improvement of our communities in a number of ways.

To fully realize our vision of self-determination, we had to come up with ways to raise revenue through business. Revenue would be used to expand further business activity and fund needed programs and services for the Chickasaw people.

Our plan for economic development was three-fold. In addition to generating revenue to help meet the needs of our people, including quality affordable housing, improved health care and educational opportunities. We also sought to offer employment opportunities to Chickasaws and generate enough revenue to sustain the future.

Our entry into business began small, with the purchase of the Artesian Motor Hotel in Sulphur, Oklahoma, in 1972, making it the first business owned and operated by the tribe. It was renamed the Chickasaw Motor Inn.

Operating this venture helped us understand the potential of business diversification and economic development to serve Chickasaws and benefit our neighbors.

Not every business succeeded, but what we learned along the way has helped us build the success we enjoy today. That first business later turned into the Artesian Hotel, also located in Sulphur.

By 1987, the Chickasaw Nation had about 250 employees, with a budget of only \$11 million dollars. But, little by little, we continued to build and make economic progress.

Our first large bingo hall, called Touso Ishto, was located on a former peanut farm in Thackerville, Oklahoma and has now grown into the WinStar World Casino, one of the largest in the world.

Our most recent effort to grow Oklahoma tourism, the OKANA Resort and Indoor Waterpark, has created hundreds of new employment opportunities and will generate a substantial economic impact on the region.

Today's Chickasaw Nation

Today, the Chickasaw Nation consists of more than 81,500 citizens worldwide. Our treaty territory includes 7,648 square miles and encompasses all or part of 13 counties in south-central Oklahoma.

At our core is a mission and a set of core values that define our purpose and drive our decision making. That mission is “to enhance the overall quality of life of the Chickasaw people.”

To fulfill our mission, we have tailored nearly 400 programs and services to specifically meet the needs of Chickasaw citizens in a broad range of areas including housing, health care, education, aging, veterans services, family and social services, law enforcement, and many other areas.

To fund these vital programs and services, we have established a diverse portfolio of more than 100 businesses, ranging from banking and health care to high-end chocolate production, IT and communications, gaming and tourism, luxury hotels, venture capitalism, government contracting, radio broadcasting, manufacturing, and more.

We employ more than 14,500 people across these businesses and government operations, built to serve our people and fund our operations.

In addition, these businesses help stimulate the economies of local communities, as well as the economy of the state of Oklahoma.

We also fund roads, bridges and other infrastructure projects, all of which improve the local and state economy to the benefit of Chickasaws, other First Americans and all of Oklahoma.

Benefits to Oklahoma

Tribal citizens are also Oklahoma residents and American citizens. We strongly believe what is good for the Chickasaw Nation is good for Oklahoma, and what is good for Oklahoma is good for the Chickasaw Nation.

According to the most recent economic impact report in 2022, the Chickasaw Nation has a statewide economic impact of \$5.5 billion.

Through the multiplier effect of our business and government activities, we support more than 24,000 jobs paying Oklahoma workers \$1.5 billion in wages and benefits.

According to this same report, when combining business revenues, government expenditures, and capital expenditures, the Chickasaw Nation accounted for more than \$3.5 billion dollars in direct Oklahoma production.

That same year, our businesses alone generated more than \$3 billion dollars in revenue. Again, much of the profit from that revenue is invested in programs and services, as well as infrastructure and other capital development in our local communities.

We are also heavily involved in philanthropic efforts and assist many non-profits, cities, counties, schools and universities across the state. In fact, together, the Chickasaw Nation provides millions of dollars annually to these types of charities and educational institutions.

Exercising our sovereignty can take many forms. Many times, we exercise sovereignty in the form of mutually beneficial compacts with federal, state and local governments and agencies.

In 1994, the Chickasaw Nation became one of the first tribes in the country to compact with Indian Health Service to assume administration and delivery of health care to First Americans within our service area.

With this compact, we did more than just take responsibility of our own health care system, we took control of our tribe's destiny, as this was a major leap forward in reasserting our sovereignty and enhancing our ability to self-govern.

As we began operating our health care services, we applied a holistic, mission-driven approach. We held listening sessions inviting large numbers of our citizens to attend to learn what mattered to them and what needs they prioritized. This helped inform our decisions regarding which health care and other services to offer.

We set goals, such as having a medical facility within 35 minutes of any Chickasaw in the Chickasaw Nation. We made sure transportation and unique services for elders were available.

We paid attention to those voices who had special needs and made sure we built services and provided access to those who needed those services. We thought about our people who were struggling with addiction, mental health issues and partner violence, and offered appropriate services.

We developed new initiatives in nutrition, healthy lifestyle and physical fitness education, and provided community facilities where our people could exercise and obtain healthy foods. We coordinated our health care services to other government services such as education, rehabilitation, social and legal services, and more.

From 2005 to 2010, we added vital health and nutrition services, opened comprehensive diabetes care facilities and incorporated wellness and fitness centers in most of our communities.

We were seeing real solutions at work, and our health system was growing, as were the number of patients. As we continued to expand and improve our health care system, more and more First Americans from many different tribes and locations in the region chose to travel to our facilities to receive their health care services.

In 2009, the Carl Albert Indian Health Facility, our previous health facility, counted more than 300,000 patient visits annually, between 10 to 15 times its original estimated capacity and far too many patients for the space available.

We invested our own funds to construct a new facility, the Chickasaw Nation Medical Center, utilizing the Indian Health Service (IHS) Joint Venture Funding Program. In return, IHS provided funds for a portion of staffing in the new facility.

In 2010, the Chickasaw Nation Medical Center opened and has been providing the highest quality health care to our patients since.

Many new and expanded facilities and services have been added over time to accommodate the growing needs of patients, including a family medicine residency program, new outpatient and inpatient pharmacies, facility support buildings, an alternate care site, expanded surgery space, and more.

In the past 15 years, we have received two additional Joint Venture awards for the Ardmore and Tishomingo health facilities.

As a sovereign nation, we work closely with the federal government, and as a good neighbor, we work closely with the state of Oklahoma. But we are most active at the local and municipal level. We have a vested interest in seeing our communities thrive for the betterment of Chickasaws and all who call the Chickasaw Nation home.

Because we work so closely with all levels of government, tribes are uniquely positioned to be a bridge between federal agencies, the State and municipalities.

The Chickasaw Nation and other tribal nations of Oklahoma work hard to improve conditions for Oklahomans and continue to find innovative ways to stimulate local and state-wide economies. Oklahoma is home to us all, and we all benefit from a healthy and prosperous economy.

But among these large numbers, there are also many other ways that we, along with other tribes in the state, directly benefit Oklahoma's economy, support local and state government and enhance the lives of all Oklahomans.

Economic Impact: Examples and Details

Every day, tribes reduce the state's financial burden by providing a large variety of programs and services to First Americans and local communities.

Some of these services are funded through federal grants and others we fund with earnings from tribal business operations.

We serve approximately 1 million patients per year at the Chickasaw Nation Medical Center and outlying clinics, and fill or mail millions of prescriptions annually. We spend millions of dollars on the health care of our patients every year, an expenditure that substantially reduces Oklahoma's Medicaid costs.

In terms of education, we provide millions in scholarships, grants and school supplies to thousands of students each year.

Our roads program supports our state's infrastructure with millions of dollars worth of repairs and development on roads, water lines, sewers and bridges. By providing these

services to local communities, we relieve municipalities and the Oklahoma Department of Transportation of much of their repair and maintenance costs.

Through the Tribal Transportation Program, tribes have a dedicated source of federal funds to build roads and bridges and to develop transportation systems. Because we all share the desire to improve our transportation infrastructure, many tribes match funds with counties to construct or improve local roads and bridges.

The Chickasaw Roads Program routinely works with the Circuit Engineering Districts and local municipalities to coordinate long-term planning for large road projects.

On average, our Roads Program repairs or replaces more than 40 miles of road each year. This work is done through cooperative agreements with local counties. Each year, we match county funds with millions of dollars to finance these joint transportation infrastructure projects.

The Chickasaw Nation also supports local businesses in a myriad of ways. Tourism efforts, like those of our Chickasaw Country guide and website, promotes businesses throughout the 13 counties that make up the Chickasaw Nation.

Through our many housing and development projects, we bring much needed construction revenue and growth to the state economy. These construction projects employ local contractors and construction workers, beautify communities, and provide stable, well-paying jobs after construction is complete.

We also provide our communities with a wide variety of beneficial services, including WIC, child support services, utilities assistance, senior citizen programs, health and wellness services, food and nutrition programs, work training and much more.

We are also involved in many philanthropic endeavors and support medical research, the arts, non-profit charities, and schools and universities across the state.

The Chickasaw Nation provides millions of dollars annually to these types of charities and educational institutions.

Future Compacts

Looking to the future, we would like to expand compacting to other agencies. More specifically, we would be interested in discussing compacting for the Tishomingo Wildlife Refuge and the Chickasaw National Recreation Area in Sulphur. Both are located in the heart of the Chickasaw Nation and offer a variety of outdoor and leisurely activities for residents and visitors.

The Chickasaw National Recreation Area is especially important to us. This land was sold to the federal government by our ancestors with the intention of preserving its beauty, springs and wildlife from commercial and private interests. Thanks to their foresight, we are still able to enjoy this historic area.

These areas were not created to boost the local and state economies, but that has been, and could be once again, the case because of their impact on the community.

Years ago, we worked on an agreement with the National Park Service to partner on the Chickasaw National Recreation Area, but an agreement was not reached. We have also worked together with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service at the Tishomingo Wildlife Refuge but would like to be more involved.

Through a PL 93-638 agreement, we believe we can enhance both areas to be beneficial economic boosts for the local communities through tourism and further economic development.

Closing

Tribes are beneficial for Oklahoma economically, socially, culturally and in many other ways. We are involved in our communities by providing community-based services, improving roads and bridges, renovating school facilities and much more.

Our sovereignty and right to self-determination make all of this possible. Our sovereignty enables us to elect our own leaders, create our own laws, develop our own businesses, and provide services to our people. Our sovereignty offers our people the ability to maintain our way of life and our culture.

We work to ensure that our relationship with the federal government and the Oklahoma government remains positive because we truly believe that “United We Thrive.”

That is, if the Chickasaw Nation is doing well, then the state of Oklahoma is doing well, and if all the states are doing well, the United States will do well. When the tribes, the state and federal government work together for the benefit of the people, we will all thrive.

Thank you, again for the opportunity to provide testimony.

Bill Anoatubby, Governor
The Chickasaw Nation