

Cherokee power in Oklahoma

by M. Scott Carter

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State Rep. Chuck Hoskin, D-Vinita, at the Cherokee Nation press conference Tuesday. (Maike Sabolich)

OKLAHOMA CITY – The Cherokee Nation and its businesses have an impact of more than \$1 billion in economic output, generate more than \$400 million in income and directly and indirectly support more than 13,500 jobs, according to a study from Oklahoma City University.

According to the study, announced at a state Capitol press conference hosted by the Cherokee Nation on Tuesday, the tribe supports 13,527 jobs, directly contributes more than \$831 million of the state's economic output and provides more than \$257 million in income to state residents.

Russell Evans, executive director and research economist at the Steven C. Agee

Economic Research & Policy Institute at OCU's Meinders School of Business, said the tribe's economic impact was substantial.

"When you think about the economic impact that the Cherokee Nation exerts, it's a combination both of the new activity that comes to the state as a result of their operations, the federal grant and the contracting services they are able to provide as well as the recreation options they are able to provide," he said.

The Cherokees, he said, are closely tied to the state's broader economy.

"These are significant economic impacts," he said.

Cherokee Principal Chief Bill John Baker said the tribe is a vital part of the state's economic infrastructure.

"With a presence in 14 counties throughout northeastern Oklahoma, our roots are here and will always be here," Baker said. "We are proud of the progress of a generation and look forward to supporting northeast Oklahoma for generations to come."

Baker said his tribe supports a number of growing and diverse industries that drive private sector investment development in northeast Oklahoma. He said the tribe's government operations employ more than 3,250 individuals and provide public service to Cherokee and non-Cherokee citizens. Those services include child care, career services, elder services and health care services.

Tribal businesses, Baker said, employ more than 5,400 and maintain a state payroll of \$131 million.

State Rep. Mike Brown D-Tahlequah, said the tribe has a half-billion-dollar impact in his district alone.

Evans said the tribe's government and business operations offered a significant source of employment and job stability in northeastern Oklahoma.

"That (employment) is critical to their broader economic outcomes," he said.

Baker said tribal investments in programs such as health care offset costs that state government would otherwise have to pay.

"We do over a million patient visits a year at our nine clinics and our hospital," Baker said.
"Can you imagine if the state had to pick up a million extra visits, how it would overload their system? We do almost everything that the state does; that relieves the pressure on the rest of the state."

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