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From Left: MCN Chief of Staff Jeff Fife, Principal Chief David Hill, and National Council Speaker Randall Hicks attend Governor Stitt's final State of the State address in Oklahoma City. (Facebook)

SEVEN YEARS LATER, UNDERSTANDING TRIBAL SOVEREIGNTY STILL ELUDES STITT

GOVERNOR'S FINAL STATE OF THE STATE ADDRESSES OPPOSITION TOWARD MCGIRT AND THE RECENT OKLAHOMA TRIBES' LAWSUIT OVER TRIBAL HUNTING

BY BRADEN HARPER
MANAGING EDITOR

OKLAHOMA CITY - Tribal leaders, Oklahoma State leaders, and guests attended Governor Kevin Stitt's eighth and final State of the State address on Monday, Feb. 2. The speech was livestreamed on the Oklahoma Educational Television Authority's website and rebroadcast by local news outlets. In Stitt's address, he praised his administration's efforts in reducing budget spending, reducing the

state income tax, and capping the state's cash reserve. Stitt also reiterated his displeasure with the McGirt vs. Oklahoma ruling and its affirmation of the Oklahoma Tribes' sovereignty.

Key points in Stitt's address included calling for a state question to codify caps on recurring spending growth, disbanding the Oklahoma Secondary School Activities Association (OSSAA), and making the Parental Choice Tax Credit program available to all Oklahoma families.

Diving into the topic of Tribal relations, Stitt emphasized the "one great challenge that will remain." That challenge is the protection of the governor's One Oklahoma initiative. Stitt continued to stress his belief that the Supreme Court's decision in McGirt was harmful and unfair for all Oklahoma citizens.

"When Justice Gorsuch, in

a 5-4 decision in July of 2020, decided that half of our state was a reservation, I became the first Governor who had to face this new challenge," Stitt said. "In the wake of the McGirt decision, I have worked tirelessly to hold the line to keep One Oklahoma and protect the rights of every Oklahoman. We need to come together and protect the vision cast in 1907. We need to stop any effort to federalize half of our state."

Citing his Cherokee citizenship status, Stitt claimed that no one should receive special legal treatment or tax exemptions based on their race, and that Tribal sovereignty stands as a challenge to equality within the state.

"All laws should apply equally

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USGAO ESTIMATES NUMBER OF FREEDMEN DESCENDANTS

POPULATION ESTIMATES CURRENT AS OF 2022



(Jerrad Moore/MM)

BY JERRAD MOORE
ASSIGNMENT EDITOR

WASHINGTON. - The United States Government Accountability Office released a report titled "Information on Freedmen Descendants of the Five Tribes" on Jan. 14. The Senate Committee on Indian Affairs requested the report after the 2022 oversight hearing on Freedmen status, which covered the 1866 treaties between the U.S. and the Five Tribes. Mvskoke Media is printing selected excerpts specific to the Muscogee (Creek) Nation. The report can be read in full at the GAO website.

The report lists the estimated number of Freedmen descendants for each of the Five Tribes. The GAO created the estimates by utilizing a demographic model that began with the number of Freedmen on the Dawes Roll and projected population numbers up to 2022 using historical birth and death rates. Due to the lack of historical data and uncertainty about population changes over time, the GAO provided low and high estimates of Freedmen descendant populations.

According to the report, Muscogee Creek Nation Freedmen descendants could number between 43,500 and 117,300 individuals. These estimates were current as of 2022.

The GAO also interviewed Cherokee Nation officials, 19 Freedmen descendants enrolled in the Cherokee and Seminole Nations, and federal agency officials. These interviews revealed that Freedmen descendants encounter difficulties accessing federal services and funds that benefit Tribes, such as the Indian Health Service. According to the report:

According to IHS officials we interviewed, there are many acceptable forms of documentation for proving eligibility to receive health care services, such as tribal identification cards, and none should be given a higher priority than other forms of documentation. According to these officials, IHS-funded facilities do not require tribal citizens to provide a CDIB card, issued by Interior's BIA, to access their services or programs. As previously noted, Freedmen descendants are ineligible to

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REP. WHITECLOUD APPEARS IN MCN COURT NEXT COURT DATE SCHEDULED MARCH 2

BY JERRAD MOORE
ASSIGNMENT EDITOR

OKMULGEE - Muscogee (Creek) Nation National Council Representative for Okmulke District Seat A, Robyn Whitecloud, appeared in the MCN District Court on Monday, Feb. 2, for her initial court appearance. As previously reported, Rep. Whitecloud has been charged with four felony counts of preventing or attempting to prevent performance of official acts.

Whitecloud appeared in court without her attorney,

Ryan Cannonie of Cannonie Law Office. A member of the law office accompanied Whitecloud and informed Judge Nalani Ching that Mr. Cannonie could not attend the hearing due to a delayed flight. Judge Ching entered a plea of not guilty on Whitecloud's behalf.

Whitecloud's court date was rescheduled to Jan. 26 from its original date of Feb. 16, after a motion for accelerated hearing was filed by Cannonie. The snowstorm that moved through eastern Oklahoma forced the MCN Dis-

trict Court to close on Jan. 26, and the hearing was then rescheduled for Feb. 2.

Mvskoke Media contacted each MCN National Council representative with questions about Whitecloud's charges, but did not receive a response. Cannonie Law Office was also asked for comment but did not issue a statement.

The next hearing in the case has been scheduled for March 2. Mvskoke Media will have ongoing coverage of this story.



Rep. Robyn Whitecloud (MCNCC)

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MCN HOSTS 13TH ANNUAL ALL-INDIAN LIVESTOCK SHOW

EVENT HIGHLIGHTS HARDWORK OF YOUTH

BY SHAYLN PROCTOR
REPORTER

OKEMAH – The Muscogee (Creek) Nation hosted its 13th Annual All Indian Livestock Show on Jan 30 - Feb.1 at the Okfuskee County Fairgrounds. The competition was open to all Mvskoke youth in the state and all enrolled Tribal youth in the reservation.

MCN Agriculture Youth Program Manager Billy Haltom had said that this year's turnout was outstanding.

The championships in different breed categories received belt buckles, and all Grand winners received a new Pendleton blanket signed by MCN Chief David Hill. A free t-shirt was also given for pre-entering.

"We decided that we would go ahead and have three divisions in our goat show, and that just allows for us to spread the wealth out a little bit," Haltom said. It gives us an opportunity too because every one of our division winners receives a belt buckle. In that three-day stop show, we gave away 42 belt buckles, which is something that I don't think any other jackpot show in the state of Oklahoma can say."

Throughout the 13 shows hosted by the MCN, Haltom

enjoys seeing the kids. He has seen kids who started at nine years old showing their livestock- some have graduated or are graduating.

"I've seen them progress, through nine to ten years of showing and to see them mature and grow into young outstanding agriculturalists, it's just really a blessing to be able to be a part of those young people's lives and maybe have just a little bit of an influence on or an impact on them through their high school years," Haltom said.

Haltom started work in the MCN Youth Ag Program in Nov. 2012, which was during the time their program was in transition from going to county extension to being run strictly through MCN. During that time, Haltom wanted to do something for Native children in agriculture, which led to the livestock show.

This year, he noticed the numbers were a little bit down, but he thinks it's due to the economy. However, they've been showing livestock about every other weekend since October, and Haltom thinks the numbers have been going down everywhere, regardless of the show, species, or location.

"It's somewhat expensive to get into, and it seems like by the

time you purchase an animal, you pay for the feed, upkeep, and the things that are required for good husbandry," Haltom explained. "A lot of people just haven't been able to afford it this year, and I think that's the reason why we see kind of a little bit of a decrease in numbers, not just at our show but all shows. It has grown every year until this year, and again, the economy, I think, is the reason for that."

However, Haltom believes this livestock show still draws people. "Because we're talking over 300 kids that are entered in the livestock show over the course of those three days and I'm not saying we're overlooked in the big scope of things, but there's a lot of people that are within MCN that maybe aren't as aware as a lot of the agriculture activities that we have going on and this is an event that is has been going on for 13 consecutive years," Haltom stated.

Haltom spoke of how people still look forward to this annual All-Indian Livestock show because he receives calls about the exact dates of their show. He explained that some of the people who schedule for a local or county livestock show don't do so on the dates MCN hosts, since everyone wants to attend MCN's event.



FROM TOP to BOTTOM: The winner in the All Indian Livestock show for the Steer category was Lane Berry from Eufaula. This year's All-Indian Livestock show Reserve Grand Champion and Breed Champion in the Market Hog category was Annabell Parker. This year's All-Indian Livestock show for Reserve Grand Champion in the Market Lamb category was Channing Bass. (All Photos Courtesy: MCN Ag Youth Program)

RESULTS:

Heifers

Supreme Champion: Julie Emerson
Reserve Champion: Brody Lovett
Bronze Champion: Callie Borjon

Steer

Grand Champion: Lane Berry
Reserve Grand Champion: Chauncey Whisenhunt

Market lamb

Grand Champion: Channing Bass
Reserve Grand Champion: Tyan Stacy
Bronze Champion: Chastan Wilson

Doe Goat

Grand Champion: Jacey Treadwell
Reserve Grand: Dally Treadwell
Bronze Champion: Dally Treadwell

Wether Goat

Grand Champion: Paisley Nail
Reserve Grand Champion: Paisley Nail
Bronze Champion: Jade McPeak

Market Hog

Grand Champion: Annabell Parker
Reserve Grand Champion: Olivia Guinn
Bronze Champion: Layla Lee

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to all Oklahomans. No exceptions. An Indian named Kevin Stitt shouldn't be treated differently than a single mom of a different race," Stitt said. "If you commit a crime in Oklahoma, you should be prosecuted by a duly elected Oklahoma district attorney, you should be tried in an Oklahoma court overseen by a duly elected Oklahoma judge, and you should be protected by the rights laid out in the Oklahoma constitution. Your race shouldn't call any of these factors into question. If you live in Oklahoma, you drive on Oklahoma roads, you attend Oklahoma schools, and you vote in Oklahoma elections, you absolutely should not have different tax treatment than any other Oklahoman."

Stitt referenced the current federal lawsuit in court between the Tribes and the state regarding the prosecution of Tribal citizens who hunt on Tribal reservations. According to the Governor,

game wardens "should not be afraid to ticket poachers" and "district attorneys should not be afraid to prosecute criminals."

The Tribes Respond

Tribal leadership from the Five Tribes was quick to share their reactions on social media after the address. A common sentiment was that, even in Stitt's last year in office, he did not appear to respect Tribal sovereignty or recognize the rights of Tribal citizens within the state.

In Chief Hill's public statement, he found Stitt's view on Tribal sovereignty concerning and unchanged in the past seven years. The statement reads:

Today the Governor, once again, proved that he has no true understanding of the state which he governs. Oklahoma's proud indigenous history certainly doesn't include participating in a run for land, tribal citizens are not poachers for exercising treaty rights, and DEI policies have



Tribal leaders react to Governor Kevin Stitt's remarks on the topic of Tribal Sovereignty. (OETA)

absolutely nothing to do with people having the specific political rights and status of citizens belonging to sovereign Nations. The only good thing I can say about the Governor's comments today regarding tribal matters, is that they are his last in the Oklahoma people's house.

According to a public statement released by Cherokee Nation Principal Chief Chuck Hoskin Jr., Stitt's rhetoric on McGirt further damages the relationship between the Tribes and state leaders. The statement reads:

Today, in his final State of the State address, Governor Stitt effectively called for the termination of tribal government. No one should confuse his rhetoric cloaked in references to 'DEI', race, and concerns over public safety and taxation as anything other than a parting plea to the Oklahoma Legislature to destroy tribal governments. Governor Stitt sees termination of tribal sovereignty as the final solution to imagined problems. His issues are not rooted in the complexities of law and policy, but rather an objection over our

very existence. Fortunately, he spoke to a chamber that, on a bipartisan basis, has overwhelmingly rejected his 19th-century termination mindset in favor of cooperation and respect for tribal governments. His divisive message went out to millions of Oklahomans who are, at this point, frankly, bewildered as to why he repeatedly tells them that tribal governments cause chaos even though everything they see and experience tell them the opposite. The tribes in this state are the best friends the state has ever had. We just want to be treated with respect. History will someday record Governor Stitt's final State of the State address as one of the last gasps of an anti-tribe mindset of a thankfully bygone era. Oklahoma leaders and tribal leaders can soon begin the hard but nec-

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ROY LEBLANC INVITATIONAL MOVES TO SHAWNEE

THE RELOCATION OF ONE OF OKMULGEE'S OLDEST TRADITIONS COULD SEE REVENUE LOSSES FOR LOCAL BUSINESSES

BY BRADEN HARPER
MANAGING EDITOR

OKMULGEE - The Roy LeBlanc Okmulgee Invitational Rodeo & Festival has a new home this year, according to a public announcement made on Thursday, Jan. 29. The rodeo is one of the oldest in Oklahoma and the United States, operating since 1956. Until this year, the event had been held at the Muscogee (Creek) Nation's Bob Arrington Arena.

Among Okmulgee's historic staples, the rodeo has seen as many as 300 cowboys compete with over a thousand spectators in attendance. The rodeo is moving to the Heart of Oklahoma Exposition Center in Shawnee and has already been scheduled for Friday, Aug. 7, and Saturday, Aug. 8.

City of Okmulgee Mayor Mickey Baldwin remarked that the historic rodeo was a highlight for the city for many years. According to Baldwin, the event will be a significant loss for the community.

"As a city, we will see many who will miss that rodeo," Baldwin said. "Hopefully, we will have many that will attend the new place in Shawnee."

The City of Okmulgee does not participate in any official planning for the rodeo, and it did not charge event organizers for extended emergency services. Although the city did not receive any direct funds from the event, its absence could still have economic repercussions for local

businesses such as restaurants and hotels.

"We know that the businesses will miss that interaction," Baldwin said. "We love the rodeo. The event is definitely historic. We will miss that legacy that started here, and we just pray that moving forward, they will be able to continue to grow and have great success as they move on to Shawnee."

The event featured a parade, kid-friendly rodeo activities, and craft booths. Its notoriety was engraved in pop culture when it was referenced in "The Simpsons" season 34, episode 14, "Carl Carlson Rides Again."

According to the rodeo's Facebook page, the plans to move to Shawnee are still being finalized. The statement reads:

Around 1990, the Okmulgee County Round Up Club wanted to dissolve, but Mr. Roy LeBlanc decided Black Rodeo was too important to the history of the Black Cowboy. He moved the rodeo to the Muscogee (Creek) Nation with the help of his friend and fellow cowboy, Bob Arrington. Muscogee Nation named the arena after him some years later. In 2009, we changed the name of the rodeo to the Roy LeBlanc Invitational Rodeo in honor of the man who helped keep this living history alive. This was our home for 30 years until 2025, the year the rodeo

almost didn't happen. Kenneth LeBlanc is currently working out the final details but we are happy to announce we are moving to The Heart of Oklahoma Exposition Center in Shawnee, OK. We will see y'all there on August 7th and 8th, 2026. Stay tuned as we release more information and let y'all know what to expect when we visit Shawnee!

According to the MCN, the rodeo's size made it impractical to hold at the Bob Arrington Arena, noting that the event had simply outgrown the venue's capacity to hold spectators and vendors. The Nation's statement reads:

While analyzing our operations at the Bob Arrington Rodeo Arena, our Department of Public Safety and Department of Commerce determined that due to the size and scope of the Roy LeBlanc Rodeo, our agreements of the past were simply not feasible moving forward for the Muscogee Nation. Security requirements, traffic, tribal facility maintenance, property damage, equipment operation, and space concerns all were part of the determination of the final amount for rental. While regrettably, this amount does not fit in the budget for the organizers, we wish them well in the future for this historic event.

OP-ED

TAKING A LOOK BACK: MCN PURCHASES THE JENKS RIVERWALK

"Going Once! Going Twice! Sold Muscogee Creek Nation!" the sheriff's deputy announced on Tuesday, April 17, 2012. Mvskoke Nation had just won the auction for the prized Riverwalk development in south Tulsa. In so doing, Mvskoke Nation made \$30 million dollars in a mere 3 days! This acquisition was so impressive Mvskoke Nation was awarded National Tribal Deal of the Year in 2013 by the Native American Finance Officers Association!

In the spring of 2012, I had a consulting engagement with Mvskoke Nation. My focus was on building non-gaming income and wealth. Riverwalk was being foreclosed by a bank in Dallas. On a Friday, I saw a news report that Riverwalk would be going to a Sheriff's Auction the following Tuesday.

With only four days until the auction, we had to act fast. So I went to see then Principal Chief George Tiger. As a banker I had been through the foreclosure process hundreds of times. I explained that process to Chief Tiger as well as our bidding strategy. Our bidding strategy was if we couldn't get it for a steal, we didn't want it.

On the day before the auction, I went to the Tulsa County Courthouse and pulled all the documents on Riverwalk that had been filed of record. From that information, I was able to discern that some \$45 million had been invested in Riverwalk. That night the National Council approved us making a bid for the property. At the time I thought if we could purchase Riverwalk for \$15-\$20 million that would be a good deal. But we did even better than that.

The next morning me, Chief Tiger, and Yvonne Tiger, Chief's in-house counsel, arrived at the Tulsa County Courthouse for the auction. A bank out of Dallas owned the first mortgage on Riverwalk. They opened the bidding at only \$11 million. That was a very low opening bid and it told me that the bank was not going to bid again. They wanted to cash out and go back to Dallas. In response we bid \$11.5 million.

The auction room was jammed packed with bidders. And with seventy-five properties on the docket we had no idea who might bid against us. Fortunately there were no more bids and the sheriff's deputy declared, "Sold, Mvskoke Nation!"

For my consulting efforts, I did not receive any commission or bonus, just my standard hourly fee that I charge clients. I am very proud to have played an integral role in a team effort that resulted in increasing the wealth of Mvskoke Nation by \$30 million in a mere 3 days.

-J.D. Colbert

Have something to share? Mvskoke Media is always accepting opinion articles and letters to the editor on any subject. Articles and letters can be sent to info@mvskokemedia.com, subject: op-ed.

TRIBAL WOMEN VETERANS SUMMIT PLANNED FOR APRIL



EVENT OFFERS VASO SERVICES EDUCATION AND FELLOWSHIP WITH OTHER VETERANS

BY SHAYLN PROCTOR
REPORTER

TULSA - On Thursday, April 2, the Tribal Women Veterans Summit will be held at the Tulsa River Spirit Casino from 8:30 a.m. - 4:30 p.m. The summit is open to women who have served in the military in any capacity.

The idea for the summit began when the MCN Veterans Affairs Service Office noticed that few of their women veterans were participating in their events or visiting their office, explained MCN Veterans Affairs Assistant Director Rachel Riddle (Mvskoke).

According to Riddle, their goal in hosting this event is to reach out to their female veterans, not only to provide them with great education but also to ensure they receive the services they need. This event also provides an opportunity for each of them to meet and form relationships with other Native veterans.

"We felt there was a need to not only reach out to include them, but to get them involved. In visiting with other agencies and our lady veterans, we also discovered their need to talk about events and issues that are shared as women," Riddle said.

Riddle stated that this event started small among local attendees; however, it has grown each year, with participants from all across the United States.

"It's grown to not just include and educate our own lady veterans but other Native women veterans from across the country," said Riddle. "We're glad to see not only the huge participation of Native women veterans but also the desire and request for vendors to be a part of this event."

"We will continue to host this as a great need and help for our Native women veterans. Who have served this country honorably and likewise made our Muscogee Nation proud of them. Salute."

To register for the summit, visit:
<https://form.jotform.com/242245215371146>

To reserve a room for your stay, visit www.riverspirittulsa.com

For more information about this event, contact Rachel Riddle at 918-732-7739, or riddle@muscogeenation.com



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receive a CDIB card because they cannot document lineal descent from an ancestor with “Indian blood.” However, enrolled Freedmen descendants in the Cherokee and Seminole Nations are issued tribal identification cards.

Several of the enrolled Freedmen descendants of the Cherokee and Seminole Nations we interviewed told us that, since 2017, staff at IHS-funded facilities had denied them health care services because their tribal identification cards indicated that they were Freedmen descendants or because they could not provide CDIB cards to demonstrate eligibility. For example, in 2021, an enrolled Seminole Freedmen descendant was denied access to the COVID-19 vaccine at a federally operated IHS facility in the Oklahoma City area because of the individual’s status as an enrolled Freedmen descendant. According to IHS officials, the incident initiated an internal agency review of the beneficiary status of the Seminole Nation of Oklahoma’s enrolled Freedmen descendants, which resulted in a determination that enrolled Freedmen descendants are eligible for IHS health care services.

In October 2021, IHS issued a Dear Tribal Leader letter clarifying that enrolled Seminole Freedmen descendants are eligible to receive health care services in accordance with IHS eligibility requirements. Dear Tribal Leader letters inform Tribes about any rules, regulations, procedures, policies, and guidance that affect them directly or their duties and responsibilities to carry out programs or provide services administered by a federal agency. According to IHS officials, Dear Tribal Leader letters are primarily used to initiate the agency’s tribal consultation on specific topics. Moreover, in response to the incident, IHS officials told us that they also provided training to the staff at the facility in the Oklahoma City area regarding eligibility requirements for services provided.

According to IHS officials, Freedmen descendants who are enrolled as Cherokee citizens have been eligible for IHS services since 2017, when the Cherokee Nation began enrolling them. In response to the court ruling and the Cherokee Nation’s enrollment of Freedmen descendants, in November 2017, IHS sent a Dear Tribal Leader letter informing Tribes that enrolled Cherokee Freedmen descendants were eligible to receive health care services from IHS on the same basis as other tribal citizens of the Cherokee Nation.

IHS officials also told us that when the agency issued Dear Tribal Leader letters regarding the eligibility of enrolled Freedmen descendants of the Cherokee and Seminole Nations in 2017 and 2021 respectively, the Area Director of the Oklahoma City Area also issued copies of those letters to all IHS-funded facilities in the area. However, after these letters were issued, some of the enrolled Freedmen descendants of the Cherokee and Seminole Nations we interviewed told us that administrative staff at certain healthcare facilities continued to request a CDIB to demonstrate eligibility, making it difficult for enrolled Freedmen descendants to access health care services.

In addition to difficulty obtaining IHS care, the GAO also found that Freedmen descendants ran into difficulty obtaining housing services:

The Office of Native American Programs, an office within HUD, administers programs authorized by the Native American Housing Assistance and Self-Determination Act of 1996, as amended (NAHASDA). Such programs include block grants that Tribes use to develop new housing and to provide other types of housing assistance to eligible individuals. Subject to certain exceptions, such funding for eligible housing activities is generally “limited to low-income Indian families on Indian reservations and other Indian areas” as defined by the law. NAHASDA defines an “Indian” as any person who is a “member” of a Tribe, which includes federally recognized Tribes.

According to agency officials, eligibility is based on tribal enrollment in accordance with NAHASDA. Therefore, Freedmen descendants enrolled in the Cherokee and Seminole Nations are eligible for NAHASDA-authorized housing assistance that HUD’s Office of Native American Programs funds and the Tribes administer.

However, according to most of the enrolled Freedmen descendants in the Seminole Nation of Oklahoma we interviewed, the Tribe’s housing policy prevents enrolled Freedmen descendants from receiving NAHASDA-authorized federally funded housing assistance because the Tribe’s policy gives preference to “by blood” Seminole citizens. Under NAHASDA, Tribes can establish a preferencing system for allocating housing assistance to eligible recipients. As such, Tribes may give priority to applicants according to certain categories, provided the preference is consistently applied. For example, under the Seminole Nation of Oklahoma’s current preference systems for allocating NAHASDA funding to eligible recipients, “full-blood, enrolled Seminole Nation tribal member[s]” are awarded five points and “[a]ll other Seminole Nation tribal members,” excluding Freedmen descendants, are awarded one point for priority consideration. Enrolled Freedmen

descendants in the Seminole Nation of Oklahoma are not awarded any points for priority consideration under the Seminole Nation’s housing policies that we reviewed.

According to officials from the Office of Native American Programs, the agency received a complaint about the Seminole Nation of Oklahoma’s housing policies in 2016 and reviewed the policies. According to agency documentation, at the time, the Seminole Nation of Oklahoma required applicants for federally funded housing assistance to provide a CDIB card in addition to a tribal enrollment card. In 2016, HUD responded to the complaint and stated that the Tribe had since changed its application policy and no longer required applicants to provide a CDIB card for federally funded housing assistance. Agency officials told us that they have expressed concerns to Seminole Nation of Oklahoma officials that the execution of the Tribe’s housing policy, including its preferencing system, could raise further legal concerns based on possible Treaty obligations owed and potentially expose the Tribe to legal liability. Agency officials stated that they recommended that the Tribe change its policy. However, as of July 2025, the Seminole Nation of Oklahoma had not changed the preferencing system it uses to allocate NAHASDA funding to eligible recipients.

Agency officials told us that, since 2017, they have received no specific complaints regarding a denial of federally funded housing assistance provided by the Seminole Nation of Oklahoma, including the Tribe’s use of its preferencing system. According to agency officials, HUD has a process to address any civil rights complaints and discrimination issues reported to the agency through an online portal and all complaints are investigated. They also told us that, as of October 2024, no enrolled Freedmen descendants were receiving federally funded housing assistance from the Seminole Nation of Oklahoma. Several of the enrolled Freedmen descendants in the Seminole Nation of Oklahoma we interviewed confirmed that Seminole Freedmen descendants do not apply for housing assistance through the Tribe because they consider it to be a futile effort and that, based on the Seminole Nation’s preference system, they expect there would be no funding available for them.

The report also details jurisdictional discrepancies Freedmen descendants face. According to the report:

The exercise of criminal jurisdiction in “Indian country”—that is, which court has the legal authority to hear and decide a criminal case—depends on several factors. In particular, under the Indian Country Crimes Act and Major Crimes Act, whether a crime committed in Indian country falls under federal, state, or tribal jurisdiction depends in part on the Indian status of the alleged offender and victim. For example, the Major Crimes Act, as amended, provides federal courts with criminal jurisdiction over Indians charged with certain felony-level offenses enumerated in the statute, and generally state courts do not have jurisdiction over such crimes.

However, neither the Indian Country Crimes Act nor the Major Crimes Act defines the term “Indian.” Therefore, federal and state courts have generally interpreted and applied the test for determining Indian status as set forth in *United States v. Rogers*, 45 U.S. 567 (1846). Under the *Rogers* test, for someone to be considered an “Indian,” there must be evidence that the person has some degree of Indian blood and that they are recognized as Indian by a Tribe or the federal government. Even though they are tribal citizens, enrolled Freedmen descendants may not meet the elements of this test because they do not have a lineal relationship to a person with a degree of “Indian blood” on official tribal rolls.

Because courts have defined Indian status for the purposes of criminal jurisdiction as requiring some degree of “Indian blood,” certain Freedmen descendants’ cases are heard in state court, while other tribal citizens’ cases are heard in federal or tribal court. Several of the enrolled Freedmen descendants of both the Cherokee and Seminole Nations we interviewed raised concerns about the potential legal status of enrolled Freedmen descendants in the courts. For example, in a recent case, a Freedmen descendant who is enrolled in the Seminole Nation of Oklahoma challenged the state’s authority to prosecute them on the basis of their Indian status. However, the state appellate court ultimately determined that the individual met only one of the two requirements of the *Rogers* test—the individual proved affiliation with a Tribe through their tribal citizenship but was not able to demonstrate “Indian blood.” The individual attempted to use DNA evidence to demonstrate Indian ancestry; however, the court rejected the evidence based on its reliability, and the individual was ultimately found to be subject to state criminal jurisdiction.

Officials from the Department of Justice and Interior have met with tribal officials from the Cherokee Nation to discuss the Tribe’s concerns regarding criminal jurisdiction for Freedmen descendants who are Cherokee citizens, including revisions to the law proposed by leaders of the Cherokee Nation to include a statutory definition of “Indian” based on tribal enrollment. Officials from the Department of Justice told us that

there are challenges in exercising jurisdiction over enrolled Freedmen descendants because case law has defined Indian status for the purposes of criminal jurisdiction as requiring some degree of “Indian blood.”

The report also outlines the difficulties Freedmen descendants have in putting land they own into restricted or trust status:

Land in Indian country may include a complicated mixture of lands held by a Tribe, lands held by individual tribal citizens, and lands held by individuals and entities that are not affiliated with the Tribe. Such land held by the Tribe and individual tribal citizens may be held in trust, restricted, or fee status. Trust land is land that the United States holds the legal title to for the benefit of a Tribe or tribal citizen, which generally cannot be transferred (e.g., sold, gifted) or encumbered (e.g., mortgaged or leased) without the approval of the Secretary of the Interior. Restricted land is land that a Tribe or tribal citizen holds the legal title to and that is likewise subject to restrictions on transfers and encumbrances without the approval of the Secretary of the Interior. Trust and restricted lands are generally exempt from state and local property taxes. By comparison, fee land generally does not have restrictions on transfer or encumbrance and, when located outside Indian country, is subject to property taxes.

The Act of August 4, 1947 (commonly referred to as the Stigler Act), as amended, governs the restricted status of allotted lands held by citizens of the Five Tribes. Under the act, when such land is inherited or otherwise acquired, it retains its restricted status only if it is held by citizens of the Five Tribes with lineal descent from the “by blood” rolls. Because the Freedmen were documented as having no degree of Indian blood, Freedmen descendants who are tribal citizens are unable to inherit or otherwise acquire restricted land without the land losing its status. Interior officials we interviewed said that while they are aware of the differential treatment of enrolled Freedmen descendants under the law, their ability to resolve that differential treatment is limited because of the statutory language requiring lineal descent from the “by blood” rolls.

A copy of the report can be obtained on the US GAO website.

STATE

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 2

Essary work of joining together to solve problems and work together toward a bright future for our state.

Seminole Nation Principal Chief Sena Davis-Yesslith did not hold back, expressing her disdain for Stitt’s rhetoric. The statement reads:

As I looked down over the Oklahoma legislators, I asked myself, ‘Is there anything I could say to make our situation worse?’ Is there anything any of us can say to this “Indian man named Kevin Stitt” that would mend Oklahoma’s tribal relationships? The answer is no. If you did not listen to or watch the State of the State address, I encourage you to do so. There was a key phrase Stitt used that stood out to me the most: “When you’re young, you learn to read. When you grow older, you read to learn.” This is a statement he clearly does not live by, nor does he appear to read to better comprehend or retain knowledge of tribal treaties. The treaties our ancestors believed were written to protect our people, our land, our culture, and ultimately our rights were not honored as promised, at least not in full. What one must understand is that treaties are the supreme law of the land. They are binding agreements between the federal government and tribes, intended to foster relationships between the government, the tribe, and the state.

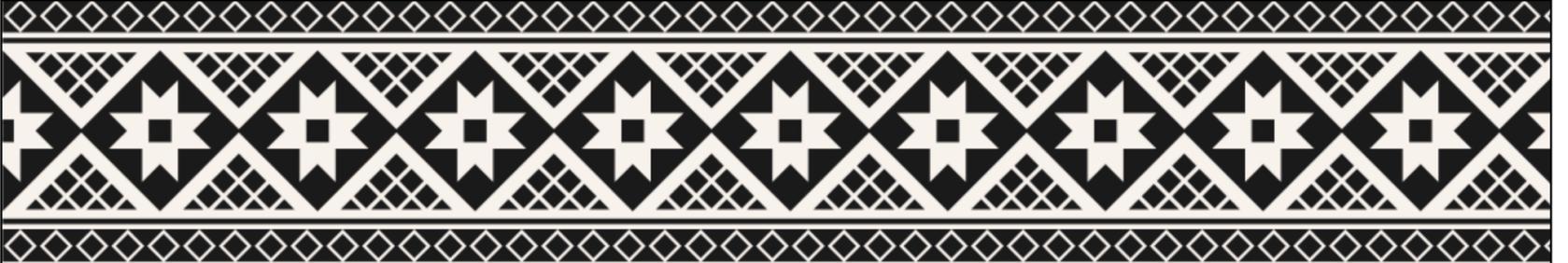
Choctaw Nation Chief Gary Batton found Stitt’s address to be an inaccurate portrait of history and current affairs. The statement reads:

The Choctaw Nation has always been and remains committed to mutually beneficial cooperation with the state of Oklahoma. Unfortunately, Gov. Stitt continues to misrepresent our relationship, the current state of affairs and our history. Tribes and Tribal members have sovereign rights, which are based not on race, but on treaties and other agreements between our nations and the United States. Gov. Stitt must recognize this history and respect what it means today. Unlike corporate entities that can come and go, the Choctaw Nation has always been and will always be a vital part of Oklahoma. We wish Gov. Stitt could see this. Until then, we will continue to work with the Legislature and other officials to advance everyone’s interests.

Stitt’s term will end on January 11, 2027.

CORRECTION

In the Dec 15 edition of *Mvskoke News* submission “Good Medicine Festival Unites Indigenous Languages and Music Traditions in Historic Houston Event” two artists were not included for the Saturday performers: Laura Ortman (White Mountain Apache) and Pulitzer Prize-winning composer Raven Chacon (Dine). Ortman and Chacon were also featured performers during the Saturday evening performance of the Good Medicine Indigenous Music Festival.”



The Muscogee (Creek) Nation Election Board 2026 Tribal Citizen Voter Participation Survey

The Muscogee (Creek) Nation Election Board is seeking feedback from eligible voters through a survey on Tribal election participation.

Participants may be entered into a drawing for one of four prizes, with drawings held March 2, June 1, September 1, and December 1.

PRIZES

AirPods Pro2



2 Pendleton Blankets



11 inch I-pad

HOW TO ENTER

Use the camera on your smart phone to scan the QR Code below



~OR~

Type the URL below in your internet browser: tinyurl.com/MCNelection



Submit your name and contact info, then complete the survey once it has been emailed to you.

RULES TO ENTER

Must Be Muscogee (Creek) citizen



Age 17 and up



Answer all of the Survey Questions



One entry per person

Individuals can only win once

Contact us if you have any questions!

Facebook: Muscogee Creek Nation Election Office

Email: Election@mcn-election.com

Office Phone: 918-732-7631

Website: <https://www.muscogeenation.com/election-board/>





NATIVE ADVANTAGE INC. ESTABLISHED TO PROVIDE MEDICARE FOR ELDERS

HEAD START RECEIVES \$3.7M IN GRANT AWARDS

BY BRADEN HARPER
MANAGING EDITOR

OKMULGEE – The Muscogee (Creek) National Council held a quarterly session via teleconference and in person at the Mound Building on Jan. 31.

The MCNC addressed the following legislation, the interpretation of which is attributed to language in the bills:

Veto Message:

NCA 25-125 A law of the Muscogee (Creek) Nation amending MCNCA Title 30, Chapter 4 entitled “Compensation of National Council” and authorizing a supplemental appropriation to the National Council FY 26 budget. The National Council originally adopted the bill during the Regular Session on Saturday, December 20, 2025. It was returned as a veto on Wednesday, Jan. 7. The veto stood 16-0.

If the bill had been signed into law by the Principal Chief, each council member would have received a \$28,000 raise. The council speaker would have received a \$15,000 raise, and the second speaker would have received a \$33,000 raise. It would have taken effect in 2028.

Order of Business:

TR 26-001 A tribal resolution of the Muscogee (Creek) Nation authorizing the Principal Chief to execute a real estate contract for the purchase of property in Okmulgee, Oklahoma. Representative Robyn Whitecloud sponsored the bill, which was adopted 15-0.

According to the legislation, the Nation intends to utilize the property to further expand on land use.

TR 26-002 A tribal resolution of the Muscogee (Creek) Nation confirming the nomination of Janet Maylen to serve on the Mvskoke Loan Fund Board. Representative James Factor sponsored the bill, which was adopted 15-0.

Maylen’s term will begin upon confirmation and will expire on January 31, 2029.

TR 26-003 A tribal resolution of the Muscogee (Creek) Nation approving and authorizing the Muscogee Nation Gaming Enterprises, LLC (“MNGE”) Board of Directors to execute World Wide Technology Quote 7584169.2. Representative Robert Hufft sponsored the bill, which was adopted 15-0.

According to the legislation, the quote will last five years and begin on Jan. 27.

TR 26-004 A tribal resolution of the Muscogee (Creek) Nation authorizing the Principal Chief to execute an agreement with Satellite Shelters Inc. for the construction of two (2) modular buildings to house the Muscogee (Creek) Nation Lighthouse Central Division on tribal property. Rep. Hufft sponsored the bill, which was adopted 15-0.

According to the legislation, the MCN Lighthouse Central Division needs new office space because it is currently housed in a building owned by Okmulgee Public Schools. The new buildings will be located at 2917 N. Wood Drive in Okmulgee, Oklahoma.

TR 26-005 A tribal resolution of the Muscogee (Creek) Nation authorizing the Principal Chief to execute a lease with the United States Department of the Army, through the real estate division

of the United States Corps of Engineers, for the Fountainhead Golf Course. Representative Lucian Tiger sponsored the bill, which was adopted 11-4. Representative Dode Barnett, Representative Thomasene Osborn, Rep. McHenry, and Rep. Whitecloud opposed the bill.

According to the legislation, the renewed lease will include specific terms and conditions that will apply to future endeavors of Fountainhead. A previous tenured lease had expired in 2023. Rep. Barnett claimed the operation of the golf course had resulted in financial losses for the Nation in the past.

NCA 26-001 A law of the Muscogee (Creek) Nation authorizing the expenditure of grant funds awarded from the Department of Health and Human Services Administration for Children and Families for the benefit of the Head Start Preschool Program and appropriating a tribal match. Representative Darrell Proctor sponsored the bill, which was adopted 15-0.

The \$2,969,280 grant will be matched by a 20 percent contribution of \$742,321 from the Nation, for a total of \$3,711,601. According to the legislation, it will be used to continue the administration of the Head Start Program.

NCA 26-002 A law of the Muscogee (Creek) Nation authorizing the expenditure of the Department of Health and Human Services Administration for Children and Families, Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program Funds for the benefit of the Muscogee (Creek) Nation Social Services Program. Representative Lora Harjo-King sponsored the bill, which was adopted 15-0.

According to the legislation, \$299,152 will be used to provide cooling, heating, and crisis funds for the Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program.

NCA 26-003 A law of the Muscogee (Creek) Nation authorizing the expenditure of grant funds awarded from the United States Department of Agriculture for the benefit of the Muscogee (Creek) Nation 2026 Summer EBT Program and appropriating a tribal match. Representative Mary Crawford sponsored the bill, which was adopted 15-0.

The \$1,029,260 grant was awarded based on a 50 percent match from the Nation. A total of \$2,058,520 will be used to provide EBT cards for approximately 105,000 eligible children living on the Mvskoke Reservation.

NCA 26-004 A law of the Muscogee (Creek) Nation authorizing the expenditure of grant funds awarded from the United States Department of Agriculture and appropriating a tribal match for the benefit of the Muscogee (Creek) Nation Food Distribution Program. Rep. McHenry sponsored the bill, which was adopted 15-0.

The \$1,668,151 grant will receive a \$417,038 match from the Nation. A total of \$2,085,189 will be used to provide EBT cards for approximately 105,000 eligible children living on the Mvskoke reservation.

NCA 26-005 A law of the Muscogee (Creek) Nation authorizing the expenditure of grant funds awarded from the Administration for Children and Families Office of Family Assistance for the benefit of the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) Program. The bill, sponsored by Rep. Crawford, was adopted

15-0.

According to the legislation, the \$778,666 grant will be used to continue administering the TANF program.

NCA 26-006 A law of the Muscogee (Creek) Nation authorizing a supplemental appropriation for the Muscogee (Creek) Nation Citizenship Office for Fiscal Year 2026. Rep. McHenry sponsored the program, which was adopted 15-0.

According to the legislation, the \$458,079 appropriation will be used for personnel, supplies, and software/license line items.

NCA 26-007 A law of the Muscogee (Creek) Nation authorizing the expenditure of the U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Bureau of Justice Assistance, FY 25 U.S. Department of Justice Coordinated Tribal Assistance Solicitation for the Benefit of the Reintegration Program. Rep. Proctor sponsored the bill, which was adopted 15-0.

According to the legislation, the \$900,000 solicitation will be used to address current gaps in the department’s services related to management, behavioral health, and training.

NCA 26-008 A law of the Muscogee (Creek) Nation authorizing the expenditure of grant funds awarded from the Federal Home Loan Bank of Topeka for the benefit of the Muscogee (Creek) Nation Department of Housing. Rep. Barnett sponsored the bill, which was adopted 15-0.

According to the legislation, the \$400,000 grant will be used to assist in the construction of 60 residential units. The units will be designed for low-income tenants and will give them the opportunity to live in a community with fellow Tribal citizens.

NCA 26-009 A law of the Muscogee (Creek) Nation authorizing the expenditure of the National Park Service Tribal Historic Preservation Office (THPO) grant for the benefit of the Historic and Cultural Preservation Department. Rep. Barnett sponsored the bill, which was adopted 15-0.

According to the legislation, the \$95,050 grant will be used to ensure the protection and preservation of valued Mvskoke historic and cultural resources, including sacred places, cultural sites, cultural remains, and Mvskoke history for future generations.

NCA 26-010 A law of the Muscogee (Creek) Nation authorizing the expenditure of the Ralph. T. Coe Center Rehoming Program Grant for the benefit of the Department of Culture and Humanities. Representative Cody Phillips sponsored the bill, which was adopted 15-0.

According to the legislation, the \$9,277 grant will be used to support conservation and preservation efforts, exhibition and interpretation, staff support, storage enhancements, and community outreach.

NCA 26-011 A law of the Muscogee (Creek) Nation appropriating funds to create the Mvskoke Opunvkv Mentor-Apprentice Program. Representative Cloud sponsored the bill, which was adopted 15-0.

According to the legislation, the Mvskoke Opunvkv Mentor-Apprentice Program will be composed of multi-generational staff who will be responsible for transmitting intergenerational knowledge of Mvskoke Opunvkv knowledge. It will allow mentors to teach apprentices the Mvskoke

language full-time. This follows Proclamation No. 25-07, which declared a state of emergency for the Mvskoke and Euchee languages. A \$625,610 appropriation will be provided for the Mvskoke Opunvkv Mentor-Apprentice Program.

NCA 26-012 A law of the Muscogee (Creek) Nation authorizing the expenditure of grant funds awarded from the Health Care Service Corporation for the benefit of the Muscogee (Creek) Nation Department of Housing. Rep. Phillips sponsored the bill, which was adopted 15-0.

According to the legislation, the \$6,000 grant will be used to provide home repairs to Tribal elders age 62 and older.

NCA 26-013 A law of the Muscogee (Creek) Nation authorizing a supplemental appropriation to the Muscogee (Creek) Nation Tribal Construction Services for the Ramp Assistance Program. Rep. Barnett sponsored the bill, which was adopted 15-0.

According to the legislation, the \$50,000 appropriation will be used to install wheelchair ramps for Tribal elders.

NCA 26-014 A law of the Muscogee (Creek) Nation amending Title 28, § 7-107, entitled “Exceptions.” Rep. Phillips sponsored the bill, which was adopted 15-0.

The legislation adds the language, “and all projects under the Tribal Utility Authority shall be exempt from the requirements in § 7-103 through § 7-106 as said projects are addressed in the Nation’s Tribal Utility Authority Act.”

NCA 26-015 A law of the Muscogee (Creek) Nation creating MCNCA Title 14, § 2-636 entitled “Contraband in Jails”. Representative William Lowe sponsored the bill, which was adopted 15-0.

According to the legislation, no person may bring or possess weapons, alcohol, tobacco, phones, or other banned items in any jail or detention facility on the Muscogee (Creek) Nation. If a person is found with any of the aforementioned items, they will be charged with a felony. Any person who is caught providing these items to a prisoner will also be charged with a felony.

NCA 26-016 A law of the Muscogee (Creek) Nation creating MCNCA Title 14, § 2-346 entitled “Disruption or Prevention of Emergency Telephone Call” and creating Title 14, § 2-347 entitled “Maiming”. Rep. Lowe sponsored the legislation, which was adopted 15-0.

According to the legislation, the Nation’s criminal code will be expanded to establish a criminal offense of maiming. This prohibits the intentional and premeditated infliction of serious bodily injury resulting in disfigurement, disability, or substantial loss of physical vigor. Any person found guilty of this crime will be charged with a felony. Any person who is found guilty of intentionally interrupting or disrupting an emergency telephone call will be charged with a misdemeanor.

NCA 26-017 A law of the Muscogee (Creek) Nation amending MCNCA Title 14, § 2-303 entitled “Battery”. Rep. Lowe sponsored the legislation, which was adopted 15-0.

According to the legislation, it will expand the Nation’s criminal code regarding battery. Medical care providers, including doctors, nurses, and other healthcare workers, are now protected under the law. Any person found guilty of committing battery against the aforementioned medical care

providers will be charged with a felony.

NCA 26-018 A law of the Muscogee (Creek) Nation authorizing the expenditure of grant funds awarded from the Oklahoma Native Assets Coalition for the benefit of the Office of the Secretary of the Nation. Rep. Factor sponsored the bill, which was adopted 15-0.

According to the legislation, the \$10,000 grant will be used to purchase four computers and office supplies.

NCA 26-019 A law of the Muscogee (Creek) Nation establishing a new Title 36, Chapter 10, entitled “Vapor Products Code”. Rep. Factor sponsored the bill, which was postponed indefinitely 15-0.

Rep. Factor made a motion to postpone the bill indefinitely. It was seconded by Rep. McHenry. There was no discussion on this bill. If the legislation had been adopted, it would have regulated the trade of vape products on the Mvskoke Reservation. It would also have given the Nation the authority to establish a Vapor Product retail business.

NCA 26-020 A law of the Muscogee (Creek) Nation repealing Title 16, Chapter 5, Subchapter 3, entitled “Department of Tourism and Recreation” and amending MCNCA Title 16, Chapter 11 entitled “Secretary of Commerce” and creating new subchapters entitled “Marketing”, “Tourism” and “Recreation” and authorizing an appropriation for the new tourism department. Rep. Lowe sponsored the bill, which was adopted 15-0.

According to the legislation, the \$264,939.71 appropriation will be used to merge the Marketing, Tourism and Recreation Departments under the Secretary of Commerce.

NCA 26-021 A law of the Muscogee (Creek) Nation authorizing a supplemental appropriation for the Muscogee (Creek) Nation Festival Fiscal Year 2026 Budget. Rep. Hufft sponsored the bill, which was adopted 13-2. Rep. Barnett and Rep. Whitecloud voted against the legislation.

This legislation had previously been voted on during the Saturday, Nov. 18 Regular Session. Its bill number was previously designated as NCA 25-117 and failed to pass. Rep. Whitecloud brought attention to the fact that the bill had previously failed when federal funding was cut due to the government shutdown last year. According to the legislation, the \$833,000 appropriation will be used for “special events” to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the Mvskoke Festival.

NCA 26-022 A law of the Muscogee (Creek) Nation approving and authorizing the Principal Chief to execute and file articles of incorporation with the office of the Secretary of the Nation to form “Native Advantage, Inc.” under Muscogee (Creek) Nation Law and approving the corporate bylaws for “Native Advantage, Inc.” Rep. Tiger sponsored the bill, which was adopted 15-0.

According to the legislation, Native Advantage will establish and administer a Medicare Advantage Plan and will comply with all federal, state, and tribal regulatory requirements. Native Advantage will be wholly owned by the Nation. It will establish a board composed of elected officials, all eligible MCN Tribal citizens.

To view the full agenda, visit mcnnc.com.

IN MEMORIAM



Mary Elizabeth Harjo

Mary Elizabeth Harjo, age 78, of Glenpool, Oklahoma, died Sunday, December 14, 2025, in Hochatown, Oklahoma. She was born on Thursday, May 22, 1947, to Bennie and Ella Joan Colbert Bender in Okemah, Oklahoma. In her younger years, Mary was a faithful member of Greenleaf Indian Baptist Church in Okemah, Oklahoma, where her faith and community were very important parts of her life.

Mary was a woman of deep pride, generous love, and a giving heart. She was very proud of her Muscogee (Creek) Nation heritage,

which was woven into who she was and how she lived. Her family meant everything to her, especially her three sons and their families. She found her greatest joy in being surrounded by those she loved most.

Mary adored her grandchildren and showed her love through care, time, and food. She had a special gift in the kitchen and loved cooking not only for her family but also for anyone in need of a good, hot meal. Her fry bread was especially loved and became a treasured family favorite that brought everyone together.

For 20 years, Mary worked in retail management in the North Texas area, where she served as a manager for several companies. She was respected for her strong work ethic, leadership, and dedication.

In her quieter moments, Mary enjoyed listening to R & B songs, country music, and Creek Hymns that brought her comfort, joy, and peace. She will be remembered for her generous spirit, her love of family, and the warmth she shared so freely with everyone she met.

Mary is preceded in death by her parents; her husband, Bennie Duke Harjo; her three brothers, Nelson Harjo, John

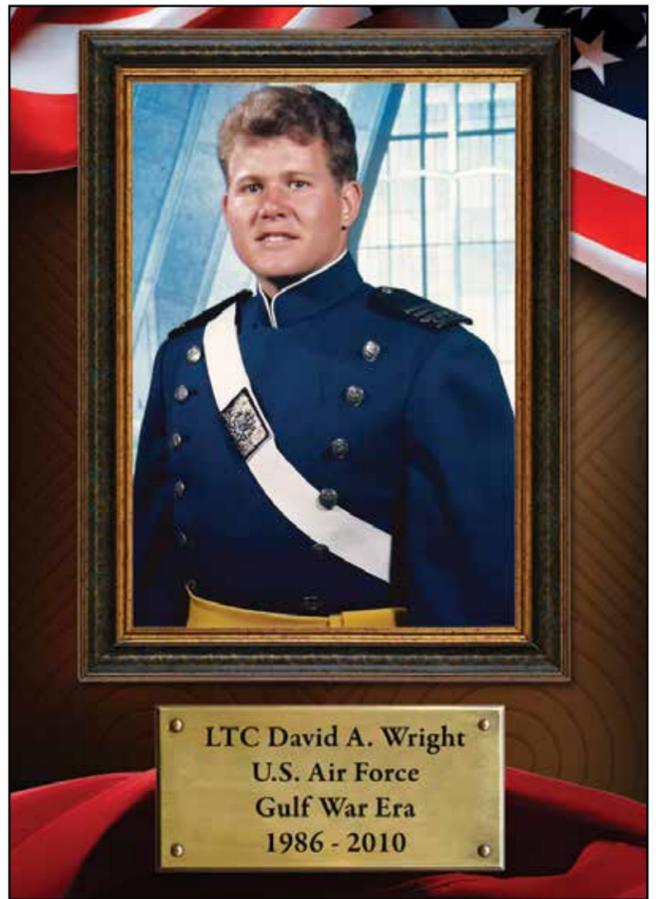
Bender and Joe Bender; and her one sister, Leah Labrada.

Mary is survived by her three perfect sons and daughters-in-law, Bennie Jr. "Duke" and Kristy Harjo of Anna, Texas; Bryan and Teresa Harjo of Gun Barrell City, Texas and Randall and Melissa Harjo of Allen, Texas; two brothers, Sam Bender of Cromwell, Oklahoma and George Bender of Sherman, Texas; four sisters, Betty Jones of Mt. Vernon, Texas, Debbie Ridge of Tulsa, Oklahoma, Benella Bender of Cromwell, Oklahoma and Alice Harjo of Arcadia, Oklahoma; six grandchildren, L.D. Harjo, Brittnie Martin, Dakota Harjo, Ashley Harjo, Lindsay Pollard and Joshua Harjo; fourteen great-grandchildren; several nieces and nephews and many other beloved family and friends.

Mary's favorite sayings were "I have three perfect sons!" and "Harjo business, is Harjo business!"

A celebration of life will be held Saturday, March 14, 2026, at 2:00 P.M. at the Tulsa Creek Indian Community Center with Rev. Wayne Harjo and Minister Grover Wind officiating. Cremation services are entrusted to Bowser Family Funeral Home in Broken Bow, Oklahoma.

VETERANS SPOTLIGHT



The Muscogee Nation Veterans Affairs Services Office is proud to honor tribal veteran LTC David A. Wright for his dedicated service to the U.S. Air Force, the United States, and the Muscogee Nation. David honorably served twenty four years from 1986 to 2010 and is a recipient of the Defense Meritorious Service Medal, Meritorious Service Medal, Air Force Aerial Achievement Medal with one oak leaf cluster, Air Force Commendation Medal with one oak leaf cluster, Joint Service Achievement Medal, Air Force Achievement Medal, Joint Meritorious Unit Award, Air Force Outstanding Unit Award with five oak leaf clusters, Combat Readiness Medal, National Defense Service Medal with one service star, Armed Forces Expeditionary Medal, Southwest Asia Service Medal with one service star, Kosovo Campaign Medal, Global War on Terrorism Service Medal, Air and Space Campaign Medal, Air Force Overseas Ribbon (short tour), Air Force Overseas Ribbon (long tour), Air Force Longevity Service Award with six oak leaf clusters, Small Arms Expert Marksmanship Ribbon (pistol), Air Force Training Ribbon, Kuwait Liberation of Kuwait Medal. Mvto LTC Wright for your selfless service to your country and your community.

MVTO FOR YOUR SELFLESS SERVICE!

COMMUNITY CALENDAR

Income Tax Filing
Vita/TCE Tax Program
Starts on Feb. 2
Open to all Muscogee (Creek) Nation citizens whose total household income is \$69,000 or under. In-office tax days are Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday, 8:45 a.m. - 3:45 p.m. by appointment only.
4900 N. Wood Drive, Okmulgee

morning or afternoon session.
Glenpol Conference Center
12205 S. Yukon Ave, Glenpool
To register, email angela.king@creekhealth.org or call 599-299-1530

Veterans Food Bank
Feb. 18, 11 a.m.
Event will give away groceries to Muscogee veterans.
Claude Cox Omniplex
200 Preston Road, Okmulgee
For questions, 918-732-7739

Elder's Meeting
Okmulgee Elder Nutrition Center
March 4, 9:30 a.m.
2900 N. Osage Pl., Okmulgee

Blood Drive
College of Muscogee Nation
Feb. 18, 11 a.m. - 3 p.m.
Room AB 104
1200 Highway Loop
56, Okmulgee

Coffee and Donuts
Veteran Affairs Services Office
March 12, 8 a.m. - 12 p.m.
1006 Bear Lane, Okmulgee

Elder's Sweetheart Dance
Elder Services
Feb. 19, 5 p.m. - 8 p.m.
Pre register by Feb. 4.
Open to Muscogee (Creek) Nation elders 55 and older.
Each elder may bring one guest who is either a spouse or caregiver.
RiverSpirit Casino
8330 Riverside Pkway, Tulsa,
To pre register, call 918-732-7765

Tribal Women Veterans Summit
Veteran Affairs Services Office
April 2, 8:30 a.m. - 4:30 p.m.
RiverSpirit Casino
8330 Riverside Pkway, Tulsa
Registration starts at 8 a.m. and is open to all military veterans.
To pre register, call 918-732-7739

'Sko Red
Department of Health
10 a.m. - 2 p.m.
This heart health awareness event will provide education on how to prioritize heart health. The program will provide a box lunch and free t-shirt. Those interested need to register for either the

Mvskoke Art Market
April 18-19
Times to be announced
River Spirit Casino
8330 Riverside Pkway, Tulsa

Health Shelf Donation Drive
College of Muscogee Nation Health & Wellness is seeking hygiene products, laundry detergent, and gently used blankets and pillows for students in need. Every five items donated will enter donors into a drawing. Donations can be dropped off at 2170 Raven Circle, Okmulgee, For more information, contact 918-549-2800.



Otria Scott Roberts

Scott was born May 4, 1941 in Holdenville, OK, to Otria Clarence "Ace" and Freda (Burrus) Roberts and grew up in Wetumka, OK. He attended Wetumka High School, where he graduated in 1959. Scott was an excellent athlete, particularly in running track. His specialty was running the hurdles, and he was a regular race winner. After high school, he enrolled at Oklahoma State Tech in Okmulgee, OK, where he studied pipe drafting. After a few short-term jobs, Scott enrolled at Southwest Automotive School in Oklahoma City, where he learned auto body repair, which would become his career. He was employed with Bolen Oldsmobile from 1964 until his retirement in 1995.

On a blind date, Scott met the love of his life, Eleta "Jean" Neal of Cushing, OK. He's always said after their first date, "he knew she was the one!" On March 16, 1962, in Cushing, OK, Scott and Jean were married and enjoyed 63 wonderful years together. During their 63 years, they were blessed with one daughter, Jeaneta, who sadly passed away at age 3, and two sons, Neal and Nathan. Scott and Jean have resided in Oklahoma City for 62 years and have been members of Bethany First Church of the Nazarene for approximately 55 years.

Scott had a successful career as an auto body technician before turning to his true passion as an artist in 2005. Known for his ability to "make anything with his hands", he paired his artistic skills with his fascination for Native American culture and began crafting pottery. As a proud member of the Muscogee (Creek) Nation, he focused on authentic pottery of the Mississippian culture of the Creek tribe. Striving for authenticity, he researched the culture and crafted his pottery according to traditional methods, digging his own clay from his "old stomping grounds" in Wetumka, OK, and firing the pottery in an open fire. His artistic work received numer-

ous awards in Native American art shows across the country and locally at the Red Earth Festival in OKC. One of his greatest honors was having one of his pots presented to the President of the United States in 2012 on behalf of the state of Oklahoma. Scott was a member of the Oklahoma Anthropology Association and the Central States Archaeological Societies since the 1970s.

A lover of the outdoors, Scott enjoyed archery, hunting, fishing, and camping. He found great joy spending time outdoors at the family land known as "the farm" near Cushing, OK. Scott deeply loved his family, especially seeing his grandkids and great-grandkids.

Scott was preceded in death by his parents, Otria "Ace" Roberts and Freda (Burrus) Roberts; sisters, Judy Walker and Mary Abbott; and daughter, Jeaneta.

He is survived by his wife, Jean; sons, Neal Roberts and wife Kim, and Nathan Roberts; sister, Rosa Barlow; brother-in-law, David Abbott; grandchildren, Caleb and wife Julie, Greg and wife Caity, Luke and wife Kara, Ruby and Millie; and great-grandchildren, Alice, Charles, Clive, Cal, Ellie, and Poppy, along with nieces and nephews.



Gretchen Marie Morgan

Gretchen Marie Morgan, age 77, of Muskogee, Oklahoma went home to be with our Lord on January 23, 2026 at St. Francis Hospital in Muskogee, Oklahoma.

Gretchen was born May 14, 1948 in Claremore, Oklahoma to Eugene M. Harjo and Suzanna (Tiger) Harjo. She was the third child born to the

couple. Gretchen graduated from Henryetta High School and Northeastern State College in Tahlequah, Oklahoma. She earned a Bachelor of Science Degree in Education majoring in Physical Education and Business. She taught all grades and adult education business classes. She later was a counselor at Connor's State College in Warner, Oklahoma. Gretchen continued her education and earned her Master's Degree from Northeastern. She then became the Director for the Upward Bound Program at Connor's State College. She worked at Connor's State College for approximately forty years until she retired in 2011.

Gretchen was an avid reader. She read to her grandson Braden Johnson and taught him to read before he was in kindergarten. She loved to

paint and put puzzles together. She was a faithful fan of the Oklahoma Sooners and the Kansas City Chiefs.

Gretchen was preceded in death by her parents, Eugene M. Harjo and Suzanna (Tiger) Harjo, son Kevin Scott Johnson, sister Sharon Harjo and brothers Norman Alex Harjo and Paul Michael Harjo. She is survived by her daughter Tasha Morgan, brothers Kenneth G. Harjo, Bruce A. Harjo and sister Vicki Tate.

Gretchen will be remembered and missed by all those who knew her for giving and her generous heart.

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