

# **Oklahoma Indian Issues: Proposed Regulations Governing Economic Development**

**U.S. House of Representatives  
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**Testimony Given by:  
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**History:** The best-known episode in Cherokee history was also the worst: the Trail of Tears, the forced relocation of the Cherokee Indians from their ancestral home in the southeast to Oklahoma. The Cherokee people were an urban, Christian, agricultural, intermarried society who had supported the United States against other tribes. In the end this was all for nothing. Though prominent Americans like Davy Crockett and Daniel Webster spoke against Removal, and though the Supreme Court ruled it unconstitutional, President Andrew Jackson sent in the army. Fifteen to twenty thousand Cherokee Indians (along with [Choctaw](#), [Creek](#), and other tribes) were rounded up and herded to Oklahoma in the winter of 1838-1839. Driven from their homes without being allowed to collect their possessions first, even their shoes, the Cherokees were no better equipped for an 800-mile forced march than people today would be. Between four and eight thousand Cherokee people died of exposure, starvation, disease, and exhaustion along the Trail of Tears. If you understand this, both the extent to which the Cherokees had adopted American standards of civilization before the Removal and the ultimate futility of it, you will go a long way towards understanding the Cherokee mentality and also the attitudes of other Indian peoples towards the white man. <sup>1</sup>

As a proud member of the Cherokee Nation I begin by saying that it has not always been easy claiming my Native American heritage. Even here in Miami Oklahoma it was not always something you would admit in public. And now more than ever I believe it is our state's Native American history that will empower us into a more prosperous future. From an economic development viewpoint Native American gaming and the other businesses that support it are paramount to the health of our local economy as well as the state of Oklahoma.

Miami has seen a resurgence in our local economy since the City of Miami launched it's own economic development department in 2005 under the guidance of Mayor Brent Brassfield, the City Council and City Manager Michael Spurgeon. Along with all our elected city officials, our department has worked closely with all our local tribes. We have supplied infrastructure to our local casinos, worked hand-in-hand with the Miami Tribe of Oklahoma to build a new multi-screen movie theater and numerous other tribal projects cooperative projects.

Currently Miami sets just off Interstate 44 where 21,000 cars pass by our community daily. With nearly 8 million cars annually traveling by our community with nearly 1 million exiting at our local gate, Native American gaming helps us bring additional tourism dollars into our other local business such as restaurants, convenience stores and motels/hotels. According to Amanda Davis, Director of Convention & Visitors Bureau for Miami, our motel tax collection is up over 13% in 2007, with June of the same year being the best in the city's history.

In addition the Oklahoma Tourism & Recreation department named the Miami CVB "Best in the State" for 2007. This honor would not have been possible without our local

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<sup>1</sup> Passage taken from the website [www.native-languages.org/choerokee.htm](http://www.native-languages.org/choerokee.htm)

tribal gaming establishments drawing people to our community. (*See attachment "Hotel Tax Collected 2004-2007"*)

Ottawa County is one of six in our state, which has created over 1000 jobs supported by domestic travel according to Oklahoma's Department of Tourism. (*See Attachment Oklahoma Tourism & Recreation Department, "Economic Impact of Tourism in Oklahoma".*)<sup>2</sup>

In closing, I believe that any restrictions to our local gaming will have an adverse effect on our entire local economy as well as our great state. After suffering three (3) Presidentially declared natural disasters within the last 12 months, our local economy cannot withstand a man made one.

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<sup>2</sup> Note: Economic impact figures based on research conducted by the Travel Industry Association