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Watson's view: Congresswoman states her case

DAYS after a tropical storm blew through Oklahoma, some parts of the state were hit by Hurricane Diane. We give that nickname to U.S. Rep. Diane Watson, a California Democrat who felt it necessary to spend part of her August recess in Tulsa, Muskogee and Oklahoma City in order to voice her displeasure about goings-on within the Cherokee Nation.

The tribe's members drew Watson's ire back in March, when they voted overwhelmingly to amend their constitution so only those with Indian blood could be considered Cherokee citizens. Doing so removed from the tribal rolls about 2,700 descendants of former Cherokee slaves, called freedmen.

Watson, who like the freedmen is black, introduced a bill that would cut off the tribe's federal funding, which totals about \$300 million, unless citizenship is restored. She told a gathering in Tulsa on Monday that while she supports the tribe's right to set its criteria for citizenship, "you cannot use U.S. monies to violate the law." With its vote, she said, the tribe broke an 1866 treaty with the federal government and now the only remedy would be to "return to full status" the freedmen.

No doubt the Cherokees appreciate the congresswoman's concern about how the tribe conducts its affairs. We would remind Watson, however, that legal challenges to the election are pending — three in federal court, another in tribal court — and those should be allowed to play out. While that process continues, the freedmen retain the tribal benefits they enjoyed prior to the vote.

Meantime, we couldn't help but notice that, as *The Oklahoman's* Larry Levy reported, Watson brought along at least three U.S. Capitol police officers. Then again, why not? If you're going to grandstand you may as well do it in style, especially when you can just let the taxpayers pick up the tab.