



## **Cherokee Nation News Release**

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December 13, 2007

### **Assembly of First Nations Opposes Cherokee Termination Bill**

**Group of over 600 Canadian Indian tribes denounces U.S. House bill to sever U.S.-Cherokee relations and cut nearly \$300 Million in federal funds**

TAHLEQUAH, Oklahoma – Cherokee Nation Principal Chief Chad Smith praised the Assembly of First Nations (AFN) for passing a resolution today opposing H.R. 2824, a U.S. House bill that retaliates against the Cherokee people for voting to limit Nation citizenship to those with Indian ancestors on the Dawes Rolls, the 1906 federal census list of the Cherokee people.

"The Cherokee Nation applauds the Assembly of First Nations for opposing H.R. 2824, which is a scorched-earth assault on tribal sovereignty that threatens all Indian nations throughout the world," Chief Smith said. "If Cherokees can face termination in the United States, it can happen anywhere. The United Nations passed the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples this past September to prevent exactly this kind of interference with intra-tribal affairs."

Based in Ottawa, the AFN represents more than 600 indigenous peoples nations of Canada. The U.N. Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, among other things, confirms the right of self-determination and self-governance for indigenous peoples and recognizes that they cannot be deprived of their means without fair and just redress.

The AFN vote follows a similar vote to oppose H.R. 2824 by the National Congress of American Indians, which is the major U.S. tribal government organization representing more than 250 U.S.-based tribes. In addition, more than 20 U.S. Indian tribes have supported the Cherokee Nation in expressing opposition to the bill.

Authored by California Congresswoman Diane Watson, H.R. 2824 seeks to punish the Cherokee people for their March 2007 to require every citizen in the tribe – whether African-, Caucasian-, Asian- or Hispanic-American – to have at least one Indian ancestor listed on the Dawes Rolls of the Cherokee Nation. More than 500 other Indian tribes in the United States also require their citizens to have Indian ancestry.

The March 2007 measure, which passed by 77%, disenrolled about 2,800 Freedmen descendants who had been citizens in the tribe for about a year due to a Cherokee Nation Supreme Court ruling that allowed citizenship for descendants of people listed on the Dawes Rolls as non-Indians.

The bill would sever U.S.-Cherokee relations and cut nearly \$300 million in federal funding for crucial social services such as health care, housing and education that help young, elderly and infirm Cherokees.

Litigation over Freedmen citizenship issues is ongoing in federal and tribal courts. Until all litigation is resolved, the approximately 2,800 Freedmen descendants have been reinstated to citizenship with full social services and the right to vote. Congresswoman Watson's bill will hurt many of these individuals and others in the tribe who receive such federal assistance.

To help Freedmen descendants become citizens, the Nation will fund genealogical studies to assist them in learning whether they have an Indian ancestor listed on the Dawes Rolls, no matter how long it takes.

Here are five undisputed facts to know about this issue:

1. The March 2007 vote requiring Indian ancestry for citizenship had nothing to do with race and everything to do with who is a Cherokee.
2. The Nation has as citizens today thousands of African Americans and about 1,500 Freedmen descendants. All are citizens because they each have an Indian ancestor listed on the Dawes Rolls.
3. Two percent of Cherokees held slaves before the Nation voluntarily emancipated them in 1863 – two years before the end of the Civil War.
4. Two-thirds of Cherokees fought for the Union during the Civil War.
5. In addition to cutting social services for Cherokees, H.R. 2824 would eliminate 6,500 jobs in Oklahoma.

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