

Choctaws one of five in US fighting against poverty in Presidential Program

President Barrack Obama announced the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma as one of five locations designated by his administration for its “Promise Zone” initiative, a new anti-poverty program meant to provide resources such as grants and tax incentives to help improve conditions in persistently high poverty communities.

Choctaw Chief Pyle said, “I am very thankful that the Choctaw Nation and partners have been awarded the Promise Zone designation. We are blessed to work with many regional, county, municipal, school, and university partners who, along with the Choctaw Nation, believe that great things can occur to lift everyone in Southeastern Oklahoma when we work together.

“This designation will assist ongoing efforts to emphasize small business development and bring economic opportunity to the high-need communities. I am confident that access to the technical assistance and resources offered by the Promise Zone designation will result in better lifestyles for people living and working within the Choctaw Nation.”

The Choctaw Nation has shown tremendous improvement in the region in the past decades by making effective change with more than 5,000 education scholarships annually and creation of jobs through economic development throughout Choctaw Nation. Plans for the future include providing even more education and economic opportunities through this initiative. Projects on the radar have potential to develop tourism and small businesses in Southeast Oklahoma as well.

The Choctaw Nation has been active in communities by building fire departments, donating to law enforcement agencies and schools and initiating programs like the summer school program. “The Tribal Council is excited to hear about the Promise Zone effort and anxious to implement even more revitalization efforts in their districts,” said Chief Pyle.

The President first announced the Promise Zone Initiative during last year’s State of the Union Address, as a way to partner with local communities and businesses to create jobs, increase economic security, expand access to educational opportunities and quality, affordable housing and improve public safety. This announcement will be a critical step forward in delivering on this commitment, according to a White House release.

The Promise Zone region is an important initiative; it identifies census tracts that experience high poverty and other challenging demographics. These areas are in several southeastern Oklahoma counties, including Atoka, Bryan, Coal, Choctaw, Haskell, Latimer, LeFlore, McCurtain, Pittsburg, and Pushmataha. Of the census tracts involved, nine have poverty rates over 30 percent, the highest of which is a staggering 52.8 percent.

The goals of this initiative include attracting private investment, improving affordable housing availability, improving educational opportunities, reducing serious and violent crimes, and assisting local and tribal leaders in navigating federal programs and cutting through red tape.

This designation provides benefits such as technical assistance, federal staff support, more extensive preference points and access to other federal grants programs, and may also provide the Promise Zones tax credit where private businesses would receive tax incentives for hiring and investing in Promise Zones, to create jobs and attract additional private investments.

The initiative is sponsored by several federal agencies including the U.S. Departments of Agriculture, Justice, Housing, and Education.

The Choctaw Nation has worked to unite government officials, local leaders, and economic development groups across southeast Oklahoma to serve on a committee that will work together through the Promise Zones initiative to create a long-term vision and guidance plan that will best meet the needs of our communities.

In addition to the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma, San Antonio, Texas, Philadelphia; Los Angeles; and southeastern Kentucky were also included in the Promise Zone designation.