

Testimony of Congressman Brad Carson on H.R. 2742

House Committee on Resources

October 17, 2001

I would like to begin by expressing my sincere appreciation to Chairman Hansen, Ranking Member Rahall, and the entire Committee on Resources staff for their leadership and hard work in bringing this hearing to fruition. As an enrolled member of the Cherokee Tribe and representing the most Native American district in the country, H.R. 2742 and the Native American Cultural Center and Museum, planned for Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, carry great significance for me.

The area encompassed by the boundaries of the State of Oklahoma, often referred to as "Native America," has had a special relationship with Indian Nations since long before it became a State in 1907. Beginning in the 1820s, the Five Civilized Tribes from the southeastern United States were relocated to Indian Territory over numerous routes, the most famous being the **Cherokee "Trail of Tears."** Forced off their ancestral lands by state and federal governments, the tribes suffered great hardships during the rigorous trips west. This forced march of Eastern tribes to the West under the Indian Removal Act of 1830 is the best-known movement of American Indians to what is now Oklahoma. Thirty-nine tribes are recognized by the state, including both tribes forced to Oklahoma and tribes native to the Plains. These tribes collectively and individually have played an invaluable role in the evolution of the State of Oklahoma. The culture and history of Oklahoma are inseparable from that of the 39 tribes. Nevertheless, before the creation of the Native American Cultural and Educational Authority of Oklahoma, there has been little statewide effort to recognize the contributions and sacrifices made by the tribes and no federal effort in Oklahoma.

In 1994, the Oklahoma Legislature created the Native American Cultural and Educational Authority to promote the history of Native Americans for the mutual benefit of the State of Oklahoma and its Indian and non-Indian citizens. By that legislation, the Authority was authorized and empowered to construct and operate a cultural center and museum on a chosen site in Oklahoma. Since 1994, various entities, including the Authority, the State Legislature, the Office of the Governor, Native American groups, and a stellar design team have worked together and developed an impressive and extensive plan for the creation of the Native American Cultural Center and Museum in Oklahoma City which three cities in Oklahoma initially bid for.

The approximately 300 acre site, donated by the Oklahoma City, where the Center will be located, will have a Great Promontory, a Court of Nations, a Court of the Wind, a Hall of the People, Permanent and Temporary Galleries, a "Who We Are" Theater, a Multi-Purpose Theater, a Demonstration Gallery, Family Center, Study Center, Discovery Center, a Lodge Hotel and Conference Center, a Visitor Center, and Dancing Grounds. As a Smithsonian affiliate, the museum will be able to rotate exhibits with the Native American Smithsonian Museum being built in Washington, enriching both of the museums' collections.

Some of the main goals tied to the creation of the Native American Cultural Center and Museum are as follows:

1. To link the past, present and future of Indian Nations and present them to the Visitor in a way that he or she can experience and understand fully.
2. To preserve and promote the living cultures of Native Americans, in language and history, dance, arts,

cultural values and spirituality.

3. And to strive for economic self-sufficiency and to engender the principles of environmental sustainability.

This massive endeavor, representing and promoting all 39 tribes in Oklahoma, is truly awe inspiring and worthy of federal financial and technical support. The design team includes Ralph Appelbaum, whose achievements include the United States Holocaust Museum, and Bill Fain, who helped design the TransAmerica building in San Francisco. Bob Schaffer, another member of the design team from Johnson Fain Partners, is in the audience today. This world class team has enjoyed the support of Governor Keating of Oklahoma, Senators Nickles, Inhofe, and Campbell, the Oklahoma State Legislature, and Representatives Watkins, Watts, Largent and Istook of the Oklahoma Delegation, to name a few.

H.R. 2742 would authorize the appropriation of \$33 million dollars over a period of four Fiscal Years beginning in 2003. However, appropriation of federal dollars is contingent upon private, city and state sources accounting for 66% of the total cost. Thus, the Center is neither wholly dependent upon federal funds nor given access to federal funds until a local commitment has been adequately demonstrated. Nevertheless, federal funds are necessary and are reasonable. Given the federal government's significant role in relocating many of the 39 tribes now a part of Oklahoma, it seems more than appropriate for the federal government to award grants to the Native American Cultural and Educational Authority for the development of this museum committed to preserving the history and culture of these tribes. Furthermore, a precedent has been set for the federal funding of state museums. To name a few examples, from 1986 to 1994, the Steamtown Railroad Museum in Pennsylvania was appropriated \$80 million in federal funds. From 1996 to 1997, the Hispanic Cultural Center in New Mexico was appropriated \$16 million. And, under the Omnibus Indian Advancement Act of the 106th Congress, appropriations amounting to over \$18 million dollars were authorized for the Wakpa Sica Reconciliation Place in Fort Pierre South Dakota.

In conclusion, as you will see from the testimony of Mayor Humphreys, Senator Kelly Haney, Governor Anoatubby of the Chickasaw Nation, and Tommy Thompson of the Native American Authority such a museum is not only necessary for the preservation of Indian cultures, but it carries deep significance in the State of Oklahoma.

Thank you again Mr. Chairman and Mr. Rahall. I truly appreciate the opportunity to testify before this Committee on this subject.