



For Immediate Release  
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### **House Expresses Disapproval of Expulsion of Cherokee Freedmen Watson: Amendment "Demonstrates the Gravity of the Issue . . . Additional Congressional Actions May Be Forthcoming"**

**Washington, DC**— Today the House of Representatives adopted an amendment to limit funds to the Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma if the tribe fails to uphold the membership rights of the Cherokee freedmen. The amendment was attached to H.R. 2786, the Native American Housing Assistance and Self-Determination Reauthorization Act of 2007. The legislation provides housing assistance to American Indians and Alaska Natives.

During the floor debate of H.R. 2786, Congressman Mel Watt (D-NC) offered an amendment to prevent funds authorized under the act from being expended for the benefit of the Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma until it recognizes the Cherokee freedmen descendants as citizens of the Cherokee Nation. Watt's amendment was further amended by language offered by Congressman Dan Boren (D-OK) that sets aside Watt's amendment as long as the tribe's temporary injunction reinstating the freedmen remains in effect and if the Cherokee freedmen prevail in its appeal of Nation's March 3 vote rescinding the tribal membership of the Cherokee Freedmen. Boren's amendment, as well as Watt's original amendment, passed by voice vote.

Congresswoman Watson issued the following statement:

"The fact that the Cherokee freedmen issue has been raised on floor of the House of Representatives demonstrates the gravity of the issue. The amendment language clearly puts Congress on record that the Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma will not be in compliance with the 1866 Treaty, which recognizes the freedmen as citizens, if it takes any action through its courts or otherwise to expel the freedmen descendants.

"The amendment also sends a clear signal that Congress will continue to monitor the situation closely. If the Cherokee Nation does not move expeditiously and in a manner indicating it will comply with its treaty obligations, Congress is poised to take stronger action.

“I remain very concerned and troubled by the conduct of the Cherokee Nation leadership. The leadership’s rhetoric and actions indicate that it has no intention of seeking any accommodation with the freedmen descendants. It is my understanding that the Cherokee Nation has eliminated from its official Web page all references on how freedmen descendants can apply for citizenship. It has refused all outside requests for its current enrollment records of freedmen descendants in the Cherokee Nation. And it pointedly refers to freedmen as “non-Indians.”

“Additional Congressional oversight of the Cherokee Nation is certainly merited, and significant additional Congressional actions may be forthcoming.”