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Chickasaw lawmaker to "Walk a Mile"
Program pairs legislators with low-income residents

OKLAHOMA CITY OK
Sam Lewin 8/11/2005

When a handful of Oklahoma lawmakers team up with low-income members of the public in an effort to broaden their horizons, at least one of them will not have much adjusting to do.

Organizers with the Walk a Mile program describe it as "a national educational program that links policymakers with their low-income constituents to learn more about each other's lives, to gain a new perspective and to 'walk a mile' in each other shoes."

Lisa Billy, a member of the Chickasaw Nation representing House District 42 in the Oklahoma Legislature, is one of those that signed up for the voluntary program.

"It puts you in direct contact with the public," Billy told the Native American Times. "In many cases there are members of the Legislature that have never lived in poverty, that have never lived on food stamps. It makes you aware of what the problems are out there."

The Purcell Republican is being paired with a woman named Cammie. Billy declined to give Cammie's last name because she did not want to embarrass her. As part of the program Billy will live on \$500 a month.

That could be a tall order for some people, but Billy is not concerned. A native of McClain County, the former Chickasaw Nation official has been in similar circumstances.

"I can live on \$500 a month. I have done it before. I have lived on commodities," she said.

Monica Barczak, the Oklahoma coordinator for the program, credited Billy for participating. All lawmakers received invitations to participate. Not all

consented.

"Many of those taking part are freshman lawmakers like Rep. Billy," Barczak said. "It shows they have a commitment to learn about their constituents and their districts."

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