

## RESOLUTION #

### **Buncombe County Commissioner Resolution in Opposition to Catawba Indian Nation Casino Development in North Carolina**

WHEREAS, Buncombe County is a county located in Western North Carolina; and

WHEREAS, Buncombe County and the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians have had a long supportive relationship both in governmental and economic development; and

WHEREAS, the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians owns and operates Harrah's Cherokee Casino Resort in Cherokee, North Carolina, which is in Jackson County, and Harrah's Cherokee Valley River in Murphy, North Carolina, which is in Cherokee County; and

WHEREAS, the Cherokee casino resorts had an estimated economic impact of \$750 million in North Carolina in 2018; and

WHEREAS, the Cherokee casino resorts have an impact on the economy of Western North Carolina in the form of employee compensation, local supplier purchases, cash distributions to fund Tribal operations, as well as distributions to individual Tribal members, each of which generate additional demands for goods and services provided by small business owners in Western North Carolina; and

WHEREAS, the Cherokee casino resorts have enabled the Tribe to make investments in Western North Carolina, including \$330 million in additional financed capital investments by the year 2020; and

WHEREAS, the Cherokee casino resorts are directly responsible for five percent (5%) of the employment, approximately 3,069 employees, in the six western counties of North Carolina; and

WHEREAS, the Cherokee casino resorts are indirectly responsible for an additional 5,411 jobs; and

WHEREAS, directly and indirectly, the Cherokee casino resorts have reduced the historically high unemployment rate in Jackson and Swain Counties, which was 1.87 times the state average through 1997; and

WHEREAS, the prior to the establishment of the Cherokee casino resorts, seasonal fluctuations in unemployment in Western North Carolina sometimes peaked at seventeen percent (17%) or more, but since the establishment of the casino resort, fluctuations typically range from two percent (2%) to four percent (4%); and

WHEREAS, the average salary for direct employees of the Cherokee casino resorts is seventy-two percent (72%) higher than the average salary in the six western counties of North Carolina; and

WHEREAS, approximately \$129 million in direct wage and salary income to Cherokee Casino resorts' employees and an estimated \$276 million in indirect wage and salary income generated by the casino resorts entered into the local economy; and

WHEREAS, Cherokee casino resorts-funded Tribal operations generated close to \$90 million in local spending and created more than 2,600 jobs in the region; and

WHEREAS, the Cherokee Preservation Foundation, using resources stemming directly from the Cherokee Casino resorts, has awarded more than \$93 million to further strengthen and diversify the regional economy; and

WHEREAS, the State of North Carolina receives a revenue share from the Cherokee casino resorts in the amount of almost \$11 million annually; and

WHEREAS, other state and local taxes and benefits approach \$80-90 million, including income tax, sales tax, decline of unemployment benefits, occupancy taxes, etc.; and

WHEREAS, the Cherokee casino resorts are responsible for bringing in approximately 5.2 million visitors to Western North Carolina each year; and

WHEREAS, almost three-quarters of the gaming revenues generated by the Cherokee casino resorts are from of-state visitors; and

WHEREAS, in 2018 the employees of the Cherokee casino resorts donated approximately 123,000 hours to various non-profit organizations for value added near \$3 million; and

WHEREAS, S. 790 was introduced by South Carolina Senator Lindsey Graham and co-sponsored by North Carolina Senators Richard Burr and Thom Tillis; and

WHEREAS, S. 790 would permit the Catawba Indian Nation to operate an off-reservation casino with electronic games without entering into revenue sharing agreements with the State of North Carolina; and

WHEREAS, revenues from a Catawba Indian Nation casino in North Carolina would flow to South Carolina where the Catawba Indian Nation is located; and

WHEREAS, the establishment of a Catawba Indian Nation casino in North Carolina under S. 790 would result in fewer jobs offered by the Cherokee casino resorts and the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians Tribal operations, thereby affecting the unemployment rate in Western North Carolina, and the salaries, wages, and other investments recycled back into the local and regional economy; and

WHEREAS, the establishment of a Catawba Indian Nation casino in North Carolina under S. 790 would result in lost investments and revenue in Western North Carolina and most of the Catawba casino revenues going to South Carolina casino developers and a South Carolina Indian tribe.

WHEREAS, the following communities in western North Carolina have formally expressed concern and opposition to the proposed Catawba casino development: Cherokee County (resolution 4/15/19), Clay County (resolution 5/2/19), Graham County (resolution 4/16/19), Jackson County (resolution 4/16/19 and letter to Stein 7.22.20), Swain County (letter to Stein 7/9/20), Town of Murphy (resolution 4/1/19) Haywood County (resolution 4/1/19);

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, that Buncombe County opposes S. 790, a bill that would permit the Catawba Indian Nation in South Carolina to open a gaming facility in North Carolina, and threaten the well-being of citizens and small business owners in Buncombe County and Western North Carolina; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that Buncombe County, by this resolution, opposes Catawba casinos and requests that North Carolina Senators Richard Burr and Thom Tillis and members of the Senate Indian Affairs Committee withdraw their support of S. 790.

Adopted this 18<sup>th</sup> day of August, 2020

ATTEST

BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS FOR THE  
COUNTY OF BUNCOMBE

By: \_\_\_\_\_  
Lamar Joyner, Clerk

By: \_\_\_\_\_  
Brownie Newman, Chairman

APPROVED AS TO FORM

\_\_\_\_\_  
County Attorney