By Amber Hanneken
Staff Writer

Hobnobbing with the first lady of the United States and riding in the president's motorcade during an all-expense paid trip to Washington, D.C. is not something most Choctaw County residents will experience in their lifetime, and definitely not something Deborah Powell thought she would be experiencing when she moved here in 2004.

Powell, an employee of the Choctaw Nation Housing Authority in Hugo, was invited to the State of the Union address last week because federal stimulus funding provides for her job. The housing authority received more than $8 million in stimulus money from the president's recovery act, and as the development specialist, Powell tracks how those funds are being spent.

She said there were two people within the authority who could have gone, but she was selected because she is a tribal member. She said the trip was an experience, from her first-ever taxi ride to shaking President Barack Obama's hand after his speech.

"I teared up when I went to shake his hand and he started talking about Oklahoma's weather and the ice storms," Powell said. "It was so intense."

Meeting the president and first lady were at the top of Powell's list of experiences but she said her children disagreed.

"My kids, after I told them everything I did, they thought the coolest thing was that I got taken from the White House to the Capitol building in a motorcade with everybody else," she said. "We were in two vans and as soon as we left the White House it was full lights and sirens and every street was blocked off."

Powell's husband, Billy Powell, also got to go on the trip with her; as well as the housing authority's Executive Director Russell Sossamon and Bishinik editor Lisa Reed.

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