

2012 is going to be a big year, a good year, for the Blackfeet.

My Fellow Blackfeet,

Today, America and most of the world is in serious economic distress. So it says a lot about us that the Blackfeet Nation has been making good, measurable economic and social progress while the rest of the world is in a downward spiral. We are seeing more job creation here than the national average. We are seeing our local economy improve, little by little, while everywhere else economies are stagnant or declining. We are taking better care of our people through our various programs than ever before, at a time when the opposite is happening almost everywhere else.

Over the last three years, there have been two main drivers for this progress: 1) Growth in the local business sector and 2) better government. You can look around for yourself and see the increase in the number of new enterprises and the expansion of existing businesses. In government, we have better policies across the board, improved productivity, stronger management, and much tighter financial controls to the point where, for the first time in decades, we have virtually eliminated fraud and corruption. In general, we are taking better care of those among us that need a helping hand than at any time in the last 50 years.

But we have a very long ways to go because, after decades of staggering unemployment and poverty, the climb back is a steep, hard one. Together, step by step, day by day, we are getting there.

I am proud and humbled beyond words to be Chairman of this great tribe. There are 565 tribes in America, and the Blackfeet stand apart in every way that matters most. We have been on this land for 10,000 years and may be the oldest living culture in the world still sovereign. We are the toughest and strongest people on earth, because our ancestors had to be that way to survive and prosper in our wild and rugged home.

And for almost all of our existence as a people, our ancestors did prosper. Why? Because of this land, our home. Our home has always been good to us. Our home has always been easy to defend, but hard on our enemies. And so, when the dark times came 180 years ago, the thing that saved us was this land, because the thing we wanted most was the thing our new enemies wanted least: this land, our home.

I remind you of this because there are **four points** I want to make.

First, I have always said it is a gift to be an Indian. But the Blackfeet got the greatest gift of all because we still have the very land --our home, our world-- that created us. Do you know that of the 565 tribes in America, only six still live on their ancestral lands? And of these, only one --the Blackfeet-- has a homeland (and therefore a society) that has not been encroached on, diluted, overrun, and trampled? Our homeland has been left alone by outsiders, and so it is still what it has always been.

And our blessings don't end there. We still have all the things that made us great for 10,000 years, especially the Blackfeet heart, mind, and spirit.

Yes, we still have everything we need to make us great again while, sadly, virtually every other tribe has lost some or all of what made them great, with little hope of regaining it. We mourn for them, but rejoice at our blessings.

Second, the challenge today is to make our homeland work for us, not against us. For thousands of years it was an advantage to have this remote and rugged home because we wanted outsiders to stay out. Today we want people and businesses to come here, but our location and climate keeps them away.

Third, the main objective for the Blackfeet Tribe must be to develop a viable economy on the reservation. We don't have one now. And we never will until we create, develop, and attract new industries, businesses, and people with money to spend. This really isn't as complicated as you might think. It isn't rocket science and we don't have to reinvent the wheel. All we have to do is to better realize what sort of society we are and borrow from similar societies who became successful. And that leads us to the essential fourth point.

Fourth, we must realize that we are a People, and that our reservation is a nation --more like a sovereign country than like a city, county, or state.

In the modern world, there really is no equivalent to an Indian tribe. We are not bonded to each other purely because of ethnicity or beliefs or how or where we live. It has more to do with who we are, where we come from, what we have in common, and how we see ourselves. Outsiders don't understand what a big, old, traditional Indian tribe is, and they never will. Nor is there any reason for them to understand it. All that matters is that we understand it and that we live it. And that we never forget that we are a People.

So to sum up these four points: We are the Lucky Ones. We have everything we need to prosper. We just need to learn from and apply the lessons and models of other prosperous societies. We must choose the right models and remember we are a People and a nation.

2012 is going to be a big year, a good year, for the Blackfeet. It will be the year when three years of good decisions and a determination to stay the course, whatever the obstacles, starts to pay off in big ways. Seeds we have planted along the way will suddenly burst in new, unexpected things you will recognize, things that will stir your Blackfeet mind and spirit to action, things that will give you a way to start bringing prosperity to your home and family.

The Blackfeet's greatest days lie ahead of us. I more than believe it, I know it. And so should you

Thank you for entrusting me with the role of Councilman and Chairman.

T. J. Show,

Blackfeet Tribal Chairman