Report by TJ Show, Tribal Secretary

"It is a gift to be an Indian. We must repay the gift by

working hard to return the Blackfeet to greatness."

I have always believed that the greatest days of the Blackfeet are in front of us, not behind us. Today, I believe it more strongly than ever, and I see a clear path to get us there.

It's an honor and a privilege to be voted on to Council, to play a role in helping make the Blackfeet great again. Every day I come to work and remember the confidence and trust that voters placed in me. When they voted for me, they were doing two things: registering their frustration and unhappiness with the old leadership, and entrusting me with their hopes for a bright future.

Montana Senators Baucus and Tester with Blackfeet Tribal Leaders Vice Chairman Peter Tatsey, Chair

I will not let you down. Here's some of what I am doing to help move us forward.

As BTBC Secretary, it is my job to handle the Agenda. That means I am in a position to schedule meetings that have the greatest Council participation possible. I believe in government and decision-making by quorum. The larger the quorum the better because one of the biggest problems in the past was that Councilmen operated in their own little worlds, like separate departments. That's bad government and leads to all sorts of problems, as we all have seen in past decades.

We are elected to Council to come to the table together --all 9 of us-- and present our ideas and listen to proposals and discuss issues or problems. After we have fully examined and debated the case, we vote based on what each individual believes is best for the entire tribe. Disagreement is good and healthy and leads to better decisions.

But in the past, Councilmen would swap votes for each other's pet projects or special interests or assemble small hand-picked impromptu quorums to slip a resolution through without full debate. Or some Councilmen would sell the rest on a motion with a hidden agenda or without all the facts being known. And looking the other way, and expecting others to do the same, was the way things used to be done.

But the Tribe elects and pays 9 BTBC members to NOT look the other way, to speak up when they see unethical and bad behavior, and to fight it and fix it. The Tribe elects and pays 9 BTBC members to be at the table to vote their conscience, speak for their constituents, and not let bad resolutions slip through. So I feel strongly that all 9 should be there, and I do all I can to make that happen.

I think most Tribal members would be surprised at how many different issues and problems the BTBC works on in a month: jurisdiction, water compact, ethics, 638, business and economic development opportunities, budget matters…the list is endless.

And for the first time in decades, things are moving well on just about every front. Here's why: First, the BTBC has instituted new policies and practices for itself that are based on accountability, transparency, best use of resources, hard work, and long hours. And we are demanding the same from staff. As an example, today it takes 6 BTBC signatures for a Council member to travel or spend any money, outside of their own small office budget. That policy alone has reduced waste and frivolous costs by at least 95%.

Second, our financial house is in much better order. This New Council inherited a mess and a huge debt. Frankly, previous Councils ran up a mountain of bad debt and dumped it in our lap. And we are dealing with it the right way: For the first time in years, we now have a clean financial house and our debt is being responsibly whittled down.

Third, the Tribe is starting to hit on all cylinders, for the first time ever. When I arrived on Council, I was excited to join the other new BTBC member in the driver's seat of the big rig called Tribal government, hit the gas, and get moving. Imagine my frustration to turn the key and find a blown engine and no gas in the tank. So before we could move an inch, we had to

rebuild the engine of Tribal government and properly ration resources.

Once we got the big rig moving again, I still felt that we were limping along in some areas. Here was the problem: the New Council now had clear priorities, ideas, and directives, but somehow things were getting stalled at the staff level. In other words, we would say: “Hey, let’s get this done”…but months later, nothing had been done.

But in recent months, that has changed for the better. The logjam has broken, due to re-assigning key projects, having some new people involved, and getting some early wins under our belt. Success breeds success, progress leads to more progress, and one win leads to another win. Now, staff that performs well sets the bar higher for staff that is still lagging. Then everyone performs better because no one wants to look like they are incompetent or are slackers.

Now that both BTBC and staff are starting to hit on all cylinders, I feel like there isn’t anything the Blackfeet can’t do.

So it is time for two big changes that I am pushing for. First, I want to see 5, 10, and 20 year plans developed. Now that we are moving, we have to decide where we want to go.

Second, I think the BTBC should operate more like the U.S. Senate where each senator has the ability to develop a plan for his or her ideas, and then bring the plan to the table. The BTBC has little ability to do that at present. For example, I have had a number of ideas on how we can capture tourist dollars from the 2.3 million visitors to Glacier Park with little cash outlay and fast ramp-up. But the BTBC has no staff to do the research, develop concepts, and write up business plans. In fact, the Blackfeet doesn’t have an Economic Development Department structured like most other tribes do to hand BTBC projects off to. But these are small obstacles and we will get over them.

These are exciting times for the Blackfeet and I thank you once again for allowing me to play a role in returning the Tribe to prosperity and pride. We are a great people and now is the time to show the world how great we really are.