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## Bronco's brigade of bubble-heads still defying logic and bottom line

By RICK BELL

We live in one universe.

Politicians live in another.

No time is this clearer than yesterday. In our world, jobs get cut, wages freeze or roll back, assets lose value, security isn't something we can take for granted.

But there is another world. It is safe and it is snug because those in it live off coin from those who aren't as safe or as snug. They remain untouched and act accordingly.



They cash the cheques and choose not to participate in the recession. Yet.

At Silly Hall, where they talk of the downturn as if it is happening somewhere else, the city council has no idea why keeping a 5.5% pay hike and allowing no debate might look a tad bit out of touch.

This scribbler has to go down and sit in the cheap seats and look in the whites of their eyes. It works in the old movies.

But, in the Little Shop of Horrors, this script is nothing if not predictable. Most of the aldermen couldn't see the light if they were hooked up to General Electric.

For a second time, Ald. Andre Chabot attempts to get his colleagues to discuss a pay raise lower than 5.5%. Yesterday, it is 3.5%.

For a second time, Andre is shut down before he even gets a chance to make his case.

Yesterday, Mayor Bronco says Andre needs 10 votes on council for a single syllable of to-and-fro to be heard.

"It's not a Dutch auction continually changing the number," says the mayor, with an obvious contempt for a member of council he plainly despises.

Andre challenges Bronco's reading of the rules. The mayor does not look happy.

It is not an understatement to tell you there is a little tension in the air, more than a little irritation from the man in the high chair.

After all, we're talking about going toe-to-toe with Bronco and to stand up to the mayor should carry a health warning like on a pack of smokes.

You've got to hand it to this alderman from east Calgary, who is also fighting against seeing his Ward 10 riding moved to the north of the city in the next election.

He has guts, even when he realizes a political knee to the groin will quickly follow any hint of dissent with the mayor. We wait. To overturn Bronco, needs city council's agreement. Almost all the seat-warmers back the mayor. Like that's news.

The monkeys once again dance on cue to the tune of the organ grinder.

Then, on the vote to allow debate on the pay increase, Andre needs 10 votes and he gets six. Diane (Big Red) Colley-Urquhart, Ric (Dr. No) McIver, Jim (No Nickname Yet) Stevenson, Rundle Ray Jones, Andre and ... yes, it's true ... Little Johnny Mar.

No debate is allowed. The deal is done. The 5.5% is through.

There's all kind of talk about aldermen maybe giving this amount or maybe that amount to charity. Well, charities are worthy, but this money is taxpayer money.

Then, there are those thinking about giving their raise back to the city. We'll see how many aldermen go that route. Best guess: Not many.

"I didn't flinch," says Andre of his encounter.

"We just can't seem to react to changing conditions."

React to changing conditions? This is a council where aldermen have only now decided they should figure out how much cash they want to spend before they plan out the next budget.

And they only come up with this brainwave when a member of the public sitting on a Silly Hall committee kind of notices the aldermen aren't considering the final tally before taking out their crayons and coming up with all the neat stuff they want to spend money on.

I am not making this up.

As you know, the next battle will be trying to inch down this year's property tax increase before it's finalized in the spring.

Birds of the air tell me the mayor is miffed. Behind closed doors, the chickadees tell me, Bronco has expressed displeasure over what he hears of the public's perception of goings-on downtown.

Big Red has a few words this day before the curtain falls.

"There was outrage and anger," she says of the mood of Calgarians.

"Now there's disbelief."

Of course, the Bronco brigade of aldermen think Calgarians are asleep and all this argy-bargy is make-believe stirred up by a few malcontents in the media. (Hi, mom.) We shall see.

Up in the capital city, we get the Drone from the Throne.

Premier Ed reveals what we knew at Christmas. They're going to dip into the piggy bank to keep spending, a move they can manage for a couple years.

The premier says it's all about protecting Albertans but it's really about crossing fingers and hoping everything will turn around sooner rather than later, so the reins don't have to be pulled in. If not, we hit the wall and these Tories will have to break some hearts. For now, as Scott Hennig of the Canadian Taxpayers Federation says, "they're operating in a bubble." Of course they are. They're politicians. Where else would they be?