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Bronco owns political podium

By **RICK BELL**, CALGARY SUN

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He doesn't even have to find a woodshed to go behind.

He has an office nearby with closed doors.

And, without ever reaching for his belt, the errant aldermen sing most sweetly.

What is expected to be one hell of a fireworks display in the big blue playpen ends up more like a few folks holding sparklers in the rain.

It is once again the battle to get Premier Ed to fork over to the city the cash he said he would.

It is the mayor's fight.

All talk of taking on the city hall establishment once again is far more show than go, like the day aldermen promised to fight Bronco's budget and then didn't put forward any cuts worth talking about.

Bronco, once again, owns the podium.

He reminds city council of all the building projects they voted for and signed off on. Not one of Bronco's ideas is ever defeated.

"Where were they when they put up their hands?" asks the mayor, no doubt knowing there have been many examples of poor hand-brain coordination on council.

"You can't put up your hand one day and say you're in favour of these expenditures and then, a few months later, forget you've agreed to them. We have to remain consistent."

The west leg of the LRT, officially costing over a billion, is going ahead and going all the way.

Ald. Diane Colley-Urquhart is concerned about the costs but the west track is a fact.

The city won't be breaking any contracts on the many building deals they've inked. To break them would cost more than \$100 million, according to the mayor's math.

Projects with no signed contracts for construction are on hold until Ed meets face-to-face with Bronco and no date is set.

The mayor is revving up his go-to-war strategy and says the city will face a shortfall of \$411 million by 2012.

What does Ed expect Bronco to do? Borrow more and tack a surcharge on the tax bills of Calgarians?

Delay something some quadrant of the city has been counting on having?

He warns Ed of "significant consequences."

Always remember, Bronco has fought the province three times and beat them each time. He won't go down easily no matter how often someone calls him a whiner.

But first, Bronco goes all olive branch on us. This isn't a fight. This is an offering of options. Be all reasonable before dropping the gloves.

If Ed wants to give the city smaller dollars per year then the provincial Tories can extend the building plan out a few more years and pay out a bigger amount by the end of the agreement.

This way, the city can borrow more cash to pay for the shovels all over town.

And, dear readers, all this is happening as Bronco is giving his state of the city speech Tuesday. It sounds like he is running for mayor again.

At day's end, Diane Colley-Urquhart says council "really needs to all sing from the same songsheet."

She says Ed has left Calgary in a "significant predicament."

"The province has left us stranded," says the alderman who ran for Team Ed in a recent byelection and came third.

By the way, the East Village gets \$45 million for its high-priced footbridge and other so-called improvements. There's nary a whimper from council.

Score another one from Bronco.

Ald. Ric (Dr. No) McIver says: "When the time comes, when we have the facts, we may need to make some big kid decisions."

Bronco doesn't break a sweat. Actually, he's all smiles.

This is, however, as good as it gets Monday for Dr. No after his brainwave to hike the speed limit for cyclists on city pathways is beaten worse than the Latvian hockey team.

Ald. Dale Hodges is left as the one to call the city's spending an "extremely aggressive program." He doesn't want the west LRT to go beyond Westbrook. He doesn't want any more dough heading to East Village.

As for the aggravation with Ed?

"I want to see how this thing ends up before we get into another penny of borrowing," says Dale.

But he's been around 26 years. He doesn't get spanked.