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The media is being accused of stirring up taxpayers emotions while Bronco fiddles as money burns ... so much hot air, so little levity

By [RICK BELL](#)

Sorry to stir up a frenzy but the only way Bronco and his majority on city council could get any closer to denial would be to move to Egypt.

Or are they just playing dumb and dumber, doing the see-no-evil, hear-no-evil, speak-no-evil routine because they can't face trimming even a gram of fat from their budget?

Yesterday, Bronco and a group of aldermen go behind closed doors with Silly Hall's tallest of foreheads to discuss the downturn in the economy and decide there isn't really much of a downturn when it comes to their tax-funded Wonderland.

For them, all the nasty numbers and the nastier short-term forecasts applying to almost all of humanity are somewhere in somebody else's universe.

They have no problems. Their cash cow is always standing by, ready for the easy milking. They can just raise taxes more than 19% over the next three years and up the fees something severe. No problem.

They do not need to put off the frills, use the scissors, give folks living outside Wonderland a little break.

Nope. Bronco is Bronco. The budget will not be changed. Taking candy from a baby would be easier.

"We are staying the course. The budget itself is cast and set," he says, of the tax hike to be rolled out in April.

Bronco, with a straight face and no apparent hint of ha-ha, says the city has "always taken a very conservative approach" when it comes to money. He is "very prudent" and "fiscally responsible."

Come on. It's a joke, right? Why isn't Bronco laughing?

The mayor does say there could be some shrinking of staff in the planning and building



department because they make dough from the real world and ... who would have thunk it ... "if we don't have as many permits coming in, you may not have as many staff."

So there is a downturn.

But, the big man cautions, no cuts are on the table, and, even if anything goes down, it won't have any impact on the tax rate.

You want a change to the budget? You want a fine-tooth comb to go through the city's numbers? You want a look at where fiscal flab can face a little Jenny Craig in a budget over two-billion bucks?

Well, the mayor pulls off a stunt he once ridiculed.

You take the things people want most and tell them those will be the ones facing the axe if there's any reduction in spending.

You want a decrease of the increase in taxes this year? Be careful what you wish for.

It can't happen, says the mayor and ... here's the budget bogeyman ... "unless people are suggesting we don't hire policemen, firemen or transit operators."

How lame. Who doesn't want more cops, firefighters, bus drivers, road crews, garbage collectors and a little more snow clearing?

But would we miss all the deep-thinkers, spin doctors and other supposedly important individuals forever in meetings with other supposedly important individuals forever in meetings?

Unfortunately the only first-class snowjob we see these days is from the Silly Hall politicians who are pretty skilled with the shovelling.

Oops. Sorry again to Little Johnny Mar, the alderman who says city council faces a greater risk to safety because the media are stirring taxpayers up into a frenzy.

Darn democracy.

Well, Bronco finishes his spacewalk and up steps Owen Tobert, the city manager, awaiting the stylish \$264,000 renovation to his paper-shuffling digs, a makeover he scores on the books while the getting is good.

Yesterday, Owen looks like he's on the top of the world and even sports some cool designer specs. Why not?

"We have a good economy," says Owen in Wonderland, who nets a bonus of \$23,310 last month on top of his \$315,000 a year.

"We have a robust local economy, I think things are going quite well." Indeed.

Owen says he's watching the numbers but the city is "nowhere near even thinking about

making changes at the corporate level."

Like that's a surprise.

Ald. Diane Colley-Urquhart emerges after the quick PowerPoint presentation and a more lengthy exhaling of hot air.

Big Red says her impression is it's business as usual and, for Bronco and his bigwigs, what's occurring in the real world doesn't mean much in the big blue bubble.

Don't mention the economy, don't scare the employees and don't ask for outside experts to peek at the books because that's an insult to the high-priced help who have a missing subtraction key on their pocket calculators.

Those in the civic cocoon do not want to be disturbed.

"All I'm asking Owen Tobert to do is what every business in this city is doing now. Nothing more, nothing less," says Big Red.

"We should have seen a plan causing some correction and impact on this current budget year and there was nothing."

Nothing? From Silly Hall?

Sounds like another frenzy being whipped up.