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## Bronco offers new deal

By RICK BELL

Come on. Don't tell me.

Bronco can't really believe we won't see his obvious stunt for what it really is, a feeble attempt to rescue what cannot be saved.

Early yesterday afternoon, Bronco won't talk.

He's rattled, a politician who always likes to be in complete control, appears caught in the headlights.

He is wrong and, unless he's succumbed to delusions, he must finally realize the error of his ways.

The mayor tries to gouge hard-working Calgarians and we don't like it and fight back and, yesterday morning, a majority of aldermen vow to scuttle his bloated budget with its tax hike of 25% over three years.

Seven aldermen, the Magnificent Seven, want to deep-six Bronco's 25% and send the budget back to the Silly Hall paper shufflers for more than a little subtraction.

The hired hands can finally dust off their seldom-used pocket calculators and come up with a smaller number much closer to inflation, while keeping intact our police, fire and paramedics services.

The Magnificent Seven are so serious, they even take out their pens and sign a declaration of independence from the mayor and his puffed-up mathematics.

Andre Chabot signs. So does Joe Connelly, aka Joe the Alderman. There's Dale Hodges and Rundle Ray Jones is in, along with Little Johnny Mar, who joins the good guys and becomes Big John Mar.

Ric McIver is front and centre, Dr. No, standing up for the biggest No of his career on city council. Jim Stevenson also gets out the ink.

Ald. Diane Colley-Urquhart's name is not on the paper but Big Red is fully on board.

The Magnificent Seven becomes the Awesome Eight and eight is enough to turn Silly Hall into Sensible Hall.

Eight is a majority.

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They all say they've heard Calgarians. They all say Bronco's nasty numbers are not good enough.

Bronco finds himself in unfamiliar territory.

He claims the city worked so hard to get his precious budget down to an increase of only 25%. Only. He thought we would buy this bull.

By lunchtime yesterday Bronco is left with the Flaky Four -- Farrell, Ceci, Pincott and Hawkesworth. He also has the Three Broncos -- himself, Bronco With a Beard, that is, his sidekick Gord Lowe and Bronco in a Skirt, Linda Fox-Mellway.

The mayor does not talk but finally realizes zipping his lip gives all the airtime to the aldermen who exhibit to Bronco the four-letter word he hates to see in others. Guts.

And so he quickly scurries up the hill to CTV to shuffle a few deck chairs on his Titanic of a budget. He can hear the glug-glug-glug and he does not like the sound.

But Bronco cannot subtract. He does not know how. It is not in his political DNA. So he pitches a paltry Plan B.

He is not blinking. He offers a pacifier to save his bacon. He figures Calgarians and most aldermen will buy in.

The mayor proposes to shift \$8 million a year out of Enmax to the public coffers and will stop funding EMS when the province picks up the tab this coming April, a move he resisted making a few days ago but something we all thought should have been done already.

As for real cuts there are ... hmmm ... let's see ... well ... there aren't any. Not the reduction of a single paper clip, not a cent from the crew who will knock the icicles off the designer bridges.

So by just moving money and not funding what the province will pay, what is just over 25% becomes just under 21%. That was easy. Next.

But there is no next. The numbers are going in the right direction. That's the best anyone can say.

"Now is the time to actually start making some of the tough decisions. It's time to vote, it's time to deal with the budget and put it to bed, one way or the other. It's not up to administration any longer," pleads the mayor, who faces his first real vote of non-confidence and a blow to his ego.

The majority of aldermen stand firm.

"We're not rebels. It's not us against them, it's not about changing the world, it's not moving mountains," says Joe the Alderman.

Joe, you must not know Bronco. It will be as tough as moving a mountain to see a budget closer to inflation. In the next few days, there will no doubt be arm-twisting by the mayor

and his people severe enough to make playground bullies wince.

"It's a good start. It's an acknowledgement we've got to get the budget down. I always walk on the sunny side of the street," says Joe, of Bronco's eleventh-hour crumb.

"But it does not move me at all. If we could do this easily what else could we do easily and what could we do with a little effort?" Too true.

Ric McIver is happy knowing what is impossible one day is suddenly ... abracadabra ... possible. But this is only the beginning.

The fight goes on with an open house at city hall tomorrow starting at 10.

"I'm locked and loaded," says Big Red, and she is.

Ald. Dale Hodges decides to quote the great Yogi Berra.

"It ain't over till it's over."

Yep. And don't kid yourself. This ain't over.