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Bronco needs to haul out the jumbo-sized scissors and start cutting the budget down fast. But as we're finding out, Bronco doesn't like to lose

By RICK BELL

Now we've got Ald. Gord Lowe, Bronco's Man Friday, accusing the aldermen who oppose the mayor and his budget of being reckless.

Maybe if we make it real simple, you know, like the old Dick and Jane readers, the mayor and his minions might get it.

Bronco. See Bronco. See Bronco cut. Cut Bronco cut.

Understand, Bronco? Cut. The city has a budget for day-to-day operations of almost \$8 billion covering the next three years and the man can't find a cent to reduce.

Can you imagine what would happen in the real world if the boss tells shareholders no fat in his \$8-billion budget can be found?

The individual in question would be punted so far the Stamps would give the kicker a look-see at next year's training camp.

Bronco's Plan B isn't a plan. It is smoke and mirrors. You don't just move money from the city-owned Enmax and then act like you're doing something by not spending on EMS when everybody knows the province is picking up the tab for paramedics April 1.

But Bronco doesn't get it because Bronco doesn't want to get it. He does not want to cut. The end.

What little he does he only does because seven aldermen, the Magnificent Seven, sign a piece of paper Thursday saying his budget isn't good enough and they want to send it back to the paper shufflers if that's what it takes.

Sadly, what we have now is not a battle over a budget. The mayor is being challenged and he does not like to be challenged.

His phony-baloney attempt to calm the waters, not reducing the spending and thinking Calgarians forking out for a 21% tax hike over three years will magically put the critics to bed, isn't working.



So the mayor will fight. It's all about winning now and winning for Bronco means you will pay as much as he desires.

The phones ring yesterday at Silly Hall as they do the Friday before. People are still peeved. Many aren't buying what Bronco is selling, a shell game your pet hamster could figure out.

In a city where voting is treated with the same enthusiasm as a root canal appointment, we've finally got ourselves a real walking, talking story of democracy, just like you read about in the social studies school books.

Down at the big blue box, you can hear some caution. No points have been put on the board.

Yes, the Magnificent Seven pledge to watch our backs when the budget is debated Monday. Let us list the names of the aldermen with the intestines to refuse to play along with those who won't cut.

In no particular order, we have McIver, Connelly, Chabot, Jones, Hodges, Mar and Stevenson.

As well, Ald. Diane Colley-Urquhart backs the seven. So we have the Magnificent Seven and Big Red. If they hold together, it's a majority and the Bronco budget will feel the scissors.

While Big Red says "the mayor is on the run and there is blood on the ground" she's taking nothing for granted and reminds Calgarians it's important to show up at the budget open house beginning at 10 this morning, through city hall's front doors.

Big Red has a petition you can sign if you want a one-year budget with a tax increase no more than around inflation.

"People say they won't make a difference because no one listens. Guess what? We're listening and the only ones who can be the conscience of this city are the people themselves," she says.

"E-mails are fine, phone calls are fine. But they're invisible. Let's put a face on this budget. Some people think we're at the finish line. Well, we're not there."

Some say Big John Mar will be the one who will go weak in the knees when push comes to shove, as it will. Big John says he wants more cuts as long as the city leaves the cops, firefighters and paramedics alone.

"The only sacred cows have flashing lights on them," says the man who might need an XXL shirt before this is over.

Joe Connelly, the respected Joe the Alderman, no relation to Spendin' Joe Ceci of Flaky Four fame, still wants the budget to take a spin or two on the shrink cycle.

"We have way too many priorities and we're genuflecting to the special interests," says Joe. Well said.

Ric McIver is the veteran of city council combat. Dr. No was going up against Bronco when

one was the loneliest number that he'd ever do.

Dr. No isn't lonely this time around, but he isn't breaking out the bubbly just yet.

"We don't want high-fiving when we haven't even gotten into the council chambers. Nothing is decided, nothing is better, nothing is worse."

Rundle Ray Jones still wants cuts. So does Andre Chabot.

Then there's Dale Hodges seeing the most argy-bargy in his quarter century on city council. Is the tax hike low enough?

"No," he replies.

Listening, Bronco?

See you all at the open house.