

November 16, 2008

## Will the clamor of outrage ringing in his ears wake Bronco from his budget dream, or will he hit the snooze alarm for three years?

By [RICK BELL](#)

Bronco walks away.

Does he learn anything from the outrage?

Do all these taxpayers showing up on a Saturday change his mind?

He's asked and he just smirks and walks away, back to the coziness of his big office, back to his bubble where anyone who opposes him is a troublemaker or stupid or both.

Back to where he can start twisting arms to get what he wants.

Well, Bronco can run but he can't hide.

Three years ago, almost nobody shows up to the city's sales job on the budget, only a few sorts who don't like cat licences, who lost their way to the Santa Claus parade or want a picture beside the horse statues.

This time, hundreds upon hundreds make their way down, many arriving a half-hour before the 10 a.m. official start, but no ho-ho-ho spirit abounds, though the thought of roasting someone's chestnuts over an open fire is definitely in the air.

Even Silly Hall finally admits 700-plus come through the doors to give the buffoons behind the budget a reality check and we all know how municipal math likes to inflate budgets and deflate the attendance of those upset with the games going on in the big blue playpen.

Marvin Heid has face time with Bronco. He is in a crowd surrounding the mayor who holds a cup of coffee as a sort of buffer between himself and the peeved off.

The mayor actually speaks but, alas, says nothing real. He sees his job now as getting Calgarians off his back, like a guy bugged by mosquitoes in the summer.

Bronco assumes we should always be good little taxpayers and suck up any crap shovelled our way, grateful it isn't an even bigger gouge.

And when we, and so many others, won't go along with a 25% tax hike, he throws Enmax



money around, stops paying for paramedics when the province pays for them and offers a no-cut 21% tax increase, thinking voodoo accounting will do the trick.

This time, he's the doll and there are plenty more than happy to stick in the pins.

Marvin finally walks away.

"You go along and dream in your own little world," he tells Bronco. The man is clearly frustrated and he's not alone.

Later, Marvin explains.

"He doesn't answer. He's up here and we're living down in the real world and our job is to come up with money for his dream." Bingo.

A few minutes later, a guy is outside with a sign he's hand printed, attacking the city's stupid spending, including the \$25-million designer foot bridges across the Bow. Homemade Sign Due To Lack of Civic Funding, is the punch line. People mention the bridges many times.

"I'd fund half a bridge if some of these aldermen would go over first," says the protester. It gets a big laugh.

A lapel sticker reads: "No, Dave. You don't have a revenue problem, you have a spending problem."

It is a line Ralph used when he made cuts in the '90s in a slow economy.

"Gord Lowe loves to spend your money," is another message worn yesterday. Ald. Gord Lowe aka Bronco With a Beard, is the mayor's budget sidekick and a lot of voices surround him.

Nearby, a firefighter resents being used as a pawn when Bronco threatens Calgarians with cuts on the front lines in the hopes we don't see the fat in the rear where pencil pushers take up space.

A city worker quietly suggests where to be more efficient but won't speak out for fear he'll be bounced for truth-telling. A city bigshot says few chairs are provided to make taxpayers comfortable because the homeless might sit in them.

What a day.

John Schmal, an alderman for 18 years, hands Bronco a plan. Don't expect a thank you note, John.

Ald. Diane Colley-Urquhart is mobbed by well-wishers with almost a thousand signing her petition calling for a one-year budget with an increase around inflation.

Ald. Ric McIver wears a Stamps jersey and speaks of the tremendous turnout and the awesome atmosphere.

"It's amazing. The numbers are huge. I've been to these things where there were six people. I wrote out notes on the comments of hundreds. Unbelievable," he says, sizing up the response as "angry but hopeful."

Angry and hopeful but also feeling on edge and disrespected in an economy where savings have been hit big-time and oil has gone from \$147 to \$57 a barrel since July.

Silly Hall refuses to recognize what is going on. The last three-year city budget for day-to-day operations was \$6.2 billion. This one is just shy of \$8 billion. The mayor says nothing can be shaved off the bottom line of this bottomless pit.

For the average households, city bills will be up \$660 a year in three years' time.

John Mar is the alderman seen as the weak link.

Will he walk tall or act small? Will he weasel out on his word or will he stand up and send this budget back to the drawing board?

"I'm going to be as clear as I possibly can. I'm willing to work with my colleagues towards finding more cuts but I'm prepared to refer the budget back to administration if we are unable to agree. Period."

Ald. Joe Connelly isn't blinking.

"I haven't seen anyone tell me I'm on the wrong track," says Joe the Alderman.

Everyone asks: Where is Druh the Shrew?

Ald. Druh Farrell always entertains city council with her flights of fancy and, when possible, scores cash for her latest Peter Pan project.

But no one sees her.

Go figure. Hopefully she won't show up for the budget debate. We should be so lucky.

It is a great day. A line is drawn. It's not over until the fat budget shrinks.