

# Hypocrisy makes a loud statement

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Just minutes before council's vote to take their 2.42% pay hike this year, deputy mayor Joe Pantalone told me they deserve to make \$99,153.60 because Toronto councillors are "underpaid" compared to others doing similar work.

"When you're underpaid, at least you should get (a) cost-of-living increase," he said.

He also said I must mention whether I'm getting a cost-of-living increase this year -- yes, and it's 2% -- and insisted I should agree to give it back to my employer.

When I suggested to him there's a big difference between wage hikes handed out at City Hall and those given at the Toronto Sun - namely that ours aren't being funded by the already beleaguered taxpayer -- he said at the end of the day the same "person on the street" contributes to my raise.

And this is why I've regularly concluded the long-time NDP councillor is totally out-of-touch with the feelings of average Torontonians -- citizens who've been handed tax hike after tax hike by Mayor David Miller's regime in the past year, with only deteriorating services to show for all the cash grabs.

But at least he's honest and consistent about his troughing, however silly he may sound.

## TAKING THE RAISE

For when push comes to shove, many of the 22 councillors who backed Councillor Case Ootes' motion to refuse their 2.42% pay hike this year will quietly take it now that the motion went down to defeat and their gesture has been recorded publicly.

In other words, they won't be prepared to put their money where their mouth is, by either handing the money back to the city or donating it to charities in their ward.

It's easy to vote for something they know won't see light of day and believe me, it won't. The motion didn't get the two-thirds of council support required to even be considered at yesterday's council meeting, sending it off to the mayor's tightly controlled executive committee.

There it will die a quick death because the mayor wants it to die a quick death. He's already said publicly that while he's freezing his salary at \$163,040.02, he's not prepared to force councillors to do the same.

So if they really wanted to do the right thing, they'd simply give up the money without a fuss -- which to their credit Ootes, Michael Walker, Peter Milczyn, Frances Nunziata, Cesar Palacio, Janet Davis, Glenn De Baeremaeker, Rob Ford, Chin Lee, Giorgio Mammoliti and Michael Thompson told me they intend to do.

Predictably, however, the hypocrisy of several of their colleagues came through loud and clear yesterday.

Take David Shiner. After loudly proclaiming to any media who'd listen that council has to show "leadership" with a pay freeze, I asked him if he would still forgo his pay hike if the motion failed.

He was not amused with my question. "I will decide what I do with my personal pay after," he sniffed. "The increase itself isn't the major importance here."

Brian Ashton said he'll be prepared to take a pay freeze when the mayor comes forward with a property taxpayers' protection plan for the city.

"To make a shallow gesture is of no benefit to the broader community," he said.

## 'LEADING THE WAY'

When asked whether or not they'll take the pay hike, councillors Denzil Minnan-Wong and John Parker were both non-committal.

"I'm not even thinking that far down the line," said Parker. "This is not about whether individual councillors decide to somehow make a demonstration of their own but a matter of council as a group leading the way."

Even frugal Cliff Jenkins, Karen Stintz (who seconded Ootes' motion) and Doug Holyday told me they'll opt to take their pay hikes.

"I think it's a cop-out (for members to give their pay hike away)," Holyday said. "The point can only be made in a statement by council."

Well, I disagree with all of them. While it would have indeed been a stronger statement if council had voted for the freeze as a whole, constituents are still looking to their individual councillors for leadership and some show of restraint, however small and symbolic.

For heaven's sake, it's only \$2,348 and if council's centre-right actually worked together (and weren't so devoid of good ideas), they might consider joining forces and contributing the money to a cause being severely underfunded by the Millerites (something as basic as filling potholes, perhaps).

Now that would make a statement.

