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Council Pay Hike Swept Under Rug

The most troubling aspect of Toronto councillors' 2.4 per cent raise isn't the hypocrisy of endorsing it at the same committee meeting where the pay of 3,900 non-union staff was frozen. Nor is it the fact that, by being generous to themselves, councillors weakened the city's bargaining position in ongoing negotiations with 23,000 unionized workers.

What adds insult to those injuries is that acceptance of councillors' salary increase was never put to a simple, recorded vote of council. Had they voted in public, councillors might well have decided to forego this pay increase. Instead, council has used procedural tactics to avoid a vote and sweep the matter under the rug. Here's how it happened:

Through an automatic cost-of-living increase, each councillors' pay jumped by \$2,348 earlier this year, to \$99,153. Concerned about the message that would send to staff and to taxpayers hard hit by the economic downturn, some councillors put forward a motion in January to roll back the pay increase. These councillors wanted the matter dealt with immediately, but that required a two-thirds majority of council. The resulting 22-19 vote fell short of the required two-thirds.

The matter was subsequently referred to the executive committee. Councillors who favour a rollback appeared before the committee this week to argue their case. For their efforts, they were reportedly heckled by committee members. And the committee voted to keep the pay raise without putting the question to council.

The pro-rollback councillors could still try to raise the matter again at council, but that would once more require support of a two-thirds majority.

"I believe we have a majority; I don't believe we have two-thirds," says Councillor Karen Stintz. "Council needed to send a message but we weren't given the opportunity to send that message."

A recent survey of all 45 members of council by the *Star's* city hall bureau suggests that a majority would, indeed, have voted to reject the raise, had they been allowed to. The survey found that 16 councillors and Mayor David Miller were already voluntarily returning their pay raises to the city, 12 councillors (including six on the executive committee) were pocketing the money, and 16 were undecided but leaning toward rejecting the raise or donating it to charity.

A straightforward vote would have, at least, forced the undecideds to get off the fence.

Miller could have made that difference, but he failed to get behind the rollback. Yes, the mayor has willingly given up his own pay hike, but he did nothing to ensure that council as a whole made the same gesture. That isn't leadership.