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THERE ARE NO BLACK HATS IN THE DEBATE ON PLASTIC SHOPPING BAGS

By Marc Robitaille, member of the Canadian Plastics Industry Association and president of Omniplast

If we are to succeed in addressing climate change, we have to stop making villains out of products and industries.

Unless we want to turn back to the clock to the early 20th century, we had better come up with better strategies than banning products. How about responsible use or internationally accepted product stewardship strategies like the 3 R's – reduce, reuse, and recycle – currently being ignored in the bag ban discussion at city hall?

There are no black hats or white hats here in the debate on banning plastic bags. There are only serious questions that need to be asked and answered. Any decision made in the name of the environment should be based on science and fact. And we need to work together, listen to the science, and build consensus around solutions or we will create even more problems.

Unfortunately that is not what is happening in the Montreal debate on plastic shopping bags. The facts are being ignored which is quite frightening for our common environmental future. It is not just industry that has a vested interest here. We all do. It is our environmental future too.

But we have to get our facts right and show respect for each other. The Standing Committee on water, the environment, sustainable development and large parks last year was given the latest 3 R's data on plastic shopping bags which showed that the bags are not a problem in Montreal. The data given to the Commission showed that Montrealers are some of the best product stewards in the world. 93% of all plastic shopping bags are reused and recycled.

Let's get real – plastic shopping bags are less than 0.27% of the waste stream – that's 27 one hundredths of one percent! But the commission chose to ignore the data because they did not want to hear that Montrealers have found a 21st century solution to the bag "problem". They wanted to adhere to a dated and old approach to environmentalism from the last century -- "us" versus "them" - that will eventually, if it continues, only accelerate climate change.

Grant you this is a complex issue, but how about consistency in environmental edicts from on high? In 2009, the SAQ dumped this thicker type plastic bag being proposed by Montreal because it was considered **bad** for the environment. Now Montreal is trying to sell the same bag as an environmental solution. It either is or it isn't. That's the point.

Let's put the black and white hats back on the shelf in the closet and sit down, look at the science and listen to each other. We all share the same environmental future and that solution is already here on plastic bags in Montreal.

Quebec is at the forefront. The industry has been proactive and collaborative. Citizens have already adopted the best sustainable practices possible. One day, the rest of the world will have no other choice than to follow Quebec's leadership. On March 3, we will finally have the chance to meet the mayor and work together to protect the environment. We simply hope it won't be too late.

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