



Using buying power for good

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Ald. Rick McIver, a critic of the city's planned ethical purchasing plan, believes holding municipal suppliers accountable to environmental and ethical standards is an "airy fairy idea."

He's wrong. There's nothing flaky about ensuring the city does business with companies that meet code of conduct standards set by local and international laws and agreements.

McIver didn't show up for Wednesday's debate and lost the argument. Council adopted the purchasing policy in principal, and will now cost out budgetary effects, starting with apparel, food and chemical purchases.

The city buys about \$900 million of goods and services a year, ranging from police and firefighters' uniforms to equipment and food it sells through park concessions and golf courses.

That's a lot of taxpayer-supported clout that can be used to do much good internationally and set an example locally of better buying habits. The policy also keeps Calgary in line with cities worldwide, as municipalities around the globe have adopted similar purchasing rules. Still, not everyone likes the move. The Canadian Federation of Independent Business fears smaller businesses won't be able to afford to investigate their supply chain.

Those fears may be overstated. By nature of its size, a smaller company is less likely to lose track of where its supplies are coming from, or miss the fact that it might be inadvertently dealing with a sweatshop in China.

A fear of eliminating the competition is no reason for the city to compromise its business integrity. There are still questions that must be investigated before the policy is given final approval. It would be helpful to learn from other municipalities, like Vancouver, which adopted a similar policy two years ago.

Council took a strong ethical stand to move ahead on the issue Wednesday. Once it has answered lingering questions, it should stick by its conviction and make this policy a part of everyday business.

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