

editor's note



THE OTHER NIGHT WE BROUGHT IN some take-out Chinese food and I was about to tear open the little packet of soy sauce that always comes with take-out, when for some reason I took a look at the ingredients. Now normally, soy sauce includes soy beans, wheat, water, and salt. But this packet simply listed water, salt, and monosodium glutamate. In other words, it was just salt water with some MSG for flavor.

Of course, it wasn't the first time I was surprised by ingredients. I remember back when I was in college and working at the food service, we were always careful when posting the menu board. Some nights we had hamburgers, but other nights it was beef patties. The difference? Beef patties had a lot more fillers (and I think none of us want the details on that!).

Similarly, I think we all need to be careful with what we think is in the proposed "American Recovery and Reinvestment Plan." To me, it seems obvious that the plan's purpose is to stimulate our economy by consuming American goods and services and creating American jobs. But unless it's clearly stated in the plan that the funds are to be used only on the purchase of American goods and services, it's likely that it will not have the intended effect. It's conservatively estimated that even a 5% level of non-domestic construction and related industry spending will result in the failure to create or retain between 100,000 and 150,000 jobs (with a resultant loss of between \$3.5 billion and \$5.3 billion in personal earnings).

Put another way, the Associated General Contractors of America (AGC) estimates that for each \$1 billion in construction spending, 9,700 jobs are created. And with the stimulus package proposing \$115 billion in construction activity by the end of the second year of the package, it should mean the addition of more than 1.1 million jobs (plus another half-million jobs in related manufacturing industries).

Unfortunately, the use of the "American Recovery and Reinvestment Plan" to stimulate the American economy is not a given. And thanks to loopholes large enough to drive a forklift

through, not even the inclusion of the so-called "Buy America" or "Buy American" provisions guarantee that American goods and services will be used on the planned infrastructure and other construction projects. (For more on this, see Angela Stephens' article "Made in America?" on page 23 of this issue.)

I'm reminded of a story I once heard about the International Monetary Fund's efforts to stimulate a third-world country's economy through, in part, the construction of a large bridge. Unfortunately, a foreign contractor underbid all competitors (through substantial government subsidies). The material wasn't just shipped in, but so were all the laborers. And to add insult to injury, the laborers slept and ate on the working ship—so while the country got a new bridge, there was no other positive impact to the local economy.

I urge everyone to contact their congressional representative and senators and insist that the "American Recovery and Reinvestment Plan" be used to stimulate our economy and to create American jobs. This taxpayer-funded plan should be used to maximize the domestic content of all construction related projects—both of labor and of materials. (If you need assistance with the wording of a letter to your congressman or a letter to your local paper, please let me know. Also, visit www.aisc.org/buildamerica for more information, including white papers with more details.)

And I hope to see all of you at NASCC—The Steel Conference (April 1-4 in Phoenix). Stop by the AISC booth and let us know what you and your company are doing—and let us know how AISC can help you.

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