

Simple yet complicated

March 5, 2011

Sometimes when you look at a thing there's more than meets the eye. On first blush some things seem deceptively simple but are very complicated once all the ramifications are considered.

Take the Republican plan to slash the federal budget. The logic is that if spending is cut then the budget will be in better shape over the long run. However, what's complicated is not how much you cut but what you cut. Do the cuts achieve the intended goal.

The GOP spending plan, for example, has a stated goal of reducing government spending. However, according to the Washington Post, a Moody's Analytics report claims the plan to sharply cut federal spending this year would destroy 700,000 jobs through 2012.

This agrees with another claim by our buddies at Goldman Sachs, "which predicted that the Republican spending cuts would cause even greater damage to the economy, slowing growth by as much as 2 percentage points in the second and third quarters of this year."

Now, no one wants to see the federal government drown in red ink, nor do we want to see 700,000 of our citizens lose their livelihoods. Simple in theory but complicated in reality. Those 700,000 are potential taxpayers and voters.

The big question is what to cut. Again, sometimes simple is not so simple. Take scientific research, for example. The GOP proposes to scale back federal involvement in scientific research and development. In a USA

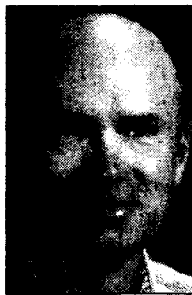
Today article, House Appropriations Committee chief Hal Rogers, R-Ky., says such cuts "are necessary to show that we are serious about returning our nation to a sustainable financial path."

The article goes on to explain: "The federal government funds more than a third of all research-and-development spending nationwide ... Of that federal spending, about \$30 billion is spent on 'basic' research ... The House budget proposal cuts about \$4.4 billion from that \$30 billion in basic research."

"We're eating our seed corn. A lot of this looks like mindless cutting," says retired congressman Sherwood Boehlert, R-N.Y., former head of the House Science Committee.

The bottom line is that this country saves money in the short term with cuts to science research, but in the long term we will lose our leadership position (in science) in the world. That means technologies (and jobs) that would be centered in the United States will go elsewhere.

How do I know this? Because as we put the ax to scientific research China is opening major research universities — seven announced in the last five years. You want simple? How about just laying down and submitting to the Chi-



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nese? That simple enough for you?

So tough cookies! Who needs science anyway? Well, we do. Want an example? Been to the gas pump recently? Did you grind your teeth and mutter under your breath as the money meter on the pump spun out of control? Maybe American science will come to your rescue.

According to the Associated Press, "a Massachusetts biotechnology

company says it can produce the fuel that runs Jaguars and jet engines using the same ingredients that make grass grow. Joule Unlimited has invented a genetically-engineered organism that it says simply secretes diesel fuel or ethanol wherever it finds sunlight, water and carbon dioxide.

The Cambridge, Mass.-based company says it can manipulate the organism to produce the renewable fuels on demand at unprecedented rates, and can do it in facilities large and small at costs comparable to the cheapest fossil fuels."

Some may scoff at this, but Joule chief executive Bill Sims says: "If we're half right, this revolutionizes the world's largest industry, which is the oil and gas industry, and if we're right, there's no reason why this technology can't change the world."

I don't know about you, but if this guy's company is

onto something and it turns out that it actually works, and some federal funding would speed the process of the United States ridding itself from dependence on foreign oil producers, I'd say "fund away." I, for one, would enjoy waving goodbye to the Saudis while they disappear in my rear view mirror.

This is all pretty serious stuff. You're probably ready for a good laugh right about now. OK, here's one for you.

Reports on ESPN and elsewhere say that, "Iran objects to the logo for the 2012 London Olympics, contending it is racist because it resembles the word 'Zion' and warning of a possible boycott of the Games."

Well, the logo was launched back in 2007 and has been seen all over the world for the last five years, so why Iran objects at this late date is a mystery.

Also a mystery is that Iran's president, Mahmoud Ah-ma-nut-job (I believe that's how it's pronounced), thinks the rest of the world actually cares if Iran competes in the Olympics. I mean, the world isn't going, "Oh, no, what will we do if Iran has no entry in the decathlon! How can we face life?" My guess is that the world's reaction will be more like, "Whew! Good ride-dance!"

If you want to look at the logo and make your own determination, go to <http://sports.espn.go.com/oly/news/story?id=6167220>.

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