

## My Take: Seeing The Connections

Written by Jane Alexander, Editor-In-Chief  
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Jane Alexander, Editor-In-Chief A lot has been said about the recently passed "American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009" (ARRA), not all of it kind. We know it's not perfect. How much in life is? What's especially troubling to me, though, is the fact that much of the negative hype has been passed along in a never-ending news cycle by "talking heads" who don't seem to have a clue as to how things work out here in the real world. Makes me hanker for someone like the science historian James Burke to show up and discuss the ARRA in terms of "connections" from the beginnings of the global recession to the brighter, more sustainable future that the stimulus package will spark.

Many of you will remember Burke's hit BBC television series Connections. It first aired in 1978 (followed by the sequels Connections2 and Connections3, in 1994 and 1997, respectively). The programs explored centuries of history, science and invention and demonstrated how various discoveries, scientific achievements and world events interconnected to advance modern technology (and, ultimately, mankind). Following this model, it's easy to see how some smart—albeit high-dollar—spending on such things as transportation, infrastructure and energy-efficiency projects will jump-start an economic turnaround.

Selecting just one of the ARRA's provisions as an example and highlighting but a few Burke-type "connections," let's project where we might soon begin seeing some real recovery. I pick the \$3.8 billion allocation to the Department of Defense (DOD) for operations and maintenance (including modernization and energy efficiency) across the armed services. It includes a relatively modest \$220 million targeted at energy conservation in new military construction.

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Suppliers of energy-efficient pumps, motors, boilers, controls and other HVAC-related equipment systems and services, as well as insulation, lighting, electrical components, etc. to support DOD's greener focus certainly will get a piece of the \$3.8 billion action. They, in turn, will probably have to upgrade/ramp up their own operations to meet increased demand, meaning, among other things, that some steel mills might start rolling again and enhanced factory automation systems will be installed. None of this can be done without workers, who must feed, clothe and house themselves. They also will need to obtain reliable and efficient means of transportation to and from their jobs, where some of the money they earn will go to leisure spending. In the meantime, the children of everyone involved in this scenario will be able enroll (or stay enrolled) in their colleges or vocational schools, where they'll be learning how to keep future generations from experiencing the same types of problems we've been dealing with lately—and how to leverage the resulting technologies to pay off the ARRA and other crucial bailout programs. These are just my list of connections back to an exponentially growing economy. You, no doubt, can identify even more.

I don't buy in to the notion that our best days are behind us—never will! Thus, I call on everyone, "talking heads" included, to stop focusing on any negatives associated with the ARRA and begin stressing what's really important. That's the spirit, drive, tenacity and resiliency of America's working men and women—and their ability to see the connections.

