

U-T Editorial: No protectionism

Strip 'buy American' rules from stimulus bill

Earlier this week, the European aircraft maker Airbus took itself out of competition to build a new fleet of planes to be designated as Air Force One for the president of the United States. That left Chicago-based Boeing as the only company in the world capable of supplying the world's most photographed plane.

Americans may breathe a sigh of relief that the president will continue to fly on American-made planes, but we shouldn't feel the same way about efforts in Congress to attach "made in America" provisions onto the massive stimulus bill that just passed the House.

As currently written, the \$816 billion stimulus bill would require that all iron and steel used in stimulus-funded infrastructure bills be U.S.-made. It also would require that uniforms for the more than 100,000 officers in the Department of Homeland Security be made in America. Some members of Congress also want a \$20 billion allocation for computerizing medical records to be directed exclusively toward companies in the United States.

It is true that a clear majority of Americans are concerned with global trade and manufacturing jobs lost in this country. And, yes, calls to "buy American" sound patriotic. But the world is more complicated than that. Once the United States throws up barriers to imports, our exports become targets of foreign governments. And governments from Canada to Brazil to China have warned the United States to refrain from adopting such blatantly protectionist measures.

America and the world are in the midst of a recession, perhaps the deepest since the Great Depression of the 1930s. There are many lessons to be learned from that period. Willis Hawley and Reed Smoot, two protectionist congressmen, persuaded Congress to impose tough trade tariffs. Other nations retaliated, and international trade collapsed. What America doesn't need at this time is job-killing legislation.

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