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What Could We Have Bought Instead of a \$3 Trillion War?

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As we mark the 10th anniversary of a deeply painful war, we find our nation again in difficult circumstances. More than 12 million Americans are out of work. People continue losing their homes and healthcare. Our nation's liabilities -- including creaking infrastructure, billowing pollution, and inadequate education -- continue to mount.

As beltway Republicans continue to argue that there's simply no money for any of this essential work, I am left with a simple question:

How else could we have spent the \$3 trillion we sunk into Iraq?

According to rigorous research by Nobel-Prize winning economist Joseph Stiglitz and Harvard's Linda Bilmes, that's the total amount of money -- including interest costs, long-term healthcare costs, energy volatility costs, military equipment costs, and personnel pay -- that will ultimately go into the war.

It's also a sum of money that could have been used to fundamentally transform our nation into a more prosperous and equitable place.

- Imagine if we had spent a fraction of that money fully restoring our bridges, levees, ports, railroads, public transit, and electrical systems. We could have employed hundreds of thousands, bolstered our tax base, and made the nation a more attractive destination for international business investment.

- Imagine if we had spent a fraction of that money investing in innovation, including advanced energy systems and biotechnology, supercharging

entrepreneurship while reducing our carbon emissions.

- Imagine if we had spent a fraction of that money ensuring universal access to early childhood education, equipping our schools with up-to-date technologies, and ensuring access to world-class workforce development programs to train our displaced workers for 21st Century jobs. We could have lured global employers, increased entrepreneurship, and empowered our children to lead richer, more fulfilling lives.

- Imagine if we had spent a fraction of that money shoring up our safety net programs -- including Medicare, Medicaid, Social Security, and nutrition assistance -- giving nearly all Americans greater economic security and greater purchasing power, growing the middle class and bolstering consumer demand.

What's done is done. We cannot win back the costs of a misguided war, just as we cannot bring back the precious lives lost. But we can take steps right now to start realizing a better vision for the country. We can recognize that investments such as these -- unlike war spending -- pay real and lasting dividends for the people of this country. Such investments pay off disproportionately for those who suffered most from the Iraq war: veterans who now face above-average unemployment rates.

This week, as my colleagues in the Congress commemorate the tenth anniversary of the war and vote on a new federal budget, I pray that we will keep this better vision in mind.