

OBAMA'S INFRASTRUCTURE REQUEST IS ~~1/40~~ 1/25TH OF WHAT WE NEED

Here's what the White House fact sheet says about his call for infrastructure spending as part of his jobs bill.

Making an Immediate Investment in Our Roads, Rails and Airports: The President's plan includes \$50 billion in immediate investments for highways, transit, rail and aviation, helping to modernize an infrastructure that now receives a grade of "D" from the American Society of Civil Engineers and putting hundreds of thousands of construction workers back on the job.

Note they referenced the ASCE report card.

Assuming that means the White House agrees with the ASCE's estimates for how much we need to spend to catch up to the rest of the developed world on infrastructure, his infrastructure request—\$50 Billion—is less than 1/40th of what we need. ASCE says we need to spend \$2.2 Trillion. (Note, he also called for \$10 Billion in infrastructure bank investment—if you assume that will actually be set up and invested in publicly owned infrastructure rather than private projects, the ask would still need to be 36 times bigger.) Update: I originally didn't include the \$25 Billion Obama called for for schools because I thought ASCE did not, but I was wrong on that front—the 1/25th number reflects the \$50B for infrastructure, the \$10B for an infrastructure bank (though that's a problematic scheme), and the \$25 for schools.

Frankly, I think Obama shouldn't have called for a jobs bill. Rather, he should have got up before Congress and said that our declining infrastructure is the most visible symptom that we, as a country, are declining and that we need

to stop that decline right now. He should have said that our shoddy infrastructure not only makes it harder for our businesses to compete, but makes us more vulnerable to terrorism, to extreme climate events, to business incompetence. He should have called for the full investment (borrowing money right now is, after all, effectively interest free), and told Republicans that if they didn't provide the funds to prevent our country from falling into decrepitude, it was just proof they hate our country and want the terrorists to win.

\$2.2 Trillion (or even a significant fraction) invested in infrastructure would have created far more jobs than any payroll tax cut, trade deal, or work-for-free jobs program.

And now—the eve of the 10 year anniversary of 9/11—is the time to do that, as conveyors of conventional wisdom (David Sanger at the NYT?) note what those not profiting off the Counterterrorism Industrial Complex have noted for some time: we wasted far too much on stuff that doesn't make us safe.

A survey by The New York Times, detailed in the accompanying chart, puts a stark price tag on the cost of reacting – and overreacting – to the defining event of the past decade. America's bill for fighting a 21st-century "asymmetric war" comes to at least \$3.3 trillion. Put another way, for every dollar Al Qaeda spent to pull off the Sept. 11 attacks, the cost to the United States was an astonishing \$6.6 million.

Today, Al Qaeda in Pakistan is crippled and Bin Laden is dead. But the \$3.3 trillion figure suggests that the unanticipated costs of how we managed a grim decade – money already spent or committed in the future – amount to a little more than one-fifth of America's current national debt.

Some of those were unavoidable, direct costs of responding to the attack. Some, like the Iraq war, were expenditures of choice. But

there is also the more difficult, less quantifiable question of what we paid in “opportunity costs.”

Less than a trillion dollars of the \$3.3 trillion was for direct responses – including toppling the Taliban. But what if at least some of the remaining \$2 trillion plus had been spent on other, longer-range threats to American national security? Rebuilding a broken education system? Finding more imaginative ways to compete with China? Reducing the national debt? Or delivering on promises, by President George W. Bush and Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton alike, for “Marshall plans” to rebuild societies at risk of letting the next Al Qaeda flourish?

Frankly, I agree that education deserves some of this funding as well as infrastructure investment. But note that that figure—what Sanger considers discretionary among our counterterrorism spending—is just about what we need to fix our infrastructure.

We just need to start fearmongering and loyalty baiting like Republicans do on wars to make it politically dangerous not to fund this stuff.