A Drug Exec and a Congressman Spend $10 Billion

Three weeks ago The Wall Street Journal kicked off a debate on how best to allocate scarce resources to solve the world’s problems. Bjørn Lomborg offered a summary of the latest findings from his Copenhagen Consensus project, where he has enlisted some of the world’s top economists to address the issue. Now we’re offering views on the subject from top political and business leaders. How would you spend $10 billion of American resources (either directly or through regulation) over the next four years to help improve the state of the world?

Teach Them How to Fish

By Sidney Taurel

In contemplating ways to spend $10 billion to realize the greatest gain for humanity, the key questions obviously are “Where?” and “How?” But allow me to suggest that our goal should be to create programs that are sustainable and to leverage the investment of billions of dollars into billions more -- regardless of the issue addressed.

Here’s where I believe we can accomplish the greatest good: fighting infectious diseases that ravage the developing countries and increasingly threaten the developed ones.

Infectious diseases are the world’s second-leading cause of death. Just three diseases -- malaria, tuberculosis and HIV/AIDS -- together kill nearly six million people a year, mostly in developing countries. This is roughly equivalent to the population of metropolitan Chicago. And, if these diseases are not properly treated, resistant strains emerge that threaten everyone regardless of where we live.

Columbia University professor Jeffrey Sachs makes a compelling case that disease devastates not only individuals and families. Societies and economies also suffer in lost potential and costs of care. That’s why each dollar spent to ensure that people are healthier and more productive can yield a 20-fold benefit.

So, if infectious diseases are the targets, how should we invest our $10 billion?

I recommend we follow the wisdom of the Chinese proverb: “Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day. Teach a man to fish and you feed him for a lifetime.”

I would invest half of the $10 billion in comprehensive treatment programs that could be sustained by the countries with high incidence of the above diseases, and which have leaders committed to long-term solutions.

I’d begin by ensuring that effective existing medicines are made available to the countries at low cost. Fortunately, many infectious diseases can be effectively treated with generic drugs -- which can be complemented by the antiretroviral and other critical medicines pharmaceutical companies are providing at deeply discounted prices.
In addition, to reinforce the programs’ sustainability, I would transfer to local companies the technology and know-how so they themselves can manufacture the medicines that are already off-patent.

Medicines are effective only if they are used properly, however. So we must also take a comprehensive public-health approach and train doctors, nurses and ultimately patients to ensure short-term compliance with treatment regimes and, more broadly, slow the spread of disease. We should leverage existing organizations -- like the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies -- for this purpose.

I know this approach can work because for the past five years Lilly and 14 partners on five continents have been using it to combat a growing and virulent form of tuberculosis -- multidrug-resistant TB.

The progress we're starting to see -- in treating patients, improving manufacturing standards, and supporting local economies -- tells me such an approach could be adapted for an array of infectious diseases and supported by the countries most affected.

However, because the bugs that cause these diseases continually evolve and new strains emerge, any long-term solution requires another critical component: ongoing research.

I would use the remaining half of the $10 billion to foster investment in research, and I'd leverage it as I would the treatment programs -- by working to make it sustainable.

The problem is that there are no market incentives for research in infectious diseases of the developing world.

I would take the lessons learned from President Bush’s BioShield experiments (which aimed to create an artificial market to attract biotech and pharmaceutical companies to develop medicines to counter a biological attack), and offer a guaranteed sum for whoever gets to a research-based solution first. This should attract competing programs and generate added investment by those pursuing novel treatments and cures for infectious diseases.

I believe the benefits from these proposals would expand like ripples across a pond -- bringing new energy and insights to the stubborn diseases that threaten all of us, and providing health and hope to millions of the world's neediest citizens who desperately need help now.

Mr. Taurel is chairman of Eli Lilly & Co.
Let's Invest in Clean Energy

By Steny Hoyer

How would I spend a hypothetical $10 billion? I can't help noting, at the outset, that it's not just a question of priorities. It's also a question of fiscal responsibility. After all, President Bush managed to turn a projected $5.6 trillion budget surplus into a projected $4 trillion deficit in less than eight years. So unless we're willing to make some tough fiscal choices, the money we're talking about will have to remain highly hypothetical.

But if I had the cash on hand, and had to choose from the list of worthy causes, I'd focus on one issue: energy.

A dramatic investment in clean energy would be the most effective check on aggressive petroregimes from Moscow to Tehran. It would be the best long-term solution to global warming. And energy independence is the most effective step we can take for American families staggering under the burden of high gas prices.

That's because the forces that have produced this summer's record prices are not going away. We are facing skyrocketing world demand for an ever-shrinking quantity of oil, and unless Congress figures out a way to amend the laws of supply and demand, that fundamental fact is not going to change. This is a large-scale problem, and it's going to take large-scale solutions.

One of those solutions is using America's resources for America. Right now, 311 million acres of public land are available for oil leasing. Of those, the oil companies are sitting idle on 68 million acres, including 33 million on the Outer Continental Shelf. Republicans seem incapable of acknowledging that those 68 million acres are already leased, yet completely undrilled. The public wants drilling on that land, and Democrats agree.

But ultimately, we are still consuming nearly a quarter of the world's oil while, according to the Oil and Gas Journal, we are sitting on just 1.6% of the total world supply. Even with more domestic production, there's only one lasting solution: find new sources of energy, and use the energy we already have more intelligently.

There, the difference between the two parties is stark. Republicans voted against more fuel efficient cars, against lower fares to boost public-transit ridership, and against renewable energy research. Democrats, on the other hand, raised the gas mileage standard for the first time in more than three decades, increased production of homegrown biofuels, supported efforts to develop the next generation of vehicles, and launched a comprehensive advanced energy research program.

With $10 billion, we could give that work a massive push. Government-sponsored research has an excellent track record; the defense research agency DARPA, for instance, has sparked the development of GPS, the computer mouse, the Saturn rocket engine, the Predator drone and computer-aided design -- not to mention the Internet.

The Advanced Research Projects Agency for Energy, and other government-sponsored researchers, are now doing the same thing for clean technologies. Over the past 10 years, the federal government has
been spending an average of a little less than $1 billion per year on energy research. An extra $10 billion infusion would allow us to double those efforts for a decade.

Imagine the effect on our economy if we mastered cutting-edge technologies like these, not just for our own consumption, but for export to the world: hydrogen-powered vehicles; fuel cells; plug-in hybrids; new nuclear technology, for safe, carbon-neutral plants; carbon sequestration, which would let us keep relying on coal, while storing emissions in the ground.

These, and other promising solutions, are hardly space-age endeavors; most of the science already exists. The difficulty lies in achieving economies of scale and cost-effectiveness, but it's exactly there that government support could make the difference.

We could also use the money to support existing clean technologies. We could extend tax credits for renewable-energy electricity and solar projects, help local governments issue bonds for renewable energy construction, and preserve incentives for homeowners to install solar panels, small windmills, geothermal heat pumps, and fuel cells on their property.

It would be worth every penny. So much is at stake when it comes to clean energy, beginning with lower gas prices and a healthier planet for our children. Global leadership is at stake, too. In the 21st century, it will take more than an accident of geography to be a world energy leader: It will take innovation, ingenuity, and smart investment. With the right choices today, we can earn that role for generations to come.

Mr. Hoyer, a Democrat from Maryland, is House majority leader.