

Unemployment Insurance in a War Bill

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Sometimes it's relief for victims of Hurricane Katrina, sometimes it's hate crimes legislation, sometimes it's education funding for veterans. One day soon it will be free kittens for children with cancer. It's always something. It's always something that could pass just fine on its own. But it's included as lipstick on the recurring and ever-fattening pigs of U.S. politics: war funding bills.

Next week, the warfunding bill that was passed in June will come up for a final vote, as part of a larger military bill that is part of a still larger spending package. How would any member of Congress dare to vote against such a thing? Well, just in case any of them might begin to consider it, our congressional "leaders" will include in the war funding bill a special treat: funding for unemployment insurance (plus possibly COBRA health and food stamp benefits, tax breaks for small businesses, and funding for state and local governments). How's that for alluring lipstick?

As in every case in the past, congress members could easily vote No until the war funding is removed and the unemployment insurance money left in. And there is an additional level of hypocrisy this time. Unemployment insurance is now being included in a bill that increases unemployment.

Which would we rather fund, jobs or unemployment insurance? The answer you'll get from right-leaning congress members (that is to say, from pretty much all of them other than Dennis Kucinich) might be the reverse of what you'd expect if the military were not part of the equation. Militarism turns everything upside down.

When your representative tells you that they have to vote for war because they have to vote for unemployment insurance, tell them that war funding causes unemployment in the first place. When they tell you you're crazy, tell them this:

A wonderful 39-page report from the National Priorities Project ([PDF](#)) contains on pages 23 and 24 a summary of research supporting these basic and well documented facts:

Investing public dollars in the military produces fewer jobs than cutting taxes.

Cutting taxes produces fewer jobs than investing public dollars in any of these areas: healthcare, education, mass transit, construction for home weatherization and infrastructure.

Investing public dollars in mass transit or education produces over twice as many jobs as investing in the military.

Investing public dollars in education produces better paying jobs than investing in the military or cutting taxes.

Investing public dollars in any of these areas: healthcare, education, mass transit, construction for home weatherization and infrastructure has a larger direct and indirect economic impact than investing in the military or cutting taxes.

On the basis of the above evidence alone, we have a clear choice. If we decide to cut taxes or spend money on the military, we are hurting the economy and actually creating more unemployment, because we are choosing not to invest our money where it can do the most good. Every dollar invested in killing is a dollar taken away from areas where it would create more jobs.

Of course we don't actually have any of the money, and a fourth option of not borrowing it from China to spend it on Afghanistan must be considered. In the short term, at least, that choice would do even less for the U.S. economy than spending on wars. But it does add to the factors we must consider the price of interest on loans. This seems to me to make the case stronger for borrowing and spending less on education, mass transit, etc., rather than borrowing and spending more on wars. (Whether we should borrow at all, rather than reinstating useful taxes on corporations and billionaires is a separate matter.)

The case against military investment is even stronger if some additional factors are considered.

First, the above comparisons are based on military spending and non-military spending domestically. When the military spending is on distant foreign wars, or for that matter the \$140 billion a year we spend to station troops in 177 nations, the contrast in terms of economic impact at home grows.

Second, there are long-term costs, some of them difficult to calculate, that need to be considered. Joseph Stiglitz' and Linda Bilmes' book on the cost of the Iraq War presents a guide to calculation the financial costs of any war. These include long-term care for veterans, the economic value of lost lives, serious injuries, and mental health disabilities, and various macroeconomic costs including a war's impact on the cost of oil. When these very real factors are considered, the price of not investing in nonviolent industries skyrockets.

So, when your Representative proposes that you should pucker up and kiss off another \$100 billion of your grandchildren's unearned pay for illegal, immoral wars that make us all less safe, because not to do so would end unemployment insurance, tell them what Congressman Kucinich said on Thursday:

"According to the Center for Economic and Policy Research, the sharp increase in war spending is taking up a greater portion of our Gross Domestic Product, which will cost the U.S. about two million jobs because such spending 'is a direct drain on the economy, reducing efficiency, slowing growth and costing jobs.' Contrary to popular assumptions, massive spending for war does not create jobs. It costs jobs. War spending is capital-intensive, not labor-intensive. War creates unemployment.

"The current plans to make extension of unemployment benefits contingent on Congress passing a war spending bill raises serious questions about basic decency and common

sense.

“We are telling people that as long as we are at war, they will get their unemployment benefits. And, of course as long as we are at war, there will be more people unemployed.

“Instead of unemployment benefits, people need work. Instead of war, people need work. War drives up our deficit. War takes away money from job creation. War results in unemployment. War is a weapon of mass destruction.”

David Swanson is the author of the new book “Daybreak: Undoing the Imperial Presidency and Forming a More Perfect Union” by Seven Stories Press. You can order it and find out when tour will be in your town: <http://davidswanson.org/book>.

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