If I Had $1,000,000,000,000 – My Trillion Dollar Thought Experiment

written by Tracy Hughes | November 9, 2025

When **Tesla, Inc. (NASDAQ: TSLA)** shareholders approved **Elon Musk's latest compensation package** – an equity-based reward that could, under optimal market conditions, be worth close to a **trillion dollars** over time – the headlines practically wrote themselves. His agreement with was less about a simple salary than about a wager on exponential growth: a 10-year performance plan tied to increasingly audacious market-capitalization milestones, each tranche vesting only as Tesla's valuation and revenue benchmarks were surpassed. To the casual observer, it was another act in Musk's theatre of ambition; to governance experts, it represented the outer limit of shareholder capitalism – where one man's incentive structure equates to the GDP of a mid-sized country.

So what is a trillion dollars really? Everyone's talking about the trillion-dollar package that Elon Musk recently talked his shareholders into. And as interesting as that is, I'm a lot more interested in **$1 trillion** itself. So I called the Critical Minerals Institute (CMI) Co-Chair Melissa "Mel" Sanderson.

"Hey," I said, "what would you do with a trillion dollars?"
"I'd buy an island," she replied.

I said yes, but what do you think a trillion dollars could really buy in a perfect world? **Could it buy a country?** Could it buy the debt of a country? So I've put together some trivia points that I thought were interesting – …

Flashback: When a Million Was Enough

Back in the early 1990s, the Canadian pop-folk-rock band **Barenaked Ladies** released *If I Had $1,000,000*. The lyric goes:

> *"If I had a million dollars, I'd buy you a house, I would buy you furniture for your house… And if I had a million dollars, I'd buy your love."*

Fun and entirely out of its depth in what I am referring to as my ***Trillion Dollar Thought Experiment***…because when you scale from $1 million to $1 trillion, you leave the realm of personal ambition – buying fur coats (but "not a real fur coat, that's cruel") – and you enter the realm of **reconfiguring economies**.

If a million dollars prompts whimsical fantasies of tree-forts and exotic pets, then a trillion dollars prompts something closer to planetary engineering. The adolescent metaphor collapses under the sheer mass of the number.

So, What *Is* a Trillion Dollars, Really?

A trillion dollars is a number so vast it almost stops meaning anything. You need **twelve zeros** just to write it out – 1,000,000,000,000 – and even then, it still feels abstract. To grasp its scale, consider this: if you spent one million dollars every single day, it would take you nearly three thousand years to run out. One trillion dollars is more than the annual GDP of most countries on Earth, roughly equal to what the United States spends on defense in a year, and enough to buy every publicly traded company in Canada – twice. So when we talk about a trillion dollars, we're not just talking about money; we're talking about perspective – how value, ambition, and imagination intersect when numbers become too big to feel real.

And that’s where my trillion dollar thought experiment begins.

[**Disclaimer*:** The following information was provided by ChatGPT. If you happen to have a trillion dollars and discover, for instance – that you can’t actually buy all the islands listed below, please remember – this is for entertainment purposes only.]

Corporate Acquisitions

At this level, you stop buying companies – you start buying markets.

With a trillion dollars, you could take a **35% stake in NVIDIA (NASDAQ: NVDA)** at its current valuation, or acquire **most of Meta Platforms (NASDAQ: META)** outright.

You could **buy every one of the world’s top 20 gold producers combined** – and still have billions left for exploration.

Or think bigger: you could **purchase entire stock exchanges** – the **Toronto Stock Exchange (TSX)**, **Australian Securities Exchange (ASX)**, and **London Stock Exchange (LSE)** – and still have enough left to make an offer on the **New York Stock Exchange (NYSE)** just to see what they’d say.

National Economies

- Buy the **annual GDP of Spain or Australia** (each ≈ US $1.3 trillion).
- Exceed the **entire foreign-exchange reserves of Africa combined**.
- Or **erase the sovereign debt** of dozens of smaller nations – and still retain liquidity.

Infrastructure & Energy

- Build **10,000 GW of solar capacity** (≈ one-third of global electricity use).
- Fund a **worldwide network of rare earth separation and refining facilities**, including full magnet-metal value chains. (*would love to know how ChatGPT came up with this one…)
- Construct **20,000 km of high-speed rail** or **1,000 modular nuclear reactors**.
- End **global lead-acid battery use**, converting every system to lithium or sodium.

Science & Space

- You could **buy out the U.S. National Laboratories**, or **fully fund NASA's Artemis program** — not once, but **more than ten times over**.
- You could **finance one hundred commercial fusion reactors**, or **build a permanent lunar base** and still have the budget for return tickets.
- You could **underwrite every major global university for an entire year**, tuition-free, and still have billions left to spare for endowments.
- Or you could **establish a planetary fund for critical mineral exploration**, bringing **every known deposit on Earth to feasibility stage** — effectively jumpstarting the next industrial era.

Personal Scale

If you could somehow cash it out, the math gets absurd fast.

You could hand every American roughly **US $3,000**, or every adult in Canada about **US $125,000** — and still have enough left over to rename a few stadiums.

In fact, you could buy **every team in the NFL, NBA, MLB, and NHL** — twice — and still have pocket change big enough to sponsor the Super Bowl halftime show for the next decade.

🏝️ Private Islands You Could Buy Hundreds of Times Over

1. **Necker Island (British Virgin Islands)** — owned by Richard Branson; worth about US $120 million → buy it 8 million times.
2. **Lanai (Hawaii, USA)** — owned by Larry Ellison; worth ≈ US $500–600 million → buy it 1,600 times.
3. **Little St. James (U.S. Virgin Islands)** — ≈ US $60 million → buy it 16 million times.
4. **Musha Cay (Bahamas)** — owned by David Copperfield; ≈ US $100 million → buy 10 million Musha Cays.

🇫🇯 Small Island Nations You Could (Theoretically) Buy

Country	2025 GDP (approx.)	"You could buy…"
Fiji	US $5.5 billion	180 Fijis
Maldives	US $7 billion	142 Maldives
Seychelles	US $2 billion	500 Seychelles
Iceland	US $32 billion	31 Icelands
Jamaica	US $18 billion	55 Jamaicas
Bahamas	US $14 billion	70 Bahamas

🌏 Or Go Big

- Buy **all of New Zealand’s South Island** (land value ≈ US $700–800 billion) and still have funds to build its infrastructure and government.
- Purchase **every island in the Caribbean** with luxury resorts, yachts, and airports — and still have billions remaining.
- Or **build your own sovereign island nation** in international waters for under US $50 billion — complete with a grid, ports, and citizenship program.

Why This Matters?

My *Trillion Dollar Thought Experiment* is whimsical, but the implications are grave. As the global economy edges toward trillion dollar valuations and policies, we’re reminded that a trillion dollars is no longer theoretical — it is the unit in which civilization now budgets its survival.

One trillion could decarbonize the grid, restructure sovereign debt, or fund a century of scientific progress. Yet our collective imagination still reserves it for compensation plans, defense budgets, or market valuations.

Final Thought

The Barenaked Ladies once sang, “If I had a million dollars, I’d be rich.”
Three decades later, a million dollars buys a modest Toronto condo.

A trillion dollars, though — that’s not wealth; that’s civilizational leverage. It’s the difference between buying a house and rebuilding a planet. Another record, another zero – perhaps it’s time we all upgraded our calculators, just in time for the holidays.