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Senate Approves Nearly \$60 Billion for Wars

By **CARL HULSE**

WASHINGTON — The Senate on Thursday approved a nearly \$60 billion measure to pay for continuing military operations in Afghanistan and Iraq as House Democrats struggled to round up votes for a major package of business tax breaks and safety-net programs for the long-term unemployed.

Senators delivered a bipartisan 67-to-28 vote for the war financing bill after rejecting a series of Republican proposals on border protection as well as a plan by Senator [Russ Feingold](#), Democrat of Wisconsin, to require [President Obama](#) to produce a timetable for withdrawing from Afghanistan.

With lawmakers eager to begin a [Memorial Day](#) recess, House Democratic leaders ran into stiff resistance from rank-and-file members uneasy about supporting the approximately \$143 billion tax and unemployment measure. More than \$80 billion of it would be deficit spending — a hot-button issue in the midterm Congressional campaigns and an increasingly frequent line of Republican attack.

“Democrats are still committed to their out-of-control spending spree,” Representative [John A. Boehner](#) of Ohio, the Republican leader, said Thursday.

Trying to win over moderate and conservative Democrats by reducing the legislation’s impact on the deficit, Democratic leaders said they intended to break up the measure and jettison some provisions like health insurance subsidies for the unemployed. Votes were expected Friday.

Even if the House passes the legislation, no final action will occur for at least a week since Senate leaders said Thursday night that they would be unable to consider the measure before the Memorial Day break. As a result, tens of thousands of Americans could face an interruption in their unemployment benefits as of next week. The House bill would extend jobless pay through November for those who have exhausted their initial benefits. Senate officials said they would try to restore the jobless pay when Congress reconvenes on June 7.

Besides the aid to the unemployed, the House measure included about \$32 billion in tax breaks, including a popular business credit for research and development.

The Senate spending measure provides \$33.5 billion for the Pentagon and fully pays for the additional 30,000 troops in the administration's buildup in Afghanistan. It also sets aside \$13 billion for the [Department of Veterans Affairs](#) to treat veterans disabled by Agent Orange during the Vietnam War. It shifts \$5 billion to the [Federal Emergency Management Agency](#) to prevent it from running out of disaster relief. The bill would also give Haiti more than \$1 billion for earthquake relief and recovery.

The effort by Mr. Feingold, an opponent of the war in Afghanistan, was defeated on a vote of 80 to 18. He noted that his proposal was nonbinding and decried the lack of discussion about the nation's role in Afghanistan even as Congress was providing new financing for the almost nine-year-old conflict.

"I'm disappointed we are about to pass a bill providing tens of billions of dollars to keep this war going with so little public debate about whether this approach even makes sense," Mr. Feingold said. "I hope my colleagues will agree that the American people deserve an answer to the question: How much longer?"

Senator [Carl Levin](#), Democrat of Michigan and chairman of the Armed Services Committee, called Mr. Feingold's plan ill advised and noted that Mr. Obama had already said he would begin withdrawing forces in July 2011.

"It is already a deep-seated fear in Afghanistan that the United States will abandon the region," Mr. Levin said. He said it would be a mistake to exacerbate those fears "while our forces are still deploying to Afghanistan and while the [Taliban](#) is doing everything it can to convince the

Afghan people that U.S. forces are unable to protect them.”

The debate over the timeline put some Democrats in the position of opposing a proposal that they had supported during the Bush administration’s management of the war. Senator **Harry Reid** of Nevada, the majority leader, said the current situation was different since Mr. Obama had already outlined a withdrawal plan.

“I have always believed that our commitment in Afghanistan should not be open-ended, which is why I continue to support the president’s plan,” Mr. Reid said.

During the debate, the Senate also rejected Republican proposals that would have gone beyond the new White House plan to send 1,200 members of the National Guard to increase security along the border with Mexico in the Southwest.

The House is just beginning its consideration of a much more costly war financing measure that includes a series of domestic initiatives not considered by the Senate. As a result a final version of the legislation is not likely to be sent to the president’s desk until later this summer.