

REMARKS ON THE INTRODUCTION OF THE PAY FOR WAR RESOLUTION

Senator Al Franken

**M. President, I rise to speak on my Pay for War Resolution,
which I'm submitting today.**

**This resolution would change the way we pay for war
spending, and it would change the way we deliberate about going to
war. This is not a symbolic resolution. It would return us to the
traditional American way of paying for wars, where the Congress
and the nation confront—head on—the financial cost, commitment,
and sacrifice of going to war.**

**This is something I believe in strongly. It's an issue I've been
working on for months. This did not start with Libya, though Libya
gives it a new urgency. A number of my friends on both sides of the
aisle have expressed concerns about the potential costs of the war in**

Libya. But this resolution is also broader than Libya. It's about how we're going to pay for any wars in the future.

The resolution seeks to reestablish a fiscally responsible way of paying for our wars. It's fiscally responsible because it would require that war spending be paid for, or offset, as we say in the Senate. It's also morally and politically responsible because it would re-establish the connection between the citizenry of the U.S. and the costs of going to war – a burden that is now shared solely by the men and women of the military and their families, while the rest is passed on to future generations in the form of debt.

The last ten years, our wars have been paid for by borrowing – mostly from China and other countries willing to finance our debt – and by giant emergency spending bills. That's unusual in American history. And frankly, my resolution is aimed to make sure it stays unusual.

Iraq and Afghanistan have cost us well over a trillion dollars. In fact, the Congressional Research Service's most recent estimate is that, including this fiscal year, Congress will have approved one and a quarter trillion dollars for Iraq and Afghanistan – \$806 billion for Iraq and \$444 billion for Afghanistan. That is a staggering sum of money. And it's been financed through debt, through borrowing from other countries and emergency supplemental spending bills.

What's more, the Iraq war was accompanied by a massive tax cut. That failed fiscal experiment created the impression that going to war requires no financial sacrifice. We know that that's just not true. The question is, who will bear that financial sacrifice – the generation that has decided to go to war, or its children and grandchildren.

The Iraq and Afghanistan wars also drove up our deficit. It didn't singlehandedly create our deficit problem, but it made it

much worse. And if we're going to fix our deficit problem, rejecting how we financed those wars has to be part of the solution.

We have to ensure that Iraq and Afghanistan remain anomalies in American history. And that's what my resolution seeks to do. It will ensure that future wars don't make our deficit and debt problem worse. It will ensure that Congress and American citizens must face the financial sacrifice of going to war. And it will force us to decide whether a war is worth that sacrifice.

A huge gap has grown between the majority of the American people and the small proportion who serve in the military. So much sacrifice has been asked of them and their families, yet so little of the rest of us. My resolution will reconnect those who serve and our larger society.

The Obama Administration has taken an important step in seeking to reduce reliance on emergency spending bills and instead

budget for war through the regular budget process. They've included an Overseas Contingency Operations account over and above the budget for the day-to-day operations of the Defense Department. That account is where you now find our war funding.

But the improvements the Obama Administration has made are not enough. The momentous decision to go to war deserves a way of paying for those wars that matches the seriousness of that decision. Overseas Contingency Operations should be paid for.

Thus, my resolution simply says that if there is a new Overseas Contingency Operation requiring new funding beyond the defense base budget, that funding must be offset. It does not specify how that offset is to be found, leaving it up to Congress to decide. Different people will have different ideas—some may propose spending cuts; others may propose revenue increases. But the bottom line is that Congress must find a way to pay for the costs of new wars that we decide to undertake.

More specifically, this Pay for War Resolution creates a point of order so that any Senator can object to a legislative proposal that allows for spending on new Overseas Contingency Operations that is not deficit neutral.

But it has some flexibility. First, it allows the costs of war in a given year to be offset over ten years. Because of how the budgeting process works, spending cuts must be found in the same year of funding as the war spending. But if need be, any offset on the revenue side can be spread out over ten years.

My resolution also allows the offset requirement to be overridden by a vote of sixty senators. So if three-fifths of us deem it important enough to spend on an Overseas Contingency Operation without paying for it ourselves, that can happen. I believe this fully addresses any concern people might have about

unduly tying the hands of the President – or of Congress, for that matter.

If there were a genuine emergency that required immediate military response in the short term, and that couldn't be covered by the base defense budget, my resolution would not tie our hands. Any true emergency would certainly motivate enough of us to vote to waive the point of order.

Similarly, if at a particular time our economic circumstances made it especially ill-advised to offset the spending on a war, we would be able to waive or override the offset requirement with sixty votes in the Senate.

Let me talk briefly about how the resolution handles Iraq and Afghanistan. Unfortunately, we are where we are on Iraq and Afghanistan, and this resolution is not meant to drive policy on those wars. It is forward-looking.

Earlier, I mentioned the Obama Administration's praiseworthy effort to reduce reliance on using emergency supplemental spending bills. My resolution would strengthen that effort by exempting spending on those wars from the offset requirement—but only up to the amount of the President's regular budget request. Anything above that cap would be subject to the offset requirement. For example, for Fiscal Year 2012, the President requested \$118 billion for Iraq and Afghanistan. Any costs over and above that request would need to be offset. That number should go down as we draw down from Iraq and Afghanistan. This idea derives from a recommendation of the President's Fiscal Commission.

The idea that we should pay for our wars is not a Democratic idea, and it's not a Republican idea. It's not left or right. It's not anti-war, it's not pro-war. It's just common sense.

That’s why my resolution has garnered expressions of support from a diverse range of organizations and defense and budget experts. It’s supported by the Center for American Progress Action, by the Bipartisan Policy Center, and by the Committee for a Responsible Federal Budget. Noted fiscal hawk David Walker, the former Comptroller General of the U.S., has expressed his support. So has Maya MacGuineas of the Committee for a Responsible Federal Budget.

And a number of the experts have stated the rationale for the bill very powerfully. Here’s what Michael O’Hanlon of the Brookings Institution said: “Senator Franken’s proposal is serious and smart. It seeks to remedy a major problem of the last decade – fighting wars while not asking the broader nation for sacrifice and commitment, and meanwhile racking up federal debt in a way that endangers the economic prospects of future generations.”

And here's what William Niskanen and Ben Friedman of the Cato Institute say: "Democracies cannot accurately evaluate policies with hidden costs. Deficit financing sends war bills to future taxpayers. That limits the extent to which voters and their representatives weigh the wars' costs against other priorities. The effect is to make war feel cheaper than it is."

And here's Dean Baker of the Center for Economic and Policy Research: "The vast majority of people in the country have no direct connection to the people serving in the military. If we think that a situation requires the men and women in our military to risk their own lives, then the rest of us should at least be willing to pay for the cost of this adventure with our tax dollars."

My resolution makes budgetary sense and it makes moral and political sense. That's why I'm confident that my resolution will garner the support of my colleagues and of the American people.

I think Americans understand that the way we've gone about paying for the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan – by borrowing and putting the financial burden on later generations, instead of taking it on ourselves – is not good budgeting. And frankly, it's not good decision-making about wars. Right now, we're hiding the cost of wars by shifting their financial burden to future generations. And we're refusing to consider the real sacrifices that war requires of a nation—not just the members of the military. That has to change.

So we need to start paying for wars. And it needs to be a part of a larger conversation about how to address our nation's deficit and debt.

M. President, I ask unanimous consent that the text of my resolution be printed in the record.

I yield the floor.