

WASHINGTON -- To pay for additional U.S. troops in Afghanistan, Sen. Ben Nelson said Tuesday that the country should look to a funding mechanism of another era -- war bonds. The government sold war bonds to the public during World War II to finance the war effort, often making emotional appeals.

Nelson acknowledged that war bonds still represent federal government borrowing and that he hadn't seen any analysis on whether such bonds could raise enough money today. Still, he said, it's an idea worth exploring.

"I don't know why it might not make sense today, certainly in lieu of jumping to tax," said Nelson, D-Neb., a member of the Senate Armed Services Committee.

Finding the money to pay for President Barack Obama's planned troop surge could be a challenge in light of the federal government's already-high budget deficits, the national debt and competing domestic priorities.

House Democrats, including Appropriations Committee Chairman David Obey, D-Wis., have proposed a surtax to pay for the war in Afghanistan. His proposal would impose the surtax on people earning more than \$30,000 and would tax the wealthy more.

"We believe that if this war is to be fought, it's only fair that everyone share the burden," Obey has said.

But Obey's surtax proposal found little support among Midwestern lawmakers on Tuesday.

"We didn't have a war tax in the Second World War," Nelson said.

Sen. Mike Johanns, R-Neb., said he supports the president's planned increase in troops but would rather shift money from other government priorities than create new taxes.

Johanns declined to identify specific programs that should be cut. He said national security is one area that must be funded, even if done through deficit spending.

Any war tax would have to come through the Senate Finance Committee. The top Republican on that committee, Sen. Chuck Grassley of Iowa, said such a tax would be "very detrimental" to the economic recovery.

Rep. Steve King, R-Iowa, said the war tax fits into the "anti-war, anti-wealth" attitude of liberals in Congress. King said Congress should instead use unspent funds from the economic stimulus program or Wall Street bailout legislation.

Rep. Jeff Fortenberry, R-Neb., said a new war strategy is needed to prevent Afghanistan from sliding into chaos. He stressed that he also wants to know what commitments are being made by the rest of the international community.

Reps. Adrian Smith and Lee Terry, both R-Neb., said they oppose the proposed surtax.

Terry said money for additional troops could be found by a significant, across-the-board scaling back of Democrats' proposed increases in domestic spending.

Said Terry, "It's very disingenuous to ask for double-digit increases in spending and then sit there and say on the No. 1 issue of protecting our country ... that that's what deserves a new

tax."

Contact the writer:

202-662-7270, [joe.morton@owh.com](mailto:joe.morton@owh.com)

