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Additions by Senate Push Stimulus Near \$1 Trillion

By [DAVID M. HERSZENHORN](#)

WASHINGTON — The Senate on Tuesday pushed the cost of the economic [stimulus package](#) above \$900 billion by adding billions for medical research and tax breaks for car buyers.

Angling to spur automobile sales as part of the economic stimulus package, the Senate voted to add an \$11 billion provision to the bill that will allow most Americans to claim a tax deduction for the sales tax and any loan interest on the purchase of a new car between Nov. 12, 2008, and the end of 2009.

The vote, 71 to 26, in favor of the tax break for car buyers came as the Senate began to act on what is expected to be a long list of amendments to the stimulus measure. The House last week approved an \$820 billion version of the bill, which is the top priority of [President Obama](#) and Democratic leaders in Congress. Mr. Obama has said the final bill should not cost more than \$900 billion.

Later, by voice vote, the Senate added \$3.5 billion for the [National Institutes of Health](#), bringing the total price tag to just over \$900 billion with additional increases to come.

Far more contentious debate is expected later in the week when Senate Republicans plan to put forward major changes to the bill, including efforts to bolster the housing market and to cut back spending initiatives in favor of broader and deeper tax cuts.

Democrats have said they are open to changes, but to what extent is still unclear.

In other votes on Tuesday, the Senate rejected an amendment put forward by Senator [Patty Murray](#), Democrat of Washington, that would have added \$25 billion in public works projects to the recovery bill, including highway construction, public transportation and water and sewer projects.

That provision, which needed 60 votes to advance, failed by a vote of 58 in favor to 35 opposed.

The Senate also approved, by 52 to 45, an amendment by Senator [Tom Coburn](#), Republican of Oklahoma, stripping out a \$246 million tax break for Hollywood production studios that would have allowed greater deductions for movie production equipment and other costs.

The stimulus measure is one of the largest spending bills in history and will provide vast sums of money for numerous programs, including public works projects and aid to states for education and health care. But there are only a few provisions, like the tax break on car sales, aimed broadly at the general public.

Senator [Barbara Mikulski](#), Democrat of Maryland, who proposed that tax deduction, said it would aid the struggling automobile industry and save many families roughly \$1,500 on the purchase of a \$25,000 car.

“This amendment is actually about creating jobs,” Ms. Mikulski said in a speech on the Senate floor. “Our automobile industry is languishing.”

She added, “For the consumers, it means they get a deal: It’s a market incentive to get them into the showroom.”

Throughout the day there was sporadic skirmishing on the Senate floor not just between Democrats and Republicans but also, at times, internally between Democrats as members of the majority party maneuvered to push through their changes to the bill.

Bigger battles may lie ahead as Republicans push for large-scale revisions, while Democrats seek to stay on track to get the measure approved and on Mr. Obama’s desk by the end of next week.

Kate Phillips contributed reporting.

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