

oil needs. I think that is totally unacceptable and a threat to our national security. During the week, I hope we can engage in some discussion and thought about this. We should be prepared to have some votes in this area next week, after the budget resolution is completed.

THE MARRIAGE PENALTY TAX

Mr. President, the week of April 10, voting not later than April 14, the Senate will have a chance to indicate whether or not it believes we should eliminate the marriage penalty tax. The House has voted overwhelmingly to eliminate that tax. The President has indicated he thinks we should phase it out. Now the Senate Finance Committee has acted on a package that will be available and will be acted on in the Senate that week of April 10. Like the Social Security earnings test, are we finally going to do what we have been talking about for years? The Social Security earnings penalty was in place for 30 years but finally, last week, the Congress did something about it.

We have been talking about how we were going to eliminate the marriage penalty tax for 10 years. Are we going to do it? Are we finally going to do something about it? Also, this one takes on particular significance to me because our daughter was married last May. She and her husband both work. She is a young professional woman. She has discovered this applies to her and that they are going to pay more taxes this year than they did last year, even though they make about the same amount of money. She says: Dad, you must do something. So we did something in the Finance Committee. Will we do it in the Senate? Will we rise to this challenge?

Would anybody like to try to explain this tax to the married couples in America, particularly newly married couples who are first confronted with this marriage penalty tax? Would anybody like to defend it? Would anybody like to explain that it is fair and should be in place? No.

I have asked that question in all kinds of groups with all kinds of backgrounds and philosophies, and not a single hand goes up to defend it. So the Senate has a chance to act affirmatively in this area the week of April 10. I look forward to that.

THE GONZALEZ MATTER

Mr. President, finally, and not least, obviously there is a lot in the news media about the Gonzalez matter. I am not sure this is something that Congress should step into. I would like it to be handled in an appropriate forum, such as a family court, but the Government seems to be involved. The Government seems to be determined to send this young boy back to Cuba. I think that is a mistake, without full opportunity for appeals and an appropriate court consideration of what is best for the young boy.

We may have some opportunity to consider this issue in the Senate. We

will be careful about how we proceed. But I do not think we can stand by as if we did not know what was going on. So I hope my colleagues will join me in giving thought to an appropriate way to proceed on this matter.

Mr. President, I yield the floor. If no Senator is seeking recognition at this point, I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. HAGEL). The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the leadership time is reserved.

MORNING BUSINESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, there will now be a period for the transaction of morning business, with Senators permitted to speak therein for up to 10 minutes each.

The Senator from Nevada.

BUDGET

Mr. REID. Mr. President, the leader is right, this is a historic time. It is historic because this is the week we are going to begin deliberations on the budget that will guide all of our spending for this year. We have 13 appropriations bills and as soon as the budget is adopted, we can start appropriating.

I hope my friends on the majority side of the Senate will understand that we really are doing quite well as a country. This all began in 1993 when we voted on the deficit reduction plan. I am sorry to report it was not done in a bipartisan fashion. Every vote for that deficit reduction plan was cast by a Democrat. It passed the House of Representatives by one vote. In the Senate, it resulted in a tie that was broken by the Vice President of the United States, AL GORE. As a result of that action, the United States has seen on an unprecedented amount of economic expansion.

In April, we reached 107 months of consecutive economic growth, the longest period of economic growth in the history of this country. We are now 2 months beyond that and still growing. We have created about 21 million new jobs. The majority of these jobs are high-wage jobs, high-paying jobs. We have had the lowest unemployment and the lowest inflation in 30 years.

We talk about the size of Government. Well, we have actually done something about the size of Government as a result of the program President Clinton initiated and which was

supported in the Senate in 1993 by a tie-breaking vote of Vice President GORE and in the House by one vote. We have cut the size of Government. We have talked about the Government continually getting smaller. Now it is about the same size as when President Eisenhower was President. We talked for a year or two about it being the size when President Kennedy was President. We have gone even beyond that.

Home ownership is the highest in the history of this country. The country is doing very well. I hope we continue the record economic expansion because it does give us a historic opportunity.

We need to save Social Security. We need to make sure it is strengthened. Now that it is going to be OK until about the year 2035, the President wants to move forward and make sure it is OK for another 20 to 30 years. We should do that as soon as we can.

We should do something to expand Medicare so that prescription drugs are part of the program. It is no longer adequate that we have hospitalization and some doctor care for senior citizens. It is important we realize they also need help with prescription drugs.

People over the age of 65 get an average of 18 prescriptions filled every year. We need to do something about that. Sixty percent of senior citizens have trouble paying for prescription drugs. Some do not get the prescription drugs they need. Some, because they do not have enough money, take half a pill a day when they should take one pill a day. They split the pills. People are actually going without food for medicine. We need to make sure that we, in this richest country in the history of the world, the only superpower in the world, have some program for prescription drugs. I hope we do not squander this opportunity.

This already is a Presidential campaign issue. I think we should take a look at what the Republicans are saying about Governor George W. Bush's budget which there is going to be a tremendous tendency to adopt on behalf of the majority.

Senator JOHN MCCAIN says:

But, more importantly, there is a fundamental difference here. I believe we must save Social Security. We must pay down the debt. We have to make an investment in Medicare. For us to put all the tax cuts—all of the surplus into tax cuts I think is not a conservative effort—I think it's a mistake.

Senator MCCAIN is right. This country has a debt of over \$5 trillion. We should address that in this budget. We should not be going on speculative tax cuts. It seems the only thing the Governor of Texas understands as a solution to a problem is a tax cut. We have an energy crisis. What does he recommend? A tax cut, about which I am sure the oil barons, the oil moguls in the Middle East, are jumping for joy. I guess George W. Bush thinks anytime the price of gas goes up, all the Government has to do is lower the tax and continue producing as much oil as before, and it makes the Middle Eastern oil producers very happy.

He also suggested an income tax cut, even though a week ago it was reported in the press all over the country that income tax rates are at their lowest in the majority of categories. Our taxes are lower than they have been for 40 to 50 years, depending on which category one is in. Yet George W. Bush wants an income tax cut. Again, what Senator MCCAIN says about that is:

Thirty-eight percent of Governor Bush's tax cut goes to the wealthiest 1 percent of Americans.

We have Members in the House who disagree with the budget of George W. Bush. LINDSEY GRAHAM says:

It is a large tax cut that's going to eat up all the surpluses if they come about. It does nothing, in my opinion, fiscally responsible to reduce the national debt. It doesn't address the Social Security issue. Here's what Governor Bush said: "There's plenty of money to take care of the debt, take care of Social Security and give you a big tax cut. The truth is this money is a projection 10 years in the future and Congress' spending plan is going to destroy the projection. If the economy goes south, he—

Meaning George W. Bush—has dedicated all the surpluses to a tax cut. The \$5.8 trillion debt needs to be addressed quickly.

I could not agree more with Representative LINDSEY GRAHAM. We have to address the debt. If we address the debt, we reduce the debt and it is a tax cut for everybody. We pay hundreds of billions of dollars on interest on the debt. If we did not do that, it would be money in everyone's pocket, not just the 38 percent that goes to the wealthiest 1 percent of people in this country.

We are going to debate the budget this week to find out if we are going to adequately take care of the needs of this country. Can we meet the demands we have? What demands do we have? One can look at all the appropriations bills and, at random pick, for example, the Interior appropriations bill. Our national parks are the envy of the world, but our national parks have a backlog of renovations and repairs of almost \$10 billion. We are closing national parks. The national parks deserve some attention. In the State of Nevada, we only have one national park and it too has a backlog of needed repairs. The people who work for the National Park System live in quarters that are unbelievable. They are bad.

In Grand Canyon National Park, in the sister State of Arizona, they live in facilities that are difficult to describe. They look like big tin cans. People who work to preserve or national parks should not have to live in facilities such as that.

We need to help our National Park System, not only with the living quarters of the people who work in the parks, but also simply to make it so that when tourists visit them, they can visit all the parks, and that the roads are OK, the trails are OK, and, in fact, that we do a better job of preserving our parks.

We can look at every appropriations bill we have to consider this year and

there are things that need to be dealt with.

The point I am trying to make is, the American people recognize that there are things we need to do other than cutting taxes. We need to make sure we take care of Social Security, we address education, and, as I have already talked about, we need to do something about Medicare. There are priorities the American people have that are more important than reducing Federal income taxes, which are the lowest they have been in 40 to 50 years.

I hope, as this debate unfolds this week, we will be able to seize upon this opportunity to continue the record economic expansion that was started in the 1993 Budget Deficit Reduction Act. I hope we can meet this historic opportunity, on a bipartisan basis, and vote on amendments that come before us on this budget bill not on strictly a partisan basis but on what is best for this country.

I suggest the absence of a quorum. The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. THOMAS. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. THOMAS. Mr. President, we are in morning business?

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator is correct.

THE BUDGET

Mr. THOMAS. Mr. President, it is my understanding our focus this week will be on the budget, as it should be. One of the things, of course, that is very necessary is to address the budget each year, and one of the things we haven't done that we should do, and are doing this year, is to address the budget early so we don't find ourselves at the end of the session being sort of at the mercy of the President, who can kind of put the leverage on us to do what he wants us to do or else suspend Government operations and, of course, blame the Congress, which has happened before.

In any event, when we are talking about budgets, it is easy to get off into the detail. That is what we will have to do. My friend from Nevada talked about the plans for spending, and that we will have the budget come up, and that we have fortunately, for the third time in 40 years, some extra money—a surplus—in the operating budget. So many, particularly on the other side of the aisle, are searching for ways to spend the money, which is fine. But it seems to me that the responsible approach we ought to take and the approach I believe most Americans want us to take is to evaluate where we are with respect to Government, what the role of the Federal Government is in these various policies, and to make a determination as to what expenditures

ought to be made that are consistent with what we believe to be the legitimate role of the Federal Government.

We need to talk about an analysis of that because what happens for the rest of the year is pretty much guided by what you do in terms of the budget—unless, of course, you simply ignore the budget later on. I hope that is not the case. So we ought to be talking in the areas that will be under consideration. What is the role of the Federal Government with respect to the private sector? What is the role of the Federal Government with respect to local and State government? What role should be played there? It seems to me that that is basically where we ought to begin having made that decision, of course, which won't be unanimous because there is a good deal of philosophical difference as to where we ought to go.

There are those who believe the more money you can spend on behalf of the people by the Federal Government, the better off you are. There are those of us who don't agree with that. Some believe the role of the Federal Government should be limited, that we ought to do the things that encourage people to do things, give them the ability to do things for themselves, and leave many decisions with the people in local and State governments. I agree with that.

We ought to be doing something specifically for Social Security. The President has been talking for several years about "let's save Social Security." But he doesn't have a program at all to do that. Just to say "let's save Social Security" isn't the proper approach. Indeed, we have ideas on this side of the aisle as to what we ought to do. Clearly, there are three options as to what you do to make sure the young people now paying in from their first paycheck 12.5 percent will be able to have benefits when the time comes to do that. One is to raise taxes. Very few people are for that. Another, of course, is to reduce benefits. Very few are for that. The third option is to take that account and make it a personal account for the person who has paid in the money, and allow, on their behalf, for this money to be invested in the private sector in equities or bonds or stocks so that the return on that trust fund will be much higher than it is now and the benefits will be there.

We talk about paying down the debt. It is a great idea. We have done very little of that over time. We have a \$5 trillion debt. This generation and preceding generations have spent it, and we are going to leave it up to others to pay for it. We have paid down the debt some with respect to taking Social Security money and putting it over there in place of publicly held debt, which is a positive thing to do; the costs are less. Really, to pay it down, we ought to be taking some of the surplus out of the general fund and putting it over there. Frankly, we don't do that unless we have a plan to do it—something like a mortgage in which we say over 15