

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.