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

years, or whatever, we are going to pay that off. Then we can take so much every year to do that, and we are dedicated to doing it. That is not the approach taken by the administration.

There is great concern about tax reduction. I certainly believe we ought to take care of adequate spending, protecting Social Security, paying down the debt, but then what is wrong with tax reduction? That is where the money came from. Just because there is more money coming in as a result of a stronger economy doesn't mean we necessarily have an obligation to spend it, which is what the other side often says we ought to do. Much of the tax reduction is just a fairness issue. For instance, the marriage tax. Why is it that two people who are making a certain amount of money as two single persons get married and they have to pay more taxes on the same amount of earnings? That is very unfair. Part of what we talk about in tax reduction is a matter of fairness. Part of it is also incentives to do other things.

So we will be talking about the Republican budget that will be coming before this Congress, in which we safeguard Social Security, shield Medicare, pay down the national debt, and at the same time work on the fairness issue. We will be protecting that surplus by not spending it, which is unique, only happening in the last several years. It strengthens Medicare by increasing—as we did last year and again this year—some of the reductions that were made in the balanced budget amendment. We will reduce the national debt, hopefully, by using operational funds to do that, as well as Social Security dollars. We will provide tax fairness for families. We need to do that. We need to balance the budget again, as we have for about the third time in 40 years. So that is a very good thing.

This budget, over time, reduces the debt by $177 billion, wipes it out over 13 years—if we stay with this budget. That is the kind of commitment we ought to make. We talked about tax reduction. Think about what it is. This budget would provide about $150 billion in 5 years in tax relief to American families—over $13 billion next year alone in the form of marriage penalty relief which, again, is a fairness tax. In the form of educational assistance now, is reducing taxes a bad thing if we are going to—increase the health care deductibility? I don't believe so. We are seeking to provide more coverage for people—without making a total government program out of it—by giving some kind of tax relief to do that.

I think this is going to be a very important debate and an important discussion. I understand there will be differences of view. That is what this body is all about, talking about different philosophies. There will be different philosophies, such as saying the more spending we have, the better government is and the better off everyone is. That is a point of view. I don't happen to share it. I think there ought to be limitations on the size and role of government. We ought to be building opportunity instead of doing those sorts of things.

I think we have a great opportunity to do some of the things we have talked about for years; that is, to reduce the debt, to secure Social Security, and to provide some incentives for people to do things for themselves.

We have the opportunity, and we will be doing it this week. I think we ought to take into account not only the dollars that are there, and not only the specific expenditures, but how we envision the role of government over time. How does that fit into the idea of freedom and opportunity for all? What is the role of a government in that?

Thank you, Mr. President. I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Oregon.

Mr. WYDEN. Thank you, Mr. President.

PRESCRIPTION DRUG AFFORDABILITY

Mr. WYDEN. Mr. President, I come to the floor today to talk about a very encouraging development and solution with respect to prescription drugs.

I have come to the floor on more than 20 separate occasions over the last several months to talk particularly about how America can no longer afford to deny this critical coverage. Again and again, I cited examples on the floor of this Senate about how our country cannot afford to deny seniors the opportunity to get prescription drug coverage. I have talked, for example, about the exciting anticoagulant drugs. These drugs allow a senior citizen, for example, for perhaps $1,000 or $1,500, to prevent a stroke which might end up costing more than $100,000.

What is so exciting about these prescription medicines is that they don't just help older people when they are very ill, but they are absolutely key to keeping older people healthy by lowering blood pressure and cholesterol. They will help senior citizens stay in the community and will keep them from racking up those much larger health care expenses under what is known as Part A of the Medicare Hospital Insurance Trust Fund.

Again and again, we have seen examples of how cholesterol-lowering drugs can reduce death and expenses for senior citizens.

For example, heart disease is the leading cause of death for persons 65 and older. Beta blockers can reduce long-term mortality by 25 percent, and they cost about $360 a year, or $30 a month.

One in five older women has osteoporosis. About 15 percent have suffered fractures as a result this disease. This disease is the leading risk factor for hip fractures. Estrogen replacement can reduce the risk of osteoporosis as well as cardiovascular disease. One commonly used drug costs $20 a month. This is an investment that can help avoid those hip fractures and help avoid the extraordinary medical expenses.

I must say that my own mother, who will be 80 years of age very shortly, had a hip fracture recently, and this drove home to me how these prescription medicines can help avoid the kinds of health problems that my mother and scores of others seniors have seen, and how providing coverage now is an investment this Senate cannot afford to pass up.

What was exciting about the developments in the budget resolution was, first, that the Budget Committee committed $40 billion would be committed for this important program. For example, on the other side of the Capitol, the House of Representatives talked about $40 billion, but they could spend it on just about anything in the health care arena. The Senate Budget Committee said we are going to make $40 billion available for prescription drugs because it is high time we set in place this important coverage.

Second, we provided a date certain to get this job done. Our colleague from Louisiana, Senator BREAUX, has been correct to say repeatedly that the Senate Finance Committee has now held 14 hearings on this issue. Clearly there is great interest in that committee in moving forward.

The budget resolution says on this point that if the Senate Finance Committee does not come forward with a prescription drug benefit on or before September 1st of this year, any Member of the Senate can come to the floor of this body and bring this issue before the Senate.

The Presiding Officer of the Senate, who serves with me on the Senate Committee on Aging, could come to the floor if he had a plan to deal with prescription drugs. Senator SNOWE and I have teamed up on a bipartisan basis. We are particularly grateful for the help of Senator GORDON SMITH last week in the Budget Committee. The resolution allows any group of Senators to come forward with legislation if the Senate Finance Committee does not report a prescription drug measure on or before September 1st of this year.

I think it is critical to note that many Senators in the leadership of both political parties were involved in this effort.

Senator DASCHLE has talked to me almost daily about the importance of the Senate dealing with this issue, and dealing with it this year. He has worked very hard to try to reconcile the various approaches Senators have on this issue. He also has been steadfast in saying how important it is that the Senate not put this off until after another election.

There may be some colleagues on the Republican side and some on the Democratic side who will say: Let's just talk about this in the political campaign.

I believe we can't afford to deny this coverage to the Nation's senior citizens.