

they are not burdened with the responsibility and debt of the obligations of our generation.

What does a national debt of \$5.7 trillion cost us? Literally, we collect \$1 billion a day in Federal taxes from individuals, families, and businesses to pay interest on old debt. That is \$1 billion a day that isn't being spent to put a computer in a classroom or to make America's national defense any stronger. It is \$1 billion a day which instead is being spent for interest on old debt.

Many of us believe if we truly are at a time of surplus, this is the moment we should seize to pay down that national debt, bring it down as low as we can conceivably bring it so that future generations and our kids and grandkids won't be burdened with this debt and responsibility.

As you pay down the national debt, the competition for money in the marketplace is reduced. The Federal Government is not out there borrowing and servicing debt. Therefore, interest rates tend to come down. Now not only will we be taking the burden off of families who pay \$1 billion a day for interest on the old debt, we will also be reducing the interest rates they pay on their homes and their cars and their credit cards. Families win both ways.

Ultimately, this is as good, if not better, in many respects, as a tax cut. It reduces the cost of living for real families facing real difficulties.

Let me speak for a moment about the tax cut itself. There are a variety of ways we can approach this tax cut. Some have suggested cutting marginal rates. That is a shorthand approach to a tax cut which would, in fact, benefit some of the wealthiest people in this country more than working families and middle-income families. That is where I have some difficulty.

I know what is going on in my home State of Illinois now. I know because my wife called me a few weeks ago and said: I just got the first gas bill for the winter. You will never guess what happened. It is up to \$400 a month in Springfield, IL. It is about a 40-percent increase in my hometown. I hear this story all over Illinois, all over the country—energy bills up 50 percent, natural gas bills up 70 percent. If we talk about tax cuts, we ought to be thinking about families who are literally struggling with these day-to-day bills. Whether it is the need to heat your home or to pay for a child's college education or perhaps for tuition in a school, should we not focus tax cuts on the working families who struggle to get by every single day?

I always express concern on the Senate floor that we seem to have more sympathy for the wealthiest people in this country than for those who are really struggling every single day to build their families and make them strong. If we are going to have a tax cut—and we should—let's make sure the tax cut benefits those families.

I also want to make certain we protect Social Security and Medicare. If

as an outcome of this debate we end up jeopardizing Social Security or Medicare, then we have not met our moral and social obligation to the millions of Americans who have paid into these systems and depend on them to survive.

I believe the good news about the surplus should be realistic news. We should understand that surpluses are not guaranteed. We ought to make certain that any tax cut we are talking about is not at the expense of Social Security and Medicare. We should focus the tax cuts on working families to make sure they are the beneficiaries so that they have the funds they need to make their lives easier. That should be the bottom line in this debate.

As I said at the outset, Democrats and Republicans alike believe these tax cuts are going to happen. I believe it is a good thing to do. Let us pay down this national debt. Let us provide a tax cut for the families who need it. Let's make sure we protect Social Security and Medicare in the process.

I yield back my time.

CONCLUSION OF MORNING BUSINESS

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Morning business is closed.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

NOMINATION OF JOHN ASHCROFT TO BE ATTORNEY GENERAL

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the Senate will now go into executive session and proceed to the Ashcroft nomination, which the clerk will report.

The assistant legislative clerk read the nomination of John Ashcroft, of Missouri, to be Attorney General.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Utah.

Mr. HATCH. Mr. President. I am pleased that the Judiciary Committee yesterday evening favorably reported the nomination of Senator John Ashcroft to be the next Attorney General of the United States. I look forward to a fair debate of Senator Ashcroft's qualifications and am hopeful that we could move to a vote on his confirmation this week. It is important that we confirm Senator Ashcroft as soon as possible so that the President has his Cabinet in place and he can move ahead with the people's agenda.

John Ashcroft is no stranger to most of us in this body. We have served with him during his 6 years of service as the Senator representing Missouri, some had worked with him when he was Governor and some others had worked with him when he was the Attorney General of Missouri.

In the Senate, he served on the Judiciary Committee with distinction over the past four years—working closely with members on both sides of the aisle. As a member of the committee,

he proved himself a leader in many areas, including the fight against drugs and violence, the assessment of the proper role of the Justice Department, and the protection of victims' rights.

But, having heard the relentless drumbeat of accusation after accusation in recent weeks, I can fairly say, in my view, that there has been an unyielding effort to redefine this man of unlimited integrity. Some have termed the statements made by John Ashcroft, during the nearly four days of hearings in the committee, a "confirmation conversion"—"a metamorphosis."

On the contrary. The true metamorphosis of John Ashcroft is in the misleading picture painted of him by narrow left-wing interest groups. In fact, I welcomed them to the committee, and said: We haven't seen you for 8 years. I think there is a lot to be garnered out of that statement.

As my colleagues are well aware, John Ashcroft has an impressive 30-year record of loyal public service as a state attorney general, a two term Governor, and then—of course—as Senator, for the State of Missouri. I should also mention that as Missouri's attorney general, he was so well respected that he was elected by his peers across the nation to head the National Association of Attorneys General, and again as Governor, he was elected by this nation's governors to serve as the head of the National Governors' Association.

That really defines John Ashcroft rather than some of the accusations that have been thrown against him in the Senate.

I have said this before and I will say it again, of the sixty-seven Attorneys General we have had, only a handful even come close to having some of the qualifications that John Ashcroft brings in assuming the position of chief law enforcement officer of this great nation.

The Department of Justice, of course, encompasses broad jurisdiction. It includes agencies ranging from the Drug Enforcement Administration, the Immigration and Naturalization Service, the U.S. Marshal's Service, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the United States Attorneys, to the Bureau of Prisons. It includes, among other things, enforcement of the law in areas including antitrust, terrorism, fraud, money laundering, organized crime, drugs, and immigration. To effectively prevent and manage crises in these important areas, one thing is certain: we need, at the helm, a no-nonsense person with the background and experience of John Ashcroft.

Those charged with enforcing the law of the nation must demonstrate both a proper understanding of that law and a determination to uphold its letter and spirit. This is the standard I have applied to nominees in the past, and this is the standard I am applying to John Ashcroft here today in my full-hearted support of his nomination to be the