maintaining a high grade point average while dealing with the intense pressures of being in the national spotlight. Thank you Jackie, for choosing Southwest Missouri State University, and for setting an example for young people everywhere with your hard work and humility. Those are the true things of which champions are made.

I congratulate Coach Burnett, Ms. Stiles, the entire team and University for this great achievement of making it to the Final Four. I plan on attending the game Friday night in St. Louis to see one of those Indiana teams dispatched by the Lady Bears. I say to my friends from Indiana, while Indiana may be known for men’s basketball, I predict this weekend will make Missouri host to the capital of college women’s basketball.

Mr. President, I see no one seeking recognition, so I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

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 President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. CONNOLLY). Without objection, it is so ordered.

EXTENSION OF MORNING BUSINESS

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the hour of morning business be extended until 2:15 and that the half hour for the proponents and opponents of the bill be maintained to follow that.

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

Mr. REID. I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant bill 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 President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.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, I understand we are in morning business.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. That is correct.

THE UPCOMING BUDGET DEBATE

Mr. THOMAS. Mr. President, we are having a little pause in the subject of campaign finance reform, thankfully. We have been at it for some time. Hopefully, we will be through this week soon. It is a very important issue, but I am anxious, as most of us are, to move on to the other issues before us. Probably the most important one is that of the budget.

Each session, of course, is important and vital. It is important for us to have a budget. You can argue about the details of the budget, but the fact is that a budget is more than just a piece of paper. It is a commitment to the people. The budget is what defines where we are going to go over the next 2 years and into the future. It defines, as well, what our priorities are, which is a very important issue. It causes us to look ahead as to where we ought to be doing things that strengthen America, things that we ought to be doing that help put this economy back in place. Hopefully, we will be working on that budget next week.

The President has put forth a budget. Our Budget Committee will come forth with a budget. I believe the Republican budget addresses the priorities of the American people. It puts us on the continued road of a balanced Federal budget to do that. We have spent 4 years we didn’t have. We had deficit spending and we continued to increase the debt. We now, largely because of a strong economy, have a situation where we have not only a balanced budget, but a surplus which is, of course, in many ways a very happy thing to have. We have a priority, I hope, of continuing to save Social Security for seniors, not only for the immediate future but for a distance in the future where young people will be able to have benefits from the Social Security they pay in from the very first day on the job. We can commit ourselves to do that by assuring the dollars that come in that are designed for Social Security are used for Social Security.

We have a priority to improve and strengthen Medicare—obviously, one of the things that affects many people. We have to deal with pharmaceuticals and with many of the things that go together to strengthen the Medicare. In terms of dealing with the future and dealing with young people, we need to deal with our national debt which, of course, is very large. I believe we have a responsibility to begin to pay that down. Some people want to pay it down immediately, which is not practical in terms of the fact that the money is invested. But over a period of 10 years under this budget, we can pay that publicly held debt off. I think that is what we ought to do. We have an obligation to do that. We have an idea of the money and now we should not leave the debt over to the other people.

We are committed to improve educational funding, and we need to do that, to give every school an opportunity. We always get into the argument—of course, a valid argument—about which I feel strongly, and that is whether or not dollars that go from the Federal Government out to education should be used only for purposes that are determined by Congress. I think that is wrong, or should there be an opportunity given for people in local and State levels to use the money as they determine it is most needed for their particular school. And then, finally, we have an opportunity, which I hope we will take full advantage of, to return the surplus tax overcharges to the American taxpayers. Return the money to the people who have paid.

Of course, we also have a challenge with our economy weakening. It has weakened over the past several years, done what we have needed to do to keep our defense the toughest in the world, or have the oversight to make an evaluation of where we are on weapons, or to do something for the volunteer service to encourage people to be in the military, or to do something about the living conditions of our military personnel.

We need to protect the environment. Right now we are faced with a challenge, a crisis in energy, and much of that will have to be resolved by more production, by, as in my State of Wyoming, producing more resources for energy.

As we do that, we must equally be concerned about protecting the environment. We are being sought by organizations that say: If you are going to protect the environment, you cannot have access, you cannot use these lands at all. Those are not the choices. We can, indeed, have access to public land. We can, indeed, utilize those resources and allow people to hike, hunt, produce on those lands, and, at the same time, protect the environment.

Next week is going to be one of the most challenging weeks as we deal with the budget, our priorities, and what we are going to do about the surpluses. Americans are paying the highest percentage of tax of gross national product, higher than World War II. That should not be the case, and we have an opportunity to change it.

We have an opportunity to let local people and the States be involved in the decisions rather than dictating from Washington, as we have become accustomed to over the last number of years.

We have an opportunity to do some things, and I am excited about that opportunity. It is very important we pass