development. I thank my good friend for his offer, and I should be able to get back to him within a couple of hours or less, after having a chance to talk about it with my team. I thank him very much.

Mr. REID. Mr. President, the other consent I was going to ask is consent that S. 3268—that is the Energy bill that is before us now, the speculation bill—remain the pending business, notwithstanding the adoption of a motion to proceed to a nonprivileged item; namely, it would be the Coburn package. The reason that is important is, if we do that now—we have a vote at 4 o'clock or 4:20, whatever the case might be—I wanted to make sure that one of the arguments used against that going forward, which is that energy would not remain as the pending business, that this agreement would take care of that. So if people want to object to proceeding on the matter we now have before us, that we are going to be voting on in a short period of time, if they want to use the excuse it is going to take us off energy, this consent agreement would not do that.

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, reserving the right to object, as I understand it, this consent, if entered, would have the effect of moving us off of energy, and it is my view, and I think close to the unanimous view of my conference, that we ought to stay on this energy speculation bill, as it might be amended, and proceed to amendments such as we have in good faith discussed here a few moments ago. So I at this time would object to this.

Mr. REID. I say to my friend, this does not take us off energy. But anyway, the objection has been heard. So I thank the Chair.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The objection is heard.

ADVANCING AMERICA'S PRIORITIES ACT

Mr. REID. Mr. President, there is a woman who lives in Sparks, NV. Her name is Kathie Barrett. She is married and has two children. Sparks is a suburb of Reno, NV. When you are there, you cannot tell whether you are in Sparks or Reno. The demarcation between the two over the years has become insignificant. You cannot tell most of the time whether you are in Reno or Sparks.

Kathie, after taking several years off to raise her children, went back to work as a librarian's assistant. Six years ago, Kathie was diagnosed with ALS, Lou Gehrig's disease. Of course, she was declared unable to continue to work.

Her breathing capacity is extremely limited and getting worse every day, but in spite of tremendous muscle loss and coordination in her neck and back, she and her husband Martin traveled to Washington, DC, from Sparks to ask Congress to pass the ALS Registry Act.

She is one of 5,600 Americans who are newly diagnosed every year with this fatal disease, Lou Gehrig's disease. There is no cure for the disease, and the one FDA-approved drug works for only 20 percent of the patients, and even then it merely extends life for a few months.

Lou Gehrig's disease has proven particularly hard for scientists and doctors to research, much less cure. One reason is that there is a problem: There is no centralized place where the data on this disease is collected. Researchers have only a patchwork of information to work with.

I introduced the ALS Registry Act last year to create a database at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to centralize research and information on Lou Gehrig's disease. This legislation would not guarantee a cure for Kathie and thousands of other Americans who suffer, but for the first time it would give them hope for new treatment and the prospect of a cure.

I was happy to see the House of Representatives embrace my legislation by an overwhelming vote of 411 to 3—411 to 3. When the ALS Registry Act reached the Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee here in the Senate, it passed unanimously. It seemed at the time this worthy initiative was headed toward swift passage. Yet one Republican Senator prevented it from passing. Kathie Barrett continues to wait for Congress to act. Tens of thousands of others continue to suffer, as doctors and scientists are unable to gather and access the information that could help them.

The same Republican Senator who continued to hold up passage of the ALS Registry Act has, unfortunately, done the same for dozens of other worthy and overwhelmingly bipartisan bills. A few of these bills include, in this package alone, the Emmitt Till Unsolved Crimes bill. Emmitt Till's brother was here testifying about the importance of this legislation within the past week or so. This bill would help heal old wounds and provide the Department of Justice and the FBI tools needed to effectively investigate and prosecute unsolved civil rights era murders, and there are lots of them.

Another one of the bills is the runaway and homeless youth bill, which would provide grants for health care, education, and workforce programs, and housing programs for runaways and homeless youth, which is essential. We need that passed.

Another one of the bills is the combating child exploitation bill, which would provide grants to train law enforcement to use technology to track individuals who trade in child pornography and establish an Internet Crimes Against Children Task Force.

Another one of the bills is the Christopher and Dana Reeve Paralysis Act, which would enhance cooperation in research, rehabilitation, and quality of life for people who suffer from paralysis.

We tried to pass each of these bills separately, but we have had to face approximately 90 filibusters in the last 18 months. Each one of these filibusters takes about—if you put them together, it takes over a week. So we have been unable to do these one at a time.

Our efforts to pass these bills separately have been stalled by the objection of one Senator. All Senators should refuse to let that senseless objection be the last word on these important measures.

We have packaged these and other bills in the Advancing America's Priorities Act, to give the Senate the chance to overcome this senseless obstructing of our Nation's business.

Not a single one of the 35 bills in this package that has been packaged into one are partisan, nor are they controversial.

These bills have been passed by the House of Representatives overwhelmingly and their respective Senate committees with overwhelming support from Democrats and from Republicans.

The prime Republican obstructor to these bills asserts that he opposes them because they cost too much. That argument reflects an intentional mischaracterization of the legislative process. This is an authorization bill, not an appropriations bill. For those uninitiated in the ways of Congress, an authorization bill does not create 1 penny of spending. The Senator preventing this legislation from passing knows this, but he continues this facade. Spending decisions are made through an entirely separate budget and appropriations process. The appropriations process is when our limited Federal resources are divided. If Republicans or this Senator want to argue against any of these programs during the appropriations process, they have every right to do that.

In fact, the appropriations process affords them three separate opportunities: in the subcommittee, the full committee, and the Senate floor.

All these authorization bills do is move these initiatives forward in the legislative process. It allows them to be considered for the appropriations process. If we do not authorize them now, they will not be eligible for consideration during the appropriations process. Voting against them now would deny Congress the opportunity to fund any of them.

So do I hope that most, if not all, of these initiatives will be funded during the appropriations process? Absolutely.

I no longer am a member of the Appropriations Committee. I had been for 25 years or so, but I am not now because of my other responsibilities. So I hope they are all funded, but that is a different arm. I don't make that decision.

Congress must always be watchful and prudent with the taxpayers' dollars, and the person objecting to these is no more prudent than any of the other 99 Senators regarding the taxpayers' dollar.

I am as alarmed as anyone that President Bush and his Republican allies in Congress have allowed the national debt to increase by over $3 trillion over the last 7½ years. I am as alarmed as anyone that we continue to spend $5,000 a second in Iraq, funding a $12 billion war every month with borrowed money, putting it on credit—a big credit card—and sending the bill to our children and our grandchildren. I am as alarmed as anyone to hear this morning that there will be a record budget deficit in 2009 of about half a trillion dollars. The fiscal irresponsibility of this administration will be President Bush's legacy.

However, this package of bills, including the ALS registry I have talked about, helping runaways and homeless children, providing the Justice Department with tools to fight unresolved crimes, and cracking down on child pornography—these are all priorities, and priorities of all of us, Democrats and Republicans. We should all embrace these priorities. They will not add a single penny to the Bush budget deficit.

You don't have to take my word for it. The independent Congressional Budget Office, which is not partisan, has reviewed the Advancing America's Priorities Act and reports this:

Those authorizations do not cause changes in Federal spending or revenues.

I ask unanimous consent that the statement—in fact, it is a letter from the Congressional Budget Office, signed by Peter Orszag, who is the Director, copies of which were sent to two members of the committee, one to Chairman CONRAD and one to JUDD GREGG. I ask unanimous consent to have this letter printed in the RECORD.

There being no objection, the material was ordered to be printed in the RECORD, as follows:

U.S. CONGRESS,
CONGRESSIONAL BUDGET OFFICE,
Washington, DC, July 25, 2008.

Hon. HARRY REID,
Majority Leader, U.S. Senate,
Washington, DC.

DEAR MR. LEADER: The Congressional Budget Office has reviewed S. 3297, a bill to advance America's priorities, as introduced on July 22, 2008. The bill includes numerous provisions that would affect health care, criminal statutes, laws to protect wildlife and the environment, international aid programs, efforts to promote commerce, ocean research, and other government programs.

Most of the bill's provisions would specifically or implicitly authorize increased appropriations for purposes specified in the bill. By themselves—that is, in the absence of subsequent legislation—those authorizations do not cause changes in federal spending or revenues.

Although CBO has not completed a comprehensive review of S. 3297, we have previously prepared cost estimates for numerous pieces of legislation that are similar or identical to most of the major provisions in this bill. Based on those previous estimates and on a preliminary review of S. 3297, CBO estimates that, in total, the bill would authorize the appropriation of approximately $10 billion over the 2009–2013 period. CBO estimates that, if those sums are appropriated in future legislation, implementing the bill would cost about $8 billion over the 2009–2013 period.

Some provisions of S. 3297 would establish new federal crimes. Because those prosecuted and convicted under S. 3297 could be subject to criminal fines, the Federal Government might collect additional fines if the legislation is enacted. Criminal fines are recorded as revenues, then deposited in the Crime Victims Fund, and later spent. CBO expects that any additional revenues and direct spending would not be significant because of the relatively small number of cases affected.

S. 3297 contains no intergovernmental mandates as defined in the Unfunded Mandates Reform Act (UMRA). The bill would impose a private-sector mandate on certain entities that handle nonhuman primates, but CBO expects that the cost of the mandate would fall well below the annual threshold established in UMRA for private-sector mandates ($136 million in 2008, adjusted for inflation).

If you wish any further details, we will be pleased to provide them. The CBO staff contact is Kim Cawley.

Sincerely,

PETER R. ORSZAG,
Director.

Mr. REID. Mr. President, this is an indisputable fact. Any efforts to portray this legislation as a spending bill—much less a reckless spending bill—are indisputably false.

We have been down this road before. Earlier this year, the same Republican Senator who is the leading obstructor of these bills did the same thing for a package of lands bills. We acted in good faith and negotiated a set of amendments with him so that his concerns would receive full and fair consideration on the Senate floor. Those familiar with our negotiations would surely agree that we offered him a far more generous arrangement for amendments than many Democrats or Republicans would have thought his objections merited. But after spending considerable time negotiating in good faith, it became clear this Senator was not serious about reaching an agreement. Then, like now, we tried to pass the more than 60 initiatives in the lands package as stand-alone legislation. Those efforts were obstructed by the Republican side. After months of delay, we finally voted on the lands package. This package passed the Senate by a vote of 91 to 4. Every one of them is now law. The American people are benefiting from each one of them.

Some Republican Senators take another approach to explain their obstruction to this legislation. They say it is an effort to preserve minority rights.

Democrats have been more than willing to open debate on amendments, even on legislation such as this where we are baffled by Republican opposition. If the Republican Senator or Senators who are blocking this legislation are serious about having concerns heard on the floor, they should offer an opportunity to do that—they are certainly entitled to it—but it is clear that the ultimate goal is to make political points at the expense of millions of Americans who would be assisted by these very important pieces of legislation. Republican Senators have acted within their rights to block and delay action, but simply being within their rights does not make it right.

Some Republicans make one final spurious argument for opposing this legislation: that it takes us off the energy legislation.

As we learned a few minutes ago, I offered unanimous consent that we would stay on the Energy bill and that this would not set it aside. If we worked on this, we would be right back on Energy. Democrats have tried again and again to legislate on energy prices. We have introduced proposals that would lower gas prices in the short term while addressing the root cause of the problem in the long term. We have even offered Republicans exactly what they claim to want: votes on drilling, oil shale, nuclear energy, and their entire package.

In Congressional Daily today, this appeared on the back page. It says:

Cheaper, faster, safer options exist to solve the oil crisis. Don't buy Big Oil's lie.

Then it has a picture of a big oil rig out in the middle of the ocean. It says:

Drilling for oil in America's precious natural areas will NOT lower gas prices. But Big Oil's profits will skyrocket even higher.

The U.S. Department of Energy's truth: The Energy Information Administration says offshore or Arctic Refuge oil won't flow for ten years and prices won't be affected until at least 2027.

This is from President's Bush's Department of Energy.

The impact on price? ''Insignificant.''

The U.S. Department of the Interior's truth: The number of drilling permits on federal lands doubled in the last five years while the price of gas almost tripled. More drilling does not lower prices.

The U.S. House Committee on Natural Resources's truth: Oil and gas companies hold leases to millions of acres of Federal land and waters. These leases are producing no oil.

Legendary oil man T. Boone Pickens's truth—

And this is a direct quote—

I've been an oil man all my life, but this is one emergency we can't drill our way out of.

He said that about a month ago.

The plain truth: While the American public struggles to pay record-breaking gas prices, big oil companies rake in record-breaking profits.

The U.S. holds 2 percent of all the oil reserves, but consumes 25 percent of the world's oil. We can't drill our way to energy independence. Energy efficiency, renewables, and technological advances are the cheaper, faster, safer way to meet America's energy needs, while reducing the threat of global warming.

Tell them you don't buy Big Oil's lie and they shouldn't either.

This has been paid for by a number of organizations. Some are strictly environmental. Some of them are concerned about other things. Ocean Conservancy helped pay for this. League of Conservation Voters, Friends of the Earth, National Audubon Society, Sierra Club, Defenders of Wildlife, Pacific

Environment, Waterkeeper Alliance, Gulf Coast Environmental Defense, Ocean Protection Coalition.

So we have even offered the Republicans exactly what they claim to want—votes on drilling, oil shale, and nuclear power—and they have said no to this point. Hopefully, they will say yes. They have said no. So if the American people are wondering why Congress has not passed legislation on gas prices, it is because Republicans refuse to take yes for an answer.

Democrats will continue to propose ideas to address the energy crisis. Unlike our Republican colleagues, we are offering solutions. Democrats await the day that Republicans tire of endlessly talking about the energy crisis and decide it is time to join us in actually getting something done. Any Republican effort to confuse the debate on this package of bills with the debate over energy is disingenuous.

So I hope we will see this unfortunate obstruction end the way the lands package ended in April: After a delay and Republican political gamesmanship and unnecessary headaches, the legislation passed 91 to 4.

Everyone should understand our legislative days are very limited. Last week, the Republicans killed for the year LIHEAP legislation. I don't know what we are going to do to help those senior citizens, disabled, and low-income people come these cold winter months. We also have these 34 bills packaged together today that we will not be able to pass. We will have to wait until we get a new Congress and a new President. It would be wrong and unconscionable to defer the hope of many people—the hope of Kathie Barrett from Sparks, NV, and all of those who suffer from Lou Gehrig's disease—any longer. For them—for the victims of unresolved civil rights-era crimes, for homeless children, for victims of child pornography, and for the 30 other meritorious bills sponsored by Democrats and Republicans—it is time to put aside the delay, put aside the politics, put aside the obstruction, and pass the Advancing America's Priorities Act into law.

I say again, those Senators who walk down here and vote no on these proposals, they are going to have to answer to their constituents, to voters. How do you justify voting against these measures?

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Republican leader is recognized.

DEALING WITH HIGH GAS PRICES

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, I am heartened by the consent agreement the majority leader was about to offer a while ago, and I think it indicates that we are finally getting serious here about doing something significant about the price of gas at the pump. I appreciate the spirit in which that was offered. As I indicated, I will be getting back to him later this afternoon.

But make no mistake about what has been going on. The press has understood it. There has been a lot of bobbing and weaving, cancellations of Appropriations Committee meetings in order to avoid votes on offshore drilling or getting rid of the oil shale moratorium which was put in place just last year by the new majority. Great efforts have been underway, to the point where even the Washington Post a few days ago was calling on the Speaker of the House of Representatives—the Washington Post was calling on the Speaker of the House of Representatives—to allow votes on drilling.

There is no denying there has been a great effort to try to kick this can down the road and not deal with it. For example, the senior Senator from New York, who is the campaign chairman, if you will, for the Democratic Senate candidates, was quoted in the Post just this weekend as saying we should just wait until there is a new President before dealing with this issue; in other words, we should put it off for 6 months. In the meantime, consumers continue to pay these extraordinarily high prices at the pump while the chairman of the Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee recommends we just wait to deal with it until, he hopes, he has a better political lineup with which to deal. Look, we don't need to wait 6 months. We need to do it this week—this week.

The New York Times—I rarely cite the New York Times—in an editorial just this morning indicated that even though they don't share my view and the view of the majority of my Members who think increased domestic production will have a positive impact on the price of gas at the pump—while they don't share that view, this is what they had to say about the speculation bill which our good friends on the other side would like to pass essentially with nothing added to it—in other words, a speculation-only bill. The New York Times this morning on the speculation-only bill:

> Democrats' misbegotten plan to curb speculation and oil futures.

This is the New York Times, not the Wall Street Journal.

They go on:

> Democrats should know that financial speculation is not what's driving oil prices, and that curbing futures trading could hamper the ability of companies like airlines and oil refineries to manage their risks by locking in the price of oil. Putting them together is compounding one bad idea with another.

Again, this is the New York Times, not the Wall Street Journal.

The Times goes on:

> A report by government agencies—including the CFTC, the Federal Reserve, the Treasury and Energy Departments—found that speculative trades in oil contracts had little to no effect on the rise of prices over the last five years.

Again, this is not the Wall Street Journal and not Investors Business Daily. This is the New York Times about the underlying bill which our good friends on the other side of the aisle had been hoping to pass without any additional amendments.

Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the article be printed in the RECORD.

There being no objection, the material was ordered to be printed in the RECORD, as follows:

[From the New York Times, July 28, 2008]

GAS PRICE FOLLIES

Add high energy prices to a sagging economy in an election year and politicians will inevitably come up with bad policies, like converting the corn crop into ethanol or John McCain's proposal to suspend the federal gas tax—neither will provide real relief at the pump while both are guaranteed to create other problems.

The good news is that Congress failed last week to cut a deal on two more bad ideas: Republicans' misguided push for offshore drilling and Democrats' misbegotten plan to curb speculation in oil futures.

Republicans should know that allowing more offshore drilling might marginally trim oil prices—in about a decade—while sacrificing important environmental protections. Democrats should know that financial speculation is not what's driving oil prices, and that curbing futures trading could hamper the ability of companies like airlines and oil refineries to manage their risks by locking in the price of oil. Putting them together is compounding one bad idea with another.

Of course, there is plenty of evidence that markets can be manipulated by fraudulent speculation—recall the Enron mess. Yet all evidence suggests that speculation has little to do with the rising price of crude. From rice to iron, commodity prices are all rising, even without much financial speculation, due to a variety of factors including a weak dollar and growing demand from China and India.

A report by government agencies—including the Commodity Futures Trading Commission, the Federal Reserve and the Treasury and Energy Departments—found that speculative trades in oil contracts had little to no effect on the rise in prices over the last five years.

Oil futures are financial contracts for future delivery of oil. Their price has been responding to the same factors: growing world demand in the face of stagnant supply and the expectation that this dynamic will continue.

Like some of the other ''cures,'' offering to solve Americans' energy woes by drilling or slapping Wall Street around merely feeds the myth that there is a quick and easy solution out there. There isn't. Expensive oil is likely here to stay. Americans must burn less oil and find alternative sources of energy that do far less damage to the environment.

Mr. McCONNELL. Hopefully, Mr. President, we will be able to construct later this afternoon a process by which we can go forward and consider amendments that would really have an impact on the problem. I look forward to getting back to the majority leader later in the afternoon on the prospects of entering into a consent agreement that will allow us to consider all of these important items—not 6 months from now but this week.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.