

OPPOSE CAMPAIGN FINANCE RIDERS ON FSGG BILL

May 23, 2016

Dear Member:

Our organizations urge you to oppose all “poison pill” riders, including all campaign finance riders, to the fiscal year 2017 Financial Services and General Government (FSGG) Appropriations bill.

Our organizations include the Brennan Center for Justice, the Campaign Legal Center, Common Cause, CREW, Democracy 21, League of Women Voters, Public Citizen, Represent.Us, Sunlight Foundation, The Rootstrickers Project at Demand Progress and U.S. PIRG.

Last year four “poison pill” campaign finance riders were added to the House and Senate FSGG bills. In addition, an effort was made in finalizing the fiscal year 2016 Omnibus Appropriations bill to insert at the last minute another rider never considered by either congressional committee.

These “poison pill” riders have no place in the appropriations process and certainly no place in the fiscal year 2017 FSGG Appropriations bill. Of the four damaging campaign finance riders added last year to the 2016 FSGG Appropriations Committee bills, two ended up in the final Omnibus bill, which applied only to FY16. The four riders last year served to:

- Prevent the White House from issuing an executive order requiring disclosure of campaign finance activities by government contractors;
- Prevent the IRS from issuing new regulations to stop nonprofit groups from misusing the tax laws to spend secret contributions in federal elections;
- Prevent the SEC from issuing regulations to require public corporations to disclose their campaign-finance activities to their shareholders; and
- Repeal longstanding limits on the amounts that parties can spend in coordination with their candidates.

The first three of these campaign finance riders served to continue keeping the American people in the dark about hundreds of millions of dollars in secret contributions being laundered into federal elections. Secret campaign money prevents holding officeholders and influence-seeking donors accountable for corrupt practices. The fourth rider served to repeal longstanding limits on the amounts that parties can spend in coordination with their candidates.

A fifth campaign finance rider attempted unsuccessfully to be inserted at the last minute into the FY16 Omnibus Appropriations bill would have repealed the presidential financing system. This system served the nation well for more than two decades before it became outdated. It needs to be repaired, not repealed.

The unprecedented role being played by big money in the 2016 presidential election is making an overwhelming case for the need to repair the presidential financing system and again provide candidates with an alternative means to finance their presidential campaigns. The Obama administration is on record as strongly opposing repeal of the presidential financing system, stating that “it is critical that the Nation’s presidential election public financing system be fixed rather than dismantled.”

Poison pill riders have no part in any budget bill. Any effort to rewrite the Nation’s campaign finance laws and related measures should be done by regular order and through the legislative process. This should not be done by a back door misuse of the appropriations process.

We strongly urge you to oppose any campaign finance riders being included in the FSGG appropriations bills or in any final FY17 Omnibus Appropriations bill.

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