

In Wake Of Partisan Maneuvers To Break Budget Agreement, Senate Dem Leaders Urge GOP To Publicly Agree To Honor Core Tenets Of Last Year's Bipartisan Budget Agreement To Allow Appropriations Process To Move Forward

In New Letter To Majority Leader McConnell And Appropriations Committee Chair Cochran, Senate Dem Leaders Express Concern That Congressional Republicans Are Breaking Their Promise To Comply With Core Tenets Of The 2015 Bipartisan Compromise

Senate Democratic Letter Comes After Congressional Republicans Failed To Provide Parity Between Military And Domestic Investment and Security Spending and Added Poison Pill Riders to What Was a Bipartisan Milcon/VA and Zika Appropriations Act

Senate Democratic Leaders To GOP: Failure To Honor Last Year's Bipartisan Budget Agreement Puts Work on Future Appropriations Bills At Risk

WASHINGTON, D.C. - Senate Democratic leaders today released a new letter to Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell and Senate Appropriations Committee Chair Thad Cochran calling for Congressional Republicans to publicly agree to honor the core tenets of the bipartisan budget agreement of 2015 to allow the appropriations process to move forward. The letter, signed by Senators Harry Reid, Dick Durbin, Charles Schumer and Patty Murray, comes in the wake of Republican maneuvers to break last year's agreement by inserting ideological poison pill riders into appropriations bills and failing to provide parity between military and domestic investment and security spending. The Senate Democratic leaders note in the letter that a failure by Congressional Republicans to publicly demonstrate their commitment to adhere to the framework of Bipartisan Budget Act of 2015 will put work on future appropriations bills at risk.

The full text of the Senate Democratic Leadership letter can be found below:

July 7, 2016

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Majority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Thad Cochran, Chairman
Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Mr. Leader and Chairman Cochran:

We are writing to express our concern about actions by Republicans in the House and Senate that violate last year's bipartisan budget agreement, and to seek confirmation that you will keep your promise to comply with that agreement. Without strong, public assurance that you are committed to honoring the core tenets of the bipartisan compromise - including fair funding, parity, and a rejection of poison pill riders - through the completion of the full appropriations process, we will no longer be able to support proceeding to new appropriations bills.

A product of painstaking negotiation and compromise, last year's agreement established a bipartisan framework for Congress to move forward on annual funding bills based on the principles of full and fairly allocated funding, a rejection of poison pill riders, and parity between funding for the Pentagon and for domestic security and other priority investments in America. Earlier this year, we wrote to offer our cooperation in facilitating a fair Fiscal Year 2017 appropriations process that adhered to this framework. As evidenced by the Senate passage of the Energy and Water, Military Construction-VA, and Transportation-HUD bills, we have been true to our word. However, recent actions by House and Senate Republicans have violated our agreement and therefore put further work on appropriations bills at risk.

For example, the House has passed a Defense Appropriations Bill that uses a budget gimmick to hand out extra taxpayer dollars for the Pentagon, with no equivalent support for domestic security and other initiatives important to the middle class. Similarly, during consideration of the FY17 National Defense Authorization Act, Senator McCain offered an amendment to authorize an additional \$18 billion in overseas contingency operations (OCO) funding only for the Pentagon, a clear violation of the parity principle. Senators Reed and Mikulski offered a competing amendment to increase OCO by \$18 billion and provide a matching \$18 billion to invest in security at home by providing funding for law enforcement and the Department of Homeland Security, invest in job creating infrastructure and scientific research, and address national emergencies like Zika, opioids, and access to clean drinking water. However, the amendment fell on a largely party-line vote.

The willingness of Republicans to consider the McCain amendment and to reject the Reed-Mikulski amendment, combined with reported desire of Senate Republicans to offer an OCO amendment to the defense appropriations bill, sends a deeply troubling signal about your willingness to appropriate by the parity principle. Further, this unbalanced approach does not truly keep Americans safe or protect our interests abroad. Without sufficient funding for the vital national security work done by local law enforcement agencies, enforcement of sanctions and cutting off terrorist financing, and counterterrorism, we hinder a coherent national security strategy.

We also are deeply concerned that House and Senate Republicans have proposed a wide variety of problematic and highly controversial policy riders that are strongly opposed by President Obama and congressional Democrats. These include efforts to undermine the Affordable Care Act, turn back the clock on women's rights, weaken key environmental laws, and adopt a variety of anti-consumer, anti-labor, and other special interest provisions. Several such problematic riders were included in appropriations bills proposed in the House of Representatives.

The Republican-crafted conference report on the Military Construction, Veterans Affairs, and Related Agencies Appropriations Act, 2017 and Zika Response and Preparedness Act (Milcon/VA and Zika Appropriations) also raises serious questions about how you would conduct a conference between House and Senate bills, and your willingness to reject poison pill riders. Instead of quickly sending the Senate-passed, bipartisan \$1.1 billion compromise to the President for his signature in order to send desperately needed dollars to states and territories, medical researchers, and public health professionals, Republicans abandoned the Senate's bipartisan compromise in pursuit of an unrelated, extreme right-wing agenda that included poison pill provisions restricting women's access to birth control services and weakening clean water protections by waiving portions of the Clean Water Act to allow for greater use of pesticides without EPA approval. This decision to pursue a purely partisan path in conference that includes the addition of poison pill riders and a break with the bipartisan tradition of passing emergency funding without offsets make us even more concerned about your willingness to truly follow regular order.

In light of these actions, we believe that it is critical that you publicly commit to ensuring that the FY17 appropriations process will be governed by the Bipartisan Budget Act framework. More specifically, we urge you to publicly give your word that all appropriations bills considered in both chambers and sent to the President for his signature will comply with the principles of fair funding, parity, and a rejection of poison pill riders. If you cannot give us such assurance, we will be forced to oppose proceeding to future appropriations bills until you agree to keep your promises and honor our agreement.

We are prepared to continue to honor last year's agreement, and reiterate our willingness to facilitate a fair appropriations process. We hope that you will be able to give us your commitment soon so that we can continue this important work.

Thank you for your consideration of our views.

Sincerely,

HARRY REID
United States Senator
Nevada

RICHARD J. DURBIN
United States Senator
Illinois

CHARLES E. SCHUMER
United States Senator
New York

PATTY MURRAY
United States Senator

Washington

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By: DPCC