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## APPROPRIATIONS

# Dems vow to block environmental riders in omnibus

[George Cahlink](#) and [Ariel Wittenberg](#), E&E News reporters

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Top House and Senate Democratic appropriators are warning they'll block the upcoming omnibus spending package if it contains controversial policy riders, including dozens of proposals to roll back environmental and endangered species protections.

"They want to hide these [riders] in a must-pass appropriations bill. ... We won't allow it to pass," Sen. Patrick Leahy of Vermont, the top Democratic appropriator in the Senate, told reporters in a conference call yesterday.

The call was organized by the Clean Budget Coalition, a collection of environmental and other liberal and progressive organizations, which is pressing for lawmakers to strip what it considers dozens of ideological riders that could not pass Congress as stand-alone bills.

Leahy noted that in negotiating the fiscal 2017 omnibus, Democrats were able to take out more than 160 controversial riders.

Lawmakers are currently assembling a fiscal 2018 omnibus that must pass no later than March 23 or federal agencies face a potential shutdown.

It will include billions of dollars in new spending spread across agencies, based on the bipartisan budget deal approved last month.

Rep. Nita Lowey of New York, the House's top Democratic appropriator, said in the same call she was pleased with the new spending, but said lawmakers have to keep their "eyes and ears open" to riders that represent the worst of GOP policies.

Trip Van Noppen, president of Earthjustice, told reporters there are more than 80 environmental riders that need to be removed.

He said they include about a dozen that would undermine the Endangered Species Act and one that would block a Bureau of Land Management Rule to limit methane emissions from oil and gas operations on federal lands.

Van Noppen said he's also concerned about rules that would scrap roadless prohibitions for the Tongass National Forest in Alaska, which could allow for expanded logging. He noted the Senate's top Interior appropriator is Alaska Sen. Lisa Murkowski (R), who favors easing the rule.

Michael Brune, the executive director of the Sierra Club, warned that Republicans are using the bill to put into law policy changes being made by U.S. EPA Administrator Scott Pruitt to limit clean air and clean water protections.

Specifically, he cited a rider that would codify an administration push to scrap the Obama-era Waters of the U.S. rule.

Brune also warned against a rider that would limit the federal government's ability to collect data on the social costs of carbon.

He said the provision is being sought by Republican lawmakers, who deny climate change and want to "blind" the federal government to its potential billions of dollars in costs.

House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.) made similar comments earlier in the day about her caucus fighting any riders. She said negotiations over those add-on provisions have yet to begin in earnest as the spending bills are still being drafted.

About 180 House Democrats have signed a letter saying they would oppose the omnibus if it contains any "poison pill riders." Republicans maintain a 24-seat majority in the House, but if conservatives unsatisfied with the bill's increased spending joined with Democrats, they could potentially block it.

Also, Senate Democrats have the ability to block any legislation by filibuster if it cannot get the 60 votes needed to end debate. Republicans control a narrow majority of 51 seats in the Senate, meaning they would need at least nine Democrats to overcome any objections to the omnibus.

## **Lead funds sought**

Democrats are also making their case for how they hope additional dollars will be spent.

Democratic Reps. Gwen Moore of Wisconsin and Louise Slaughter of New York sent a [letter](#) to House appropriators urging full funding for programs aimed at reducing lead poisoning.

They are asking for \$35 million for the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Childhood Lead Poisoning Prevention Program and \$176 million for the Department of Housing and Urban Development's Office of Lead Hazard Control and Healthy Homes programs.

The HUD request includes \$30 million for the Healthy Homes program and \$5 million for the Lead Technical Studies Grant Program.

The lawmakers say the CDC funding will allow the agency to quickly identify "outbreaks" of increased blood lead levels in children and rapidly respond to them.

"Both HUD and CDC play critical roles in preventing, identifying and responding to lead contamination in communities across the country," the lawmakers wrote. "These efforts are critical to ensuring our children grow up healthy and safe."

Twitter: [@GeorgeCahlink](#) Email: [gcahlink@eenews.net](mailto:gcahlink@eenews.net)