

September 12, 2005

Dear Senator,

We, the undersigned groups, strongly oppose the loophole-opening Leadership PAC rider that was slipped into the Transportation, Treasury, HUD and General Government Appropriations bill in Committee. At a time when the suffering of millions of Americans needs to be alleviated, the Senate should not be focusing its attention on increasing by eight-fold the amount that congressional incumbents – and not their challengers – can raise from individuals to support their campaigns.

During Senate floor consideration of this legislation, expected this week, Senators John McCain (R-AZ) and Russ Feingold (D-WI) will offer an amendment to strip this destructive and inappropriate rider from the Appropriations bill. We strongly urge you to vote to remove the Leadership PAC rider from the bill.

The rider would allow Leadership PACs controlled by Members of Congress to give an unlimited amount of their funds (instead of the current \$15,000 annual limit) to national party committees, which could then spend the funds on the Members' campaigns. In so doing, the rider would open a major new loophole in the contribution limits for Members, limits that were enacted by Congress to protect citizens against corruption and the appearance of corruption. Members, in effect, would have two separate committees with separate contribution limits available to finance their campaigns. (See enclosed fact sheet.)

The loophole-opening rider, furthermore, is explicitly written so that it is available to congressional incumbents only, thereby providing an enormous and discriminatory financial advantage for congressional incumbents over their challengers.

The loophole-opening rider would not only greatly increase the influence of big-money contributors with Senators and Representatives and provide a huge unfair advantage for incumbents; it also has absolutely no place as a rider to an Appropriations bill and would set an extremely dangerous precedent for all kinds of additional back-door riders to be added to other appropriations bills to unravel the campaign finance laws. It also would open the door to House leaders adding their own damaging amendments to unravel the campaign finance laws in the House-Senate conference on the bill.

Furthermore, given the role that this Appropriations bill is now expected to play in addressing the Hurricane Katrina tragedy, using this legislation as a vehicle to circumvent the nation's campaign finance laws is the last thing Senators should be doing.

We strongly urge you to vote to strike the destructive, loophole-opening Leadership PAC rider from the Senate Transportation Appropriations bill.

Campaign Legal Center  
Common Cause  
Democracy 21

League of Women Voters  
Public Citizen  
U.S. PIRG