

# [Lisa Gilbert: Thorn in the Side of GOP Appropriators](#)

By Jennifer Shutt, CQ Roll Call

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If Republicans move forward with appropriations bills that adhere to the spending levels set in last year's budget deal, they'll need to assuage conservatives upset about increases they view as profligate.

That will likely come in the form of policy riders attacking environmental or financial regulations, or proposals like that of GOP Sen. [Tom Cotton](#) of Arkansas last month, who tried to undermine the White House deal with Iran by proposing an amendment to the Energy and Water spending measure to bar the United States from buying heavy water from Iran, which is used to create nuclear energy and nuclear weapons.



Gilbert: No more riders (Al Drago/CQ Roll Call)

They'll have to get the riders past Public Citizen's Lisa Gilbert. As director of the consumer advocacy group's Congress Watch, she is putting relentless pressure on Democrats to keep out "poison pill" amendments.

Last year, Gilbert launched the Clean Budget Coalition with about 200 groups, including the AFL-CIO, NAACP, Sierra Club and Planned Parenthood Federation of America, to lobby lawmakers on riders.

On April 19, at the coalition's urging, 172 Democratic representatives wrote to House Speaker [Paul D. Ryan](#) of Wisconsin, Democratic leader [Nancy Pelosi](#) of California, and the chairman and ranking Democrat on the House Appropriations Committee, [Harold Rogers](#) of Kentucky and [Nita M. Lowey](#) of New York, to urge them to keep riders out of the fiscal 2017 appropriations bills.

"We believe clean bills — free of controversial policy provisions — represent the best chance to advance appropriations legislation through 'regular order' and avoid another harmful political impasse," they wrote.

After Cotton outlined his amendment, Democrats blocked further progress on the Energy and Water measure. "We were headed to victory, and out of nowhere comes a poison pill rider," said [Harry Reid](#) of Nevada, the Democrats' Senate leader, on the floor April 28.

Gilbert says a key motivation behind the Public Citizen effort was the dramatic uptick in the number of policy riders lawmakers have added to spending bills since they agreed to stop putting in earmarks, which in the past had assuaged members' desire to get something specific out of the appropriations process. Congress banned earmarks in 2011.

"Policy riders are inappropriate by their nature," Gilbert says. "They don't fit in a spending bill and they shouldn't be there."

Her efforts paid off last year, when Democrats also said they would not vote for bills containing controversial policy riders and they were, for the most part, left out of the fiscal 2016 omnibus. "We were remarkably successful in keeping the budget clean last year, so we want to do it again," she says.

Gilbert says the coalition hasn't discussed whether she'd like lawmakers to ban riders the way they did earmarks. But, she says, "eventually it would be good if there were none."

In order for that to happen Gilbert believes Congress must return to regular order.

"It's a function of how D.C. is working right now that there are not that many pieces of moving legislation," she says, "so the ones that have to move have become vehicles for everything else."

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