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Safety agency reauthorization gets new life

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The House Energy and Commerce Committee effort to reauthorize the nation's pipeline safety regulator is showing new signs of life after months of partisan bickering.

A new proposal from E&C Chairman Frank Pallone (D-N.J.) and Transportation and Infrastructure Chairman Peter DeFazio (D-Ore.) to reauthorize the Transportation Department's Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration is floating through the committees and could see a markup as soon as early next week, two sources familiar with the bill confirmed to E&E News.

Exact details of the legislation remain unclear at the moment. A draft copy appears to have been passed to Republican committee staff last weekend in a sign of its imminent consideration, sources said.

"I don't know if it's that different, but we're working on it," Pallone responded Wednesday evening when asked about the bill's progress.

E&C Subcommittee on Energy Chairman Bobby Rush (D-Ill.) told E&E News on Wednesday night that "something was amidst" as it related to the pipeline reauthorization legislation.

The proposal, one source said, would largely abandon much of the bipartisan negotiation that occurred over the summer as the two sides looked to find common ground.

PHMSA's authorization expired Sept. 30, although the agency can continue operations so long as it has appropriations.

Pallone's new draft reportedly reinserted many of those sections that lawmakers had agreed to remove. It also includes measures meant to bolster safety through new regulatory mandates to PHMSA.

The new draft is unlikely to gather Republican support, one source said, which could break the reauthorization's traditional bipartisan movement through committee. It may also complicate negotiations with the Republican-controlled Senate.

The GOP is likely to keep pushing a pared-down reauthorization bill, **H.R. 4700** authored by Rep. Fred Upton (R-Mich.), which would increase funding levels for the agency but offer limited congressional direction for new regulations.

"We have divided government and the only way we'll complete this reauthorization is if the parties work together, which is why I'm introducing this bill that can actually gather bipartisan support," Upton said in a statement last month.