House Democrats rebooting push for wide-ranging $1T infrastructure plan

By Tanya Snyder | 11/13/2019 06:45 PM EST

At first blush, House Speaker Nancy Pelosi’s plan appears to be a mashup of measures that typically move separately. | J. Scott Applewhite/AP Photo

Democrats are working on a new $1 trillion infrastructure package, hoping to pick up the pieces from negotiations with the White House that imploded last May amid partisan rancor.

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi talked about the initiative at a caucus meeting Wednesday morning, according to a Democratic aide. Pelosi’s office did not return a request for comment.
At first blush, Pelosi’s plan appears to be a mashup of measures that typically move separately. That appears to include regularly recurring bills such as a surface transportation bill and a water resources bill, as well as items related to broadband, pipeline safety, and possibly schools, housing and parks.

House Transportation Committee Chairman Peter DeFazio (D-Ore.) told POLITICO that Pelosi asked him to address a special caucus meeting Thursday afternoon about infrastructure.

“I have provided leadership with a pretty detailed outline of what I’m proposing, and we’re having ongoing discussions,” DeFazio said. “It’s a big price tag.”

DeFazio’s committee has been working for months on a surface transportation bill that would form the backbone of this push, and also has jurisdiction over wastewater and harbor maintenance.

In the ill-fated infrastructure meetings with President Donald Trump earlier this year, Democrats and the president had agreed that broadband and drinking water must also be part of an infrastructure package, so House Energy and Commerce Chairman Frank Pallone is involved. DeFazio and Pallone are also working together on a pipeline safety bill.

Pallone, DeFazio and House Ways and Means Chairman Richard Neal attended a meeting with leadership Wednesday to discuss the matter.

“We’re producing a document that’s essentially what we agreed upon with Trump,” DeFazio said. “We’re going to put a price tag on it and propose that.”

He noted that other committees have proposals that could be merged into an infrastructure plan, too: The Committee on Education and Labor “has moved a proposal for schools; I believe Banking has moved something for housing; Interior has moved something for parks,” he said.

“Whether that’s all going to be voted on separately or amalgamated, that’s beyond my pay grade,” he said.
DeFazio bristled at the idea that the push was just a campaign issue to prove to voters that Democrats aren’t entirely consumed with the ongoing impeachment saga. Given the Sept. 30, 2020, deadline to reauthorize surface transportation programs, DeFazio noted that Congress must act on that no matter what.

“It ain’t just a campaign issue,” he said, adding that while leadership’s interest in infrastructure abated for a little while after talks fell apart with Trump, “it’s ripening.”

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