Congress takes another stab at passing self-driving car legislation



Just when everyone had pretty much given up hope of getting lawmakers in our hyper-polarized nation’s capital to agree on a new set of rules for self-driving cars, Congress appears to be ready to try again.

Stakeholders in the autonomous vehicle industry had mostly given up hope of getting anything done this year, after the failure of legislation last year and the lack of action in the months that followed. But a bipartisan contingent in both the Senate and House have held five meetings in recent weeks to see if they can forge a deal.

The new bill is being written with input from both chambers in the hopes of avoiding last year’s breakdown. In late 2017, the then Republican-controlled House passed the SELF DRIVE Act, which would speed the adoption of self-driving cars and bar states from setting performance standards.

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But a complementary bill in the Senate, AV START, failed to pass after Democrats raised objections that it didn't do enough to address safety concerns. The hope is that with Democrats now in control of the House, a bill can be crafted from the start that addresses those concerns.

Of course, the new bill could run into the same headwinds as the old one. Supporters of the legislation made a last-minute push late last year, amending the bill to address many of the Democratic members' concerns, but the bill still failed to pass. The last version would have directed federal regulators to collect crash information for so-called Level 2 semi-autonomous systems like Tesla's Autopilot and GM's Super Cruise.

This legislation also has the power to determine what these vehicles look like in the future, allowing for automakers to manufacture vehicles without steering wheels, gas, and brake pedals so long as the Department of Transportation exempts them from the Federal Motor Vehicle Safety Standards (FMVSS).

It's unclear how necessary any of this is. The US Department of Transportation is in the midst of regulatory changes that would permit the sale of autonomous vehicles that don't meet the current FMVSS. Changing these rules would pave the way for companies like Alphabet's Waymo, Ford, and General Motors to release hundreds of thousands of fully automated vehicles on public roads.

Despite this new glimmer of life, the AV industry has mostly dialed down its efforts in Washington. According to *Politico*, lobbying on driverless cars dropped 35 percent between the end of 2018 and the first quarter of 2019. Legislative hurdles in Washington are hardly the biggest problem for AV operators, many of whom are facing technical challenges and diminishing expectations about the readiness of self-driving cars.

https://www.theverge.com/2019/7/28/8931726/congress-self-driving-car-bill-redo-2019