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Bipartisan negotiations between House and Senate leaders hoping to get a child nutrition reauthorization bill done this year fell apart for the last time Tuesday, killing all hope for legislation in the foreseeable future.

"Today is a day I hoped would not come," said Senate Agriculture Chairman [Pat Roberts](#) in a statement issued this afternoon. "I'm very disappointed that the bipartisan, bicameral Child Nutrition Reauthorization negotiations have come to an end for the 114th Congress." Sources familiar with the talks say the political dynamic turned more toxic after the election, making a deal this year even more difficult. House Republicans felt entitled to a much more conservative bill after sweeping GOP victories in the election and Senate Democrats dug in, showing their willingness to fight for many of the policies championed by the Obama administration — something that some Democrats may be particularly interested in as they are up for reelection in 2018.

Roberts suggests that politics overrode policy in the negotiations.

"It is unfortunate that certain parochial interests and the desire for issues rather than solutions were put ahead of the well-being of vulnerable and at-risk populations and the need for reform," he said.

It could be a very long time before Congress reauthorizes another child nutrition bill. There is likely to be little appetite to restart the legislative process while Congress deals with Donald Trump's agenda on health care, infrastructure and immigration and the agriculture committees are pressured to address a faltering farm economy by beginning work on the 2018 farm bill. The Senate Agriculture Committee had been working on a reauthorization bill for more than two years. Following a bitter and public fight over school nutrition standards that went on for several months, the panel last January struck a carefully-crafted, bipartisan compromise with House Republicans and the School Nutrition Association on one side, and first lady Michelle Obama and the public health community on the other.

That deal was seen as something as a peace agreement. It would give schools some flexibility on school meal standards, but also preserve many nutrition reforms. There would be expanded access to summer meals for low-income children and tightened up verification for meals programs, changing the way schools ensure they are serving meals to children who are eligible for help.

The effort to reauthorize school nutrition programs — something that is supposed to but doesn't have to happen every five years — has been on the rocks since last May, when the House Education and the Workforce Committee unveiled its own child nutrition bill with a block grant pilot provision that enraged the School Nutrition Association and other stakeholders. That bill also sought to raise the threshold for high-poverty schools that serve universal free meals. The measure — known as the Community Eligibility Provision — is aimed at reducing

paperwork and simplify the program for high need schools, but some on the right hate the idea of providing meals to some students who don't qualify for free or reduced-price meals. Reauthorization hit another potentially fatal snag when teachers unions raised concerns about the verification changes championed by Republicans.

Most recently, health advocates started to worry about whether the earlier peace agreement really meant anything in a Trump administration. Much of the compromise was actually not written into the bill, but rested on a solid agreement with the committee, the White House and USDA.

"If the Senate bill passed as is, that would just be a blank check for the Trump administration to roll back the whole grain and sodium standards, if they wanted, without any notice and comment," said Margo Wootan, director of nutrition policy at the Center for Science in the Public Interest.

"That deal that was struck doesn't mean anything anymore," she added. Still, Roberts and ranking member [Debbie Stabenow](#) had tried for the past several weeks to broker a deal so the bill could get done this year. They were ultimately unsuccessful.

"This is a lost opportunity to help hungry children and struggling schools," Roberts said.