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Measure to Overhaul Food-Safety Laws Fails in House

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By Brian Faler

The U.S. House rejected a bill to overhaul the nation's food-safety laws amid complaints from Republicans that they weren't given enough time to read the measure.

The legislation, which would give regulators more power to enforce tougher safety standards, fell seven votes short of the two-thirds majority needed for passage. The [vote](#) was 280 in favor of the bill, 150 against it.

The measure needed two-thirds support because it was considered under expedited procedures that bar amendments and limit debate to 40 minutes.

Democrats will bring up the bill again tomorrow under regular procedures requiring a simple majority for passage, said Katie Grant, a spokeswoman for House Majority Leader [Steny Hoyer](#), a Maryland Democrat.

The chamber's top Republican, [John Boehner](#) of Ohio, complained that a final copy of the legislation wasn't available until late this morning.

"This may be a great bill -- I have no idea," said Boehner, shortly before the vote. "We've got this major food safety bill here on the floor and nobody gets to offer an amendment, nobody gets to have a debate about it and nobody clearly has much of an idea of what's in the bill."

More than two-thirds of the chamber's Republicans, along with 23 Democrats, voted against the measure. The bill was unanimously approved last month by the chamber's Energy and Commerce Committee.

'A Little Disheartened'

"With 280 votes, the bill clearly has broad bipartisan support and I am a little disheartened that Americans will have to wait a little longer now to feel safe about their food supply again," Representative [John Dingell](#), a Michigan Democrat who sponsored the measure, said after today's vote.

Lawmakers said the bill was prompted by a recent string of high-profile recalls of tainted peanuts, spinach and other foods. The \$3.5 billion measure calls for more frequent inspections of food processing facilities, gives the Food and Drug Administration more power to force recalls, and requires companies to keep better records to help trace outbreaks of food-borne illnesses to their origins. The plan would be partly financed by a \$500 annual fee on food producers.

Representative [Frank Lucas](#) of Oklahoma, the top Republican on the Agriculture Committee, said the measure would add hundreds of millions of dollars in fees and taxes and burdensome regulations that “will increase the cost of food for consumers” and drive producers overseas.