

COVID-19 RESPONSE

PANEL VOTES TO HOLD
FAUCI IN CONTEMPT



KEVIN DIETSCH, GETTY IMAGES

Former NIH Director Anthony Fauci testifies before the Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee hearing July 29 in Washington.

Paul seeks prosecution after doctor fails to answer questions

AHMED ABOULENEIN
Reuters

WASHINGTON — Sen. Rand Paul, R-Ky., said Thursday he will ask the Justice Department to prosecute Dr. Anthony Fauci for refusing to answer questions about the COVID-19 pandemic after a Senate committee voted to hold the former top infectious disease official in contempt of Congress.

The Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee, which Paul chairs, approved a contempt resolution on a party-line vote with Republicans in favor and Democrats opposed. The resolution accuses Fauci of failing to obey a congressional subpoena.

The move followed a hearing last week where Fauci, who retired in 2022 as the head of the national infectious-disease agency and a presidential adviser, invoked his Fifth Amendment constitutional right against self-incrimination more than 100 times.

Paul sent the referral, a formal request to consider criminal charges, after the



Paul

contempt finding. But the Kentucky senator, a long-time Fauci antagonist, bypassed a referral vote by the full Senate.

He described that step as unnecessary and said his request would be hand delivered to the attorney general Thursday. Democrats said Paul was violating Senate rules by skipping the vote, which would likely fail to achieve the necessary 60-vote majority, and called the move dangerous and unprecedented.

A Justice Department spokesperson confirmed copies of the referral had been sent to the DOJ leadership and the U.S. Attorney's Office in Washington, D.C.

"We have received the document, we are reviewing it and will work with the Senate accordingly," the spokesperson said.

The development was the sharpest escalation yet in a broad Republican and Trump administration campaign to relitigate the pandemic and hold accountable

the officials who ran the U.S. response.

Pandemic response

Fauci's attorney, David Schertler, said Thursday's vote was "a crude political stunt intended to punish Dr. Fauci for exercising his constitutional rights."

"Dr. Fauci has committed no crime — and Senator Paul knows it," Schertler said, describing the resolution as a continuation of a "personal vendetta."

Paul denied this, saying in his opening statement: "Seeking the truth is not a witch hunt." He said the committee seeks accountability to prevent "a repeat of the mistakes and the very real consequences of the past."

Fauci, who led the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases for 38 years, became the face of the U.S. COVID-19 pandemic response and a primary target of anger over measures taken against a virus that killed more than 1.1 million Americans.

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Trump targets Hong over past comments on Thanksgiving, police

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President Donald Trump on Wednesday took time out of a speech focused on the economy to attack Wisconsin gubernatorial candidate Francesca Hong, a democratic socialist who is leading in statewide polls heading into the battleground state's partisan primary on Tuesday.

Trump, who saw his average approval rating sitting at just 39% at the close of July, focused his criticisms on progressive candidates like Hong, who is trying to stave off a last-minute push by Milwaukee County Executive David Crowley for the party's gubernatorial nomination, and Abdul El-Sayed, who won the Democratic U.S. Senate primary in Michigan on Tuesday.

Trump told supporters in Las Vegas' Red Rock Casino the democratic socialist

agenda, which has seen growing momentum among younger, more progressive voters across the country, represents the spreading threat of communism. Then he shifted his focus to Hong.

"In Wisconsin, the communists even have a woman who said that the holiday of Thanksgiving should be immediately abolished and the police only exist to quote, 'uphold white supremacy,'" Trump said in reference to past social media posts by Hong that have become points of criticism among her opponents.

"These people are dangerous and frankly, they are lunatics," Trump said. "They are crazy and we can't let them get into office. Communism is the greatest threat to our country in its history."

Hong's campaign did not immediately respond to a request for comment Thursday.

Hong finds herself leading the pack of Democratic candidates running for the party's nomination on Tuesday. Her top opponent is Crowley, who suspended his campaign last month only to rejoin the race 10 days later with backing from Democratic Gov. Tony Evers and other more moderate members of the party.

State Sen. Kelda Roys and former state Department of Administration secretary Joel Brennan are also running.

Hong's ascent to the top of the Democratic field has brought with it an increased focus on the Madison state representative's past social media posts, including a 2020 post, which has since been deleted, in which she called to "cancel Thanksgiving," which she called a "colonizer holiday."

Hong initially appeared to stand by her post in an interview with CNN earlier this week, in which she said that as a chef, "one

of the first meals that I made was for the community when I was 16 was a Thanksgiving meal, but Thanksgiving is also a time that's incredibly painful for many people in our communities."

Hong offered a different take in a Wednesday interview with Politico, saying Thanksgiving is her favorite holiday.

"I don't want to cancel it," she said. "I actually love it."

Her main opponent in Tuesday's primary isn't buying it.

Crowley's campaign said Hong's flip-flop represents a pattern in which she "takes one position and offers another once reporters start asking questions."

"Wisconsin voters should not need a decoder ring to understand where a candidate for governor stands on Thanksgiving

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