



US Senate panel votes to hold top Covid expert Fauci in contempt

Democrats condemn vote as legally flawed while Justice Department decision now looms

Senate Committee backs contempt vote

Fauci invokes Fifth Amendment

Paul alleges Covid cover-up

AFP | Washington

A Republican-led US Senate committee yesterday voted to hold the country's former top infectious diseases official Anthony Fauci in contempt of Congress, in an escalation of efforts to blame him for potential Covid-19 pandemic missteps.

On the advice of his lawyers, Fauci last week had invoked his constitutional right to stay silent to prevent self-incrimination under antagonistic questioning from Republican senators, as they probed him over unsubstantiated claims that the origins of the pandemic were covered up.

The party-line vote advances the extraordinary effort to prosecute the 85-year-old career government scientist, who spent decades as the nation's top expert in infectious diseases.

It stems from an initiative by Republican Senator Rand Paul, who had subpoenaed the now-retired Fauci to testify before the Senate Homeland Security



Dr. Anthony Fauci is sworn in during a Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs committee hearing on Capitol Hill (file photo)

rity Committee.

Prior to the hearing, Paul released thousands of pages of the immunologist's personal diary.

Fauci indicated his lawyers believed Paul intended to entrap him in a slip-up that could result in perjury charges, so Fauci opted to invoke his Fifth Amendment right not to answer.

Paul, the committee's chairman, has signaled he intends to send the panel's recommendation straight to the Justice Department, which can decide

whether to take the case.

Contempt resolutions generally go through the full Senate, and bypassing that route would bring fresh scrutiny on accusations that President Donald Trump's administration aims to persecute its perceived political foes.

Democrats on the panel voiced their disdain over the vote, with Senator Gary Peters accusing Paul of a "rushed investigation."

He said the vote could "harm our ability to conduct future investigations and disregards



Senator Paul released thousands of pages of Fauci's personal diary before the hearing – a move Fauci's lawyers interpreted as a deliberate attempt to provoke a slip-up that could expose him to perjury charges

constitutional protections long recognized by the US Senate, all without making a reliable case that there is a legal basis for holding Dr Fauci in contempt."

Legal maze ahead

Paul has charged that under Fauci's watch at the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, the US-funded "gain-of-function" research in China triggered the spread of Covid-19.

The senator insists Fauci lied about that to Congress, an allegation which he has repeatedly denied.

More than six years after the pandemic's onset, the debate over whether Covid-19 leaked

from a lab remains intense. Fauci has maintained that the virus had natural origins, even if he's said he is open to the idea of a lab leak.

Paul now says that Fauci is ineligible for protection under the Fifth Amendment, because former president Joe Biden granted the doctor an unconditional pardon for public service actions dating from 2014 through January 19, 2025.

Republicans say the pardon already protected him from perjury.

But law scholars are split on the issue that opens the door to a murky legal maze pitting the reach of a presidential pardon against the scope of the Fifth Amendment.

Law professor Tracey MacLin of the University of Florida told AFP that if the Senate panel had truly wanted Fauci to speak frankly, they would have offered him immunity.

Several Democrats yesterday had unsuccessfully pushed for a delay on the vote, arguing that the panel should hear from legal experts.

Two Trump advisers dating to the president's first term, Steve Bannon and Peter Navarro, served time in prison for failing to comply with congressional subpoenas.

But they did not plead the Fifth, opting instead to refuse to appear.

Israeli settlers attack West Bank Palestinian community, burn homes

AFP | Khirbet al-Tuba

Israeli settlers attacked a small Palestinian community in the West Bank, injuring people, destroying homes and smashing their power source, the military and residents said yesterday, in the latest in a spate of violent confrontations.

Journalists in remote Khirbet Al-Tuba saw buildings blackened by fire and smoke, the interiors of three homes completely burned and graffiti in Hebrew spray-painted on remaining structures.

The dozen solar panels the isolated settlement community relies on for power had also been smashed to render them unusable.

The Israeli military said it "strongly condemned" the raid and that it had responded after "homes being set on fire and Palestinians being attacked in the area by Israeli civilians" late Wednesday.

"Several Palestinians were injured, among them a girl and a woman. Several structures were also burned," the military said. "The suspects fled before the forces arrived."

Radwan Abu Jundi, whose



Palestinians walk past Israeli security forces deployed on a street

house was torched, told AFP that about 40 settlers attacked the hamlet at around 10 pm.

"The settlers started throwing stones. We rushed to protect the women, but they got to my wife and daughter and beat them," he said.

"Then they started spraying something and setting the room on fire. The pictures tell the whole story."

Locals said that five people were wounded in the attack, including Abu Jundi's wife and daughter, as well as another child.

"From the moment the attack began until daybreak, we spent the whole night standing here, putting out the fires and helping the injured," Ali Awad, another resident whose son was injured, told AFP.

Violence by Israeli settlers toward Palestinians in the West Bank has persisted for years, but recent months have seen a surge in attacks.

Excluding Israeli-annexed East Jerusalem, some 500,000 Israeli settlers live in the occupied West Bank among some three million Palestinians.

Explosive drone found near Ukrainian plane at German airport



An Ukrainian "Antonov" cargo plane is pictured at the German airport Leipzig-Halle in Schkeuditz

AFP | Berlin

German police raised the alarm at an airport overnight after an explosives-laden drone was found near a Ukrainian cargo plane and another aircraft collided with an unknown flying object nearby before landing safely.

All flights to Leipzig-Halle airport were diverted for several hours from around midnight as police deployed a bomb-disposal robot to remove the detonator from the explosive in the unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) found on the tarmac.

The airport in eastern Ger-

many plays a key role in the transport of military goods by the German armed forces and NATO allies. It also serves as a base for Ukraine's Antonov Airlines.

Video footage from a local news agency showed the bomb disposal robot near an Antonov plane painted with the yellow and blue of the Ukrainian flag. The words "Be Brave Like Kherson" were written on the side -- a reference to a Ukrainian region battered by Russian strikes.

Ukraine's ambassador to Germany Oleksii Makeiev blamed Moscow. "Who else could it be but Russia?" he said on Welt TV.



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01



The severe threat of #ElNiño is growing around the world, including in #Uganda. Millions of people are at risk of slipping into worse hunger. @WFP and partners are acting early to help communities prepare, but more resources are needed to scale up.

@WFPChief

02



We mark the 81st anniversary of the atomic bombing of Hiroshima at a time when nuclear sabers are rattled once again in the name of power & coercion. But peace is not secured through fear & might. It's built through trust, diplomacy, international cooperation & an unwavering commitment to international law. Let's choose dialogue over division & cooperation over confrontation to move closer to a world where the tragedy of Hiroshima is never repeated.

@antonioguterres

03



Our hearts are heavy today. LVMPD Officer Austin Abdelnabi was killed in the line of duty while answering a call to protect this community. A Marine veteran, a husband, and a man who showed up every day for the people of Las Vegas. This hits close to home because it happened in my hometown. To his wife Sage, his family, and every member of Metro — we stand with you. We are grateful for his service and we will not forget his sacrifice. Rest easy, Officer. -DKP

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