

# Caught in crosshairs, Fauci calls GOP descriptions of his emails 'profoundly misleading'

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**Washington (CNN)** — President Joe Biden had just finished delivering [remarks on the latest jobs report](#) and left the room Friday when a reporter shouted one last question.

"Mr. President, do you still have confidence in Dr. Fauci?"

Poking his head back into the room several seconds later, Biden delivered an unequivocal response: "Yes, I am very confident in Dr. Fauci."

# THE POINT

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It was a public show of support that Anthony Fauci, director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, seldom received from Biden's predecessor, and it came as the [disclosure of hundreds of his emails](#) put him in the crosshairs of his Republican critics.

A day earlier, former President Donald Trump had blasted Fauci over the emails in a statement released by his leadership PAC, saying, "After seeing the emails, our Country is fortunate I didn't do what Dr. Fauci wanted me to do. There are a lot of questions that must be answered by Dr. Fauci."

Trump's statement was just the latest missive in a renewed Republican effort to [turn Fauci into a top political enemy of the party](#). GOP lawmakers, many of whom have been suspicious of what they see as Fauci's outsized influence and unwarranted authority as a public health official, are now overtly calling for him to be fired.

Some of Fauci's Republican critics claim that his emails, which were released to the public this week as part of a Freedom of Information Act request by news outlets including CNN, BuzzFeed News and The Washington Post, provide evidence that he acted improperly last year.

Among their complaints are that Fauci minimized mask efficacy, too quickly dismissed a theory that the novel coronavirus [originated from a lab](#) in the Chinese city of Wuhan, and was too willing to accept China's explanation of how the virus came to be -- even though Fauci's position on the mask question was in line with the entire Trump administration at the time, and he is far from alone in doubting the lab link theory.

## Push to fire Fauci

This week, Trump allies began circulating a pair of tweets by GOP Sen. Josh Hawley of Missouri calling for Fauci's resignation. And on Friday, one person close to the former President said they would be "shocked if Trump doesn't light Fauci up" during remarks he is set to deliver Saturday evening to the North Carolina Republican Party.

Rep. Chip Roy went after Fauci and the restrictions imposed by "federal bureaucrats" during an radio interview Friday. "We've literally just wrecked the greatest economy in the history of the world because Anthony Fauci wanted to be on the cover of magazines," the Texas Republican said.

And a fundraising pitch from GOP Sen. Rand Paul of Kentucky lashed out at Fauci on Thursday. "Dr. Fauci MUST GO," the solicitation read, adding, "He's continuously and deliberately misleading the public at every turn. It's time to FIRE FAUCI ... There are 2,000 emails proving Fauci chose his own ego over the facts."

The 4,000 pages of released emails from Fauci's government account offer a window into communications he was having during the early months of the pandemic last year. His Republican critics say that they confirm their worst suspicions of him, with some even claiming they prove he lied under oath.

In an interview with CNN on Friday, Fauci defended his communications and said that his critics have taken them out of context.

"The emails were taken deliberately and egregiously out of context and therefore are profoundly misleading," Dr. Fauci told CNN. "That's just it. There is no doubt about it."

On accusations he lied under oath, Fauci responded, "Are you kidding me?"

Despite Fauci's decades of work at the National Institutes of Health under presidents of both parties, he has been viewed with everything from suspicion to hostility by Republicans, who now see his policy recommendations -- on school closures, crowd limitations, mask mandates and social distancing -- as both wrong and politically damaging to Trump.

Now, the Biden administration's full embrace of Fauci -- even bringing him into the White House in an official role as chief medical adviser -- has given Republicans license to treat him as a political rival, despite Fauci having served as a top Trump adviser.

Critics have latched on to one email in particular, sent to Fauci in April 2020. An executive at EcoHealth Alliance, the global nonprofit that helped fund some research at China's Wuhan Institute of Virology, thanked Fauci for publicly stating that [scientific evidence supports a natural origin](#) for the coronavirus and not a lab release. (The origins of the virus remain unclear.)

Fauci called the Republican criticism "misrepresentation in its greatest form" and labeled their comments "disgraceful" and "slanderous."

"There is not a single thing in there that I could not explain."

But for Trump and other Republicans, it's fodder to go after Fauci as an out-of-touch and potentially compromised bureaucrat.

"The correspondence between Dr. Fauci and China speaks too loudly for anyone to ignore," Trump said on Thursday.

## A concerted effort

Expressing opposition to Fauci has become an easy attack line for conservative Republicans to score points with the party's base.

Members of the House Freedom Caucus, including [Chairman Andy Biggs](#), an Arizona Republican, and [Rep. Jim Jordan](#), an Ohio Republican, have been tweeting that the White House is "protecting" Fauci. And Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene, a controversial Georgia Republican who is known to promote conspiracy theories and racist rhetoric, introduced a bill called the "[Fire Fauci Act](#)" that would reduce Fauci's salary to \$0, which will undoubtedly go nowhere in the Democratic-majority House.

After the email leak, several more House conservatives, such as Reps. Matt Gaetz of Florida and Buddy Carter of Georgia, signed on to the legislation as co-sponsors.

When it comes to the optics of conservative attacks on Fauci, a spokesman for the Democratic campaign committee told CNN that Democrats don't care.

"In four months they've used everything from Dr. Seuss to hamburgers as an attack that has fallen flat. If this is what they want to spend their time on while Americans get back to work and return to normalcy, they can be our guest," the aide said.

member of the Trump administration's Covid-19 task force, and the evolving understanding of how the virus worked and how it originated.

These news channels have also given platforms to Fauci's most ardent critics. Appearing Wednesday on Fox News, former Secretary of State Mike Pompeo claimed Fauci was echoing the Chinese Communist Party line that it's unlikely the coronavirus originated from the lab in Wuhan.

Pompeo said some of Fauci's comments "were the exact same words, the exact same excuses, the exact same theories the Chinese Communist Party has presented for a year now."

*CNN's Tara Subramaniam contributed to this report.*



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