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Democrats block Senate GOP offer of immunity to former Fauci assistant

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Democrats on the Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee on Wednesday blocked a Republican-led effort to grant immunity to a longtime assistant of Dr. [Anthony Fauci](#) as part of the panel's investigation into the former government health leader.

The motion, which required support from two-thirds of the panel's members, failed along party lines 8-7 during a [committee meeting](#).

Only one of the panel's Democratic lawmakers, Sen. [Maggie Hassan](#) (D-N.H.), was present for the vote. The New Hampshire senator voted against the measure, and the rest of the committee's Democratic senators voted no by proxy.

Committee Chair [Rand Paul](#) (R-Ky.) said the unnamed assistant appeared for a deposition last week and refused to answer questions, citing her Fifth Amendment rights.

Paul acknowledged the assistant's right not to answer but added, "her silence does not end this investigation."

The Kentucky lawmaker has long pushed for a full investigation into Fauci and his handling of the COVID-19 pandemic, alleging that the scientist lied to Congress about funding research projects in China that the senator claims contributed to the pandemic's outbreak.

The committee approved a resolution to hold Fauci in contempt last month after the doctor refused to answer Republicans' questions during a hearing before the panel in July. Paul sent the referral to the Justice Department.

Paul said he is looking to question Fauci's former assistant over alleged destruction of records.

"We are here today to remove the obstacles she raised so she can answer the committee questions without any fear of conviction," Paul said ahead of the Wednesday vote.

"Under an immunity order, her testimony, and anything derived from it, cannot be used against her in a criminal case," he continued. "The Fifth Amendment protects her from incriminating herself. Immunity gives her that same protection."

Hassan called for the committee to take more time to consider this "incredibly serious authority," saying that several members recently learned about the proposed action.

"Compelling someone to testify after they have invoked their Fifth Amendment right is something none of us should take lightly," Hassan said.

"Before we take an extraordinary step like this, we should more seriously pursue a good faith bipartisan approach to obtain this information and pursue the work of this committee," she continued. "Because of that, I'm voting against this motion today, and I encourage my colleagues to do the same."

Paul noted that the assistant's testimony would still be "voluntary," noting no one would "compel her testimony."

"I'm not saying that we might never do this, but I do think it is rushed today and that's why I'm going to oppose it," Hassan replied.

Sen. Ron Johnson (R-Wisc.), a member of the panel's majority, expressed his hope that this was "not the final story" on this motion and encouraged the committee's Democratic members to reconsider their vote.

"I don't want to see Anthony Fauci's assistant go to jail," the Wisconsin senator said. "I want the truth, and hopefully folks on your side of the aisle will help us get the truth without, again, harming that particular witness."

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