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OPINION | REVIEW & OUTLOOK

Anthony Fauci and the Wuhan Lab

Emails add to the mystery over U.S. funds for risky research.

By [The Editorial Board](#)

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Dr. Anthony Fauci answers questions during a Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee hearing to discuss the on-going federal response to Covid-19 at the U.S. Capitol on May 11.

PHOTO: GREG NASH - POOL VIA CNP/ZUMA PRESS

Anthony Fauci's email correspondence from the early days of the pandemic have ignited a spate of recriminations over masks and the doctor's celebrity. But what really matters is that some of the emails raise more questions about the origin of Covid-19.

As director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, Dr. Fauci cast doubt on the theory that Covid-19 came from a laboratory like the Wuhan Institute of Virology (WIV). After ruling it out several times, he publicly said last month it is possible, as the hypothesis was getting a second look in media and academia.

 OPINION: POTOMAC WATCH

Reading Dr. Anthony Fauci's Emails



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The emails, released after media freedom-of-information requests, show that Dr. Fauci followed debates about Covid-19's origin from the beginning. In early 2020, the immunologist Kristian G. Andersen wrote to him that the virus had some “unusual features” hinting at manipulation in a lab setting.

Mr. Andersen later published a paper rejecting the lab-leak theory for lack of evidence. And Dr. Fauci began sharing articles arguing in favor of a natural origin while giving advice to scientists writing about the issue. But conclusive proof of a zoonotic origin hasn't emerged, and it's reasonable to ask why Dr. Fauci was slow to accept the possibility of a lab leak.

Of particular interest: From 2014-19, the National Institutes of Health sent \$3.4 million to the WIV through the nonprofit EcoHealth Alliance. “I just wanted to say a personal thankyou on behalf of our staff and collaborators, for publicly standing up and stating that the scientific evidence supports a natural origin,” EcoHealth Alliance chief Peter Daszak gushed to Dr. Fauci in a partly redacted April 2020 email. “Your comments are brave, and coming from your trusted voice, will help dispel the myths being spun around the virus' origins.”

The NIH money was spent on researching bat coronaviruses, and it's likely the WIV conducted gain-of-function research to make them more deadly or infectious. In a February 2020 email, Dr. Fauci sent his deputy Hugh Auchincloss a paper about gain-of-function research on coronaviruses. “Read this paper,” he ordered. “You will have tasks today that must be done.” His deputy commented on the paper and said they would “try to determine if we have any distant ties to this work abroad.”

Dr. Fauci has since said his outfit didn't fund gain-of-function research; the EcoHealth Alliance funding was meant to go to collecting samples. But "I can't guarantee everything that's going on in the Wuhan lab, we can't do that," Dr. Fauci said Wednesday in an interview with NewsNation Now.

Dr. Fauci also said this week that his emails "are really ripe to be taken out of context" and that "you don't really have the full context." That may be true. But it's all the more reason to investigate the U.S. links to WIV and gain-of-function research. The issue relates to Covid's origins but also to the future risks and benefits of such research.

The current Congress doesn't seem interested, but President Biden could help by establishing a fact-finding commission like the Robb-Silberman effort on intelligence failures before the Iraq war. This shouldn't be a "Fire Fauci" partisan exercise. Understanding where the pandemic came from—and what officials knew and when they knew it—can teach valuable lessons and perhaps save lives.

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