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EXCLUSIVE POLICY

White House Pushes for Flavored Vapes Blocked By FDA Head

FDA commissioner blocked new flavors like mango and blueberry despite scientific staff signoff

By Liz Essley Whyte [Follow](#) and Laura Cooper [Follow](#)

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President Trump listens as Marty Makary, commissioner of the Food and Drug Administration, speaks at the White House last year. MARK SCHIEFELBEIN/ASSOCIATED PRESS

The White House is pushing to allow more vape flavors on the market for the first time in years, but Food and Drug Administration Commissioner Marty Makary opposes the move and is blocking the plan, people familiar with the matter said.

A memo from Makary's office prevented the authorization of several flavors including menthol, mango and blueberry from Los Angeles-based vape maker Glas, according to agency documents reviewed by The Wall Street Journal, after FDA scientific reviewers had OK'd the flavors.

“The White House and FDA are completely aligned on expanding the availability of flavored vape products for adults, and adults only,” said White House spokesman Kush Desai. “The Biden administration completely disregarded evidence finding these products are beneficial for adults trying to quit smoking, and the Trump administration remains committed to rectifying this poor policymaking.”

Flavored vapes have long been a source of controversy. Seeing a boom in teen vaping, the government cracked down on kid-friendly flavors in 2020, enacting a ban that left menthol and tobacco on the market.

The FDA in recent years has declined to authorize flavored vapes. Public health advocates have said any flavors harm health and put teenagers on a path to lifelong nicotine use.

Vaping advocates have argued that flavors, especially those such as mint that appeal to adults, can help smokers quit more dangerous cigarettes. They say the FDA’s unwillingness to authorize any flavored products means more demand for a flood of illegal Chinese vapes with flavors such as watermelon and cotton candy.

The second Trump administration has largely been seen as friendly to vaping advocates. Trump vowed to “save vaping” during his presidential campaign.

The February memo from Makary’s office was a setback for Glas, which has been seeking authorization for its vaping device and accompanying flavors for nearly five years. The device includes specific features to thwart youth use and requires users to verify their age via a linked phone app. The FDA authorized the company’s device and a tobacco flavor, but decided to sit on its menthol, mango and blueberry flavors. The memo said the agency needed more time to evaluate the flavors, without going into detail on the science in the application.

The FDA had earlier asked the company to do a study evaluating whether the flavors help adult smokers quit more effectively than tobacco flavor. Glas submitted a 400-person study, which found the flavors helped.

The setback came after Glas had an encouraging meeting in February with an FDA scientific official who profusely apologized for delays and promised news was coming, company representatives said. Shortly after the meeting, the FDA official signed the document recommending authorization of the company's device and flavors, an agency document shows.

“It appears that, for reasons unclear, FDA political leadership has overruled the expert scientific conclusions of its own tobacco scientists,” said Glas attorney Stacy Ehrlich.

Health Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr. told a House subcommittee Thursday that new vape flavors have gotten “caught up in the regulatory process.”

“We are doing everything we can now to get American vapes on the market,” Kennedy said. “People are using those vapes to quit smoking, which is something that we like.”

The FDA in March issued a draft guidance document that hinted in the future the agency could authorize mint, coffee and other vape flavors potentially more appealing to adults—but may avoid authorizing fruit flavors. The agency has previously authorized menthol and tobacco flavors.

“The FDA and the White House have been in lockstep on a public health approach to increase options for current smokers, including flavored vaping products, which is reflected in the FDA's draft guidance issued last month,” said HHS spokesman Rich Danker, who added that the Glas application is still under review.

The White House wanted an American company to get authorized for flavored e-cigarettes, people familiar with the matter said. Makary protested and appealed to staff in the White House, the people said, concerned about the public health effects of authorizing flavors. Tensions linger, people said.

“The holdup quite frankly is Marty Makary,” said Richard Burr, the former North Carolina senator who now leads a pro-vaping group, the Coalition for Smarter Regulation of Nicotine. “We’ve hit a wall.”

Glas chief executive Sean Greenbaum wrote a letter to FDA leaders earlier this month and copied Kennedy and others. The letter said the memo from Makary’s office didn’t align with the scientific staff’s conclusions and asked the FDA to quickly OK its products that remain in “regulatory limbo,” adding “without the need for legal action.”

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