

<https://www.wsj.com/politics/policy/how-zyn-became-all-the-rage-inside-trumpworldincluding-with-rfk-jr-dd3d7105>

POLITICS • POLICY

How Zyn Became All the Rage Inside Trump World—Including With RFK Jr.

Nicotine pouches have gained popularity across the administration, with even key health officials including Kennedy indulging

By [Liz Essley Whyte](#) [Follow](#), [Josh Dawsey](#) [Follow](#) and [C. Ryan Barber](#) [Follow](#)

May 18, 2026 9:00 pm ET

At a lunch this month between President Trump and tobacco executives, the conversation turned to nicotine pouches, one of the hottest products in the market.

The president called his health secretary, Robert F. Kennedy Jr., and in the course of the conversation asked him what pouches he used. Trump took an interest in the product and told officials he wanted to see more of the pouches authorized, according to people familiar with the meeting.

The meeting was a boon for a booming product—one that has gained popularity across the Trump administration, with even key health officials including Kennedy indulging. Not long after that lunch, the Food and Drug Administration unveiled a new policy that allows more of the pouches to be marketed even if they haven't yet received scientific authorization from the agency.

“The only guiding factor behind the Trump administration’s health policymaking is Gold Standard Science,” said Kush Desai, a White House spokesman. “FDA’s regulatory treatment of nicotine pouches is rooted in recent evidence that has found that nicotine pouches can help adults quit smoking.”

Nicotine pouches have become a phenomenon in the past several years, gaining popularity among social-media influencers (aka, self-styled

“Zynfluencers”), gamers and middle-aged men especially. Pouches went from 4% of the oral tobacco and nicotine market in 2019 to 44% five years later, according to a 2025 study published in JAMA Network Open. Philip Morris International, which makes the popular Zyn pouches, told its shareholders its nicotine pouch business grew by 36% in 2025. (A spokesman said it doesn’t pay influencers.)

The pouches, which don’t contain tobacco, offer discrete access to the alertness and calm of nicotine without the known cancer risk of cigarettes, fans say—and without the need for smoke breaks. Public-health experts warn that while pouches are safer than cigarettes and vapes, they still have some cardiovascular effects, can lead to withdrawal symptoms and may be harmful to teen brain development. Companies with authorized U.S. products have pledged to the FDA to avoid advertising to youth.

“These products could be a huge help to addicted smokers who would be interested in switching to them,” said Mitch Zeller, a former top tobacco regulator at the FDA. “On the risk side, the challenge is that these flavors can be appealing to children. And even if these products are less risky than cigarettes, no kids should be initiating on these products.”

The pouches have devotees across the Trump administration.



President Trump looking at a Zyn container. SAUL LOEB/AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE/GETTY IMAGES

Among administration officials and other Trump supporters, some make a joke playing off the motto of a leading coffee chain: Just as “America Runs on Dunkin,” as the corporate slogan goes, the MAGA movement runs on Zyn. Ahead of foreign travel, officials are known to stock up on their nicotine pouches of choice.

The popularity of nicotine pouches took off in conservative circles as the former Fox News host Tucker Carlson publicly extolled Zyn. Appearing in 2023 on comedian Theo Von’s podcast, with a Zyn can on the table beside him, Carlson popped a pouch into his mouth as he said, “You’ve gotta try this product, it’s unbelievable.”

“It will wind you up,” he added, calling the product a “powerful work-enhancer.” But Carlson eventually turned against the brand and started his own, Alp.

In the first year of the Trump administration, the Elon Musk-led Department of Government Efficiency was known as particularly fervent in its taste for nicotine pouches, with cans of Zyn and the rival brand Sesh all over their offices.

At the General Services Administration office, which served as one of the home bases for DOGE, boxes of Sesh cans were available for staff to push them through long days and nights, according to people familiar with the matter.

“People are living on Celsius, Monster and Zyn,” a former administration official said.

Other nicotine pouches include Altria’s on! and Reynolds American’s VELO.



Packages of Velo nicotine pouches. MIKE SEGAR/REUTERS

Kennedy has endorsed the products. “Nicotine pouches are probably the safest way to consume nicotine,” he said in an interview with a Brazilian radio host last year.

Actress Cheryl Hines, Kennedy’s wife, introduced him to nicotine gum during his independent bid for president, when he needed a way to stay awake but coffee was no longer doing the trick, people familiar with the matter said. Hines had used the gum to stay alert on film sets. Kennedy later switched to the pouches and appeared to pop one in during his confirmation hearings, as noted by internet sleuths at the time.

The pouches were readily available during the transition period Kennedy spent at Dr. Mehmet Oz’s Florida mansion, people familiar with the matter said.

Staffers across Kennedy's department also use the pouches, people familiar with the matter said, as they have gained popularity across the administration and in conservative politics. A staffer for Arkansas Gov. Sarah Huckabee Sanders offered a Kennedy aide a tobacco pouch from a custom gold tin at a dinner in Washington this spring.

In the days following Trump's meeting with tobacco executives, the FDA released a new policy that would allow more vaping and pouch products onto retail shelves, even if they haven't been fully authorized by the agency's scientists. The new policy says the FDA won't pursue penalties or other enforcement against products that go to market, as long as they have submitted complete applications for their new products to the agency.

A pilot program launched in September to speed pouch product reviews was going well, the agency said.

Trump had previously asked some in the tobacco industry why they were aggressively pushing products that allegedly cut into smoking use. The answer: The industry has generally pivoted to nicotine products as fewer Americans take up smoking and tobacco.

Watch: The Rise of Zyn: The Oral Nicotine Product Going Viral



Zyn POUPAY JUTHARAT FOR WSJ

C. Ryan Barber is a reporter in The Wall Street Journal's Washington, D.C. bureau, where he covers the Justice Department and legal affairs. Prior to joining the Journal, Ryan reported on the Justice Department and federal law enforcement for Insider and the National Law Journal....



Josh Dawsey is a political investigations and enterprise reporter for The Wall Street Journal. He most recently worked as a political enterprise and investigations reporter for the Washington Post. He joined the Post in 2017 and previously covered the White House. Josh was part of a team of journalist...



Liz Essley Whyte is a health policy reporter in The Wall Street Journal's D.C. bureau, with a special focus on the federal health agencies. Before joining the Journal in 2022, she was an investigative reporter at the Center for Public Integrity, a nonprofit newsroom, where for several years she covered...



Further Reading

Inside Marty Makary's Downfall at the FDA

Trump Is Planning to Fire FDA Commissioner Marty Makary

Trump Pressures FDA Commissioner to Approve Flavored Vapes

The Antiabortion Movement Is Turning on Trump

OPINION **President Trump's Marty Makary Problem**

Videos