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EXCLUSIVE POLICY

# Trump Pressures FDA Commissioner to Approve Flavored Vapes

Marty Makary has been on thin ice with the White House in recent days

By Liz Essley Whyte [Follow](#) and Natalie Andrews [Follow](#)

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An e-cigarette display case in Ypsilanti, Mich. NICK HAGEN FOR WSJ

WASHINGTON—A frustrated President Trump over the weekend upbraided Food and Drug Administration Commissioner Marty Makary for not moving quickly enough to approve flavored vapes and nicotine products, according to people familiar with the discussions.

In a series of weekend calls while in Florida and conversations at the White House on Monday, Trump sought advice from his advisers about Makary and the importance of flavored vaping to young MAGA voters, the people said.

Advisers told the president that Makary has blocked Trump's vaping agenda and described the commissioner as a problem for the administration.

Makary earlier bucked White House preferences by refusing to OK menthol, mango and blueberry vape flavors from Los Angeles manufacturer Glas.

Makary and Trump discussed the FDA commissioner changing course on flavored vapes, people familiar with the matter said, though it wasn't clear if he had decided to do so. Some of the people said Makary was weighing becoming more open to vape flavor approvals. Makary earlier wanted to avoid approving fruit flavors or others potentially appealing to children because he was worried about the public health risks.



Martin Makary, commissioner of the Food and Drug Administration. ERIC LEE/BLOOMBERG NEWS

In his 2024 campaign, Trump promised to “save vaping,” a reversal from his first administration, which cracked down on flavored vaping in response to a boom in teen e-cigarette use in 2020. He also signed a law during his first term that raised the age requirement to buy tobacco products from 18 to 21. The FDA in recent years, including during the Biden administration, has declined to approve flavored vapes. It has approved tobacco and menthol vape flavors.

White House spokesman Kush Desai pointed blame at the Biden administration, and said: “The only factor guiding the Trump administration’s health policymaking is Gold Standard Science, and the FDA

under Commissioner Makary's trailblazing leadership will continue to make evidence-based decisions that rectify the Biden administration's missteps and that are in the best interest of the American people."

Makary has been on thin ice with his superiors in the administration in recent days, according to people familiar with the situation. It isn't an unusual status for him—Robert F. Kennedy Jr., secretary of Health and Human Services, last year considered making Makary a figurehead and installing someone else to run the FDA, The Wall Street Journal previously reported.

The FDA commissioner continues to take heat for recent rejections of rare-disease drugs. "There is corporate spin out there," Makary defended himself on CNBC in an interview that aired Tuesday. "If your drug works, it's going to get approved." Makary in recent weeks has been seeking to repair relationships with some in the pharmaceutical industry, people familiar with the matter said.

Personnel decisions continue to dog Makary, even after the White House last year fired and rehired his vaccines chief. His drugs chief resigned after being accused of seeking a bribe, and a longtime top cancer regulator quit the agency, citing failures in Makary's leadership.

Makary attempted in recent weeks to hire his favorite candidate for the role of chief vaccine regulator at the agency, ophthalmologist and Fox News guest Dr. Houman Hemmati. But the White House and senior health officials nixed that attempt, people familiar with the matter said.

The job is now filled by an acting official since Dr. Vinay Prasad departed at the end of April, in the wake of outrage from rare disease advocates who blamed him for a string of drug rejections and regulatory U-turns. Makary had defended Prasad.

After the February shake-up in Kennedy's department, Makary moved to get the administration to fire a group of senior career and health staffers whom he had clashed with over policy, people familiar with the matter said. White House officials thwarted those efforts because the staffers were seen as allies to the president and Kennedy.

Vaping fans have blamed Makary for what they see as a lack of progress on flavored options. The commissioner overrode a recommendation from his scientific staff in February in withholding approval for the Glas flavors.

Makary is also facing pressure from antiabortion groups for failing to produce a promised safety study of the abortion pill. Susan B. Anthony Pro-Life America President Marjorie Dannenfelser renewed her call Monday for Makary to be fired.

Makary has reached out to at least one critic, people familiar with the matter said. He met recently with Rep. Jake Auchincloss (D., Mass.), who last month questioned in a congressional hearing whether the FDA was putting politics over science.

Auchincloss declined to comment.

### **Corrections & Amplifications**

Marty Makary met recently with Rep. Jake Auchincloss, who last month questioned in a congressional hearing whether the FDA was putting politics over science. An earlier version of this article incorrectly said that they spoke on the phone and that Auchincloss's comments at a congressional hearing came earlier this month. (Corrected on May 5)

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