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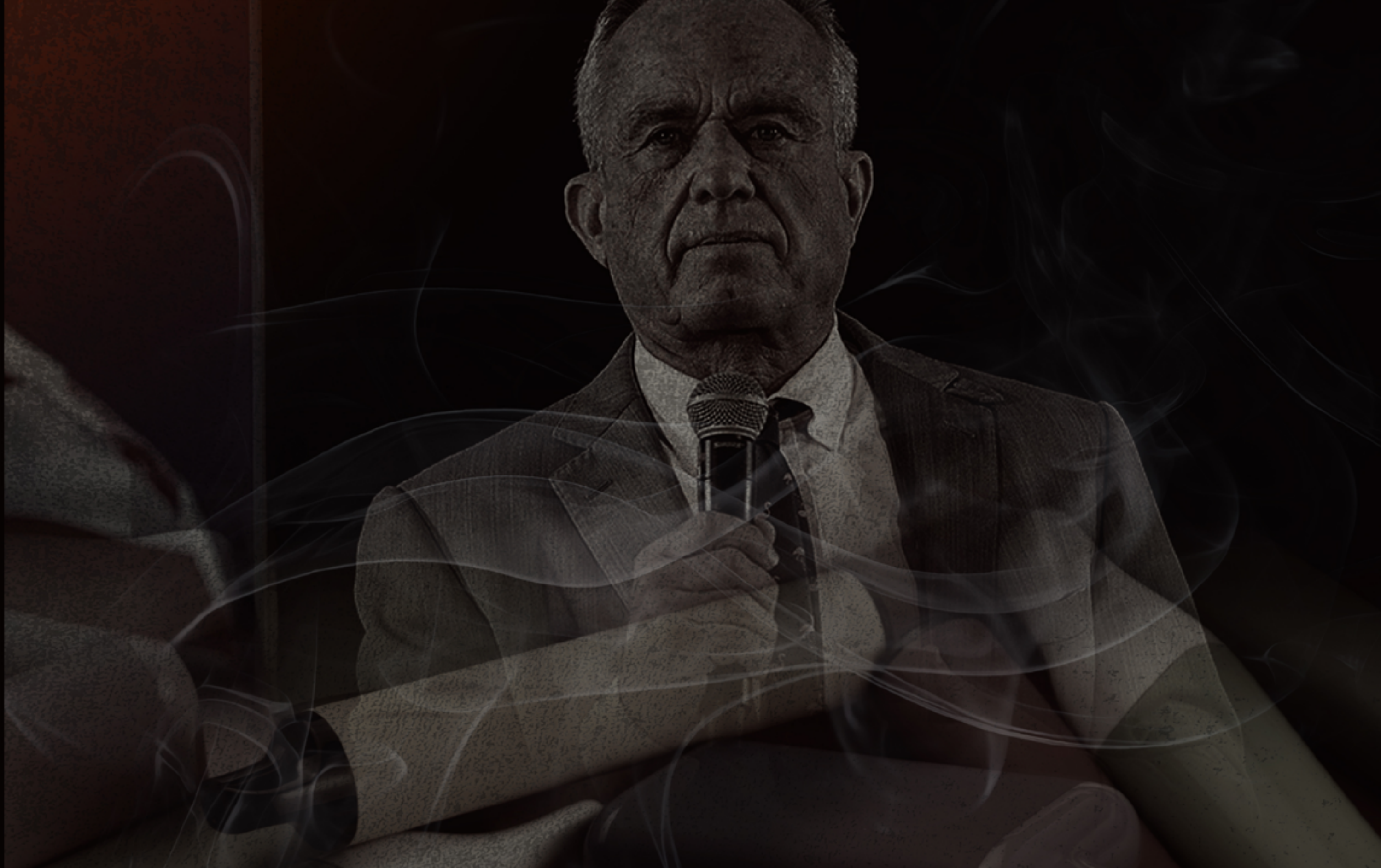

FACT SHEET

Up in Smoke: Trump and RFK Jr. Are Selling Out Public Health to Big Tobacco While Trump Cashes In

Donald Trump and Robert F. Kennedy Jr. built their "Make America Healthy Again" agenda around fighting chronic disease. The reality is that tobacco remains the single leading cause of preventable death in America, killing nearly a half million Americans every year. Although smoking rates have fallen to their lowest level in American history, that public health progress is being dismantled in real time and this administration has spent its term doing the opposite of fighting tobacco use: shutting down the federal government's smoking-cessation programs, firing the officials who enforce tobacco laws, fast-tracking flavored nicotine products, and installing tobacco insiders inside federal health agencies — all while Trump personally profits and Big Tobacco pours tens of millions of dollars into his political operation.

TRUMP IS PERSONALLY PROFITING WHILE TOBACCO COMPANIES BUY ACCESS TO HIS ADMINISTRATION

Tobacco Interests Have Poured More Than $24 Million Into Trump's Political Operation Since Late 2023, and Trump Has Profited Personally From the Pro-Smoking Policies His FDA Is Issuing. Tobacco companies have donated more than $20 million to MAGA Inc., the pro-Trump super PAC, and millions more to Trump's inauguration and his White House ballroom. Trump himself has grown his stock holdings to as much as $1.64 million in Philip Morris this year, along with additional holdings in Altria, and made eight separate purchases of Philip Morris or Altria stock in March 2026 alone worth up to $275,000.

A $5 Million Check Bought a Week's Turnaround on Federal Policy. On April 30, 2026, Reynolds American donated $5 million to MAGA Inc. Two days later, Reynolds and Altria executives had lunch with Trump at his Jupiter, Florida golf club, where they complained about FDA's regulation of e-cigarettes, and Trump called RFK Jr. and CMS Administrator Mehmet Oz on the spot to voice his displeasure. Less than a week later, the FDA issued guidance clearing the way for flavored vapes to hit the market.

Senate Democrats Are Now Demanding Answers From the Tobacco Companies About Their Donations And Communications With Trump. In June 2026, six Democratic senators sent letters to the CEOs of Altria and Reynolds American demanding a full accounting of their donations and communications with the administration, writing that the money "appears to have enabled tobacco manufacturers to circumvent federal law and unlawfully sell unauthorized e-cigarettes." As one senator put it directly to the companies: "this was a lucrative payday after years of unsuccessful legislative and regulatory efforts to weaken federal tobacco oversight."

Wall Street Has Noticed Exactly What's Happening. Major tobacco stocks hit all-time highs on May 14, 2026 — six days after the FDA's guidance opened the door to flavored vapes. Since Trump took office, Philip Morris stock is up roughly 57 percent, Altria is up about 50 percent, and British American Tobacco is up over 80 percent. Goldman Sachs analysts called the FDA's May guidance "very positive" for Philip Morris, while Barclays called it good news for Juul, which had donated $1 million to MAGA Inc. in November.

"THE GREATEST GIFT TO THE TOBACCO INDUSTRY IN THE LAST HALF CENTURY": THE TRUMP ADMINISTRATION GUTTED THE GOVERNMENT'S ANTI-SMOKING PROGRAMS

The CDC's Most Successful Anti-Smoking Campaign in History Has Been Dark for Nearly a Year. The CDC's 14-year "Tips From Former Smokers" campaign — credited with driving more than 16 million quit attempts and saving an estimated $7.3 billion in health care costs during its first six years alone, and, by the CDC's own estimate, preventing 129,100 premature deaths — went dark in September 2025 after the CDC's Office on Smoking and Health was shut down and its roughly 120 staff laid off. Since then, calls to 1-800-QUIT-NOW lines have fallen by 45 percent in Texas, 25 percent in California, and 18 percent in New York, and Virginia's quitline enrollment fell by half between October 2025 and February 2026. A former OSH director called the cuts "the greatest gift to the tobacco industry in the last half century."

Programs Aimed at Keeping Kids From Vaping in the First Place Were Gutted. The FDA's "Real Cost" campaign, credited with keeping roughly 444,000 young people from starting to vape, lost most of its staff, and the National Youth Tobacco Survey — the government's main tool for tracking teen tobacco use trends — is not expected to continue past this year. The NIH canceled tobacco-related research grants, including a $14 million award studying how to keep LGBTQ, Black, and other at-risk youth from vaping, and the cuts reached all the way down to individual schools: in West Virginia, which has the highest teen vaping rate in the country, a program that cost the state less than $3,000 a year lost its funding entirely.

The FDA's Top Tobacco Regulator Was Pushed Out for Doing His Job. FDA tobacco director Brian King, who had ordered thousands of companies to pull flavored e-cigarettes from shelves and overseen teen vaping falling to a 10-year low, was placed on administrative leave April 1, 2025, alongside dozens of his staff and the FDA's entire press office. King, now at the Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids, has called the scale of tobacco money flowing through the administration "unprecedented and problematic."

The FDA Fired the People Whose Entire Job Was Catching Stores That Sell Tobacco to Minors. In April 2025, the FDA laid off the entire division responsible for fining retailers who illegally sell tobacco to minors, then had to beg some of those same employees to come back on a temporary basis to keep the operation from collapsing entirely. A former FDA tobacco chief called it "a prescription for allowing retailers to roll the dice" and sell to minors with less concern that they'll ever be caught.

FRUITY VAPES AND ZYN POUCHES: TRUMP'S FDA IS FAST TRACKING TOBACCO PRODUCTS THAT APPEAL TO KIDS

Trump Withdrew A Menthol Cigarette Ban Two Days Into His Second Term, Putting Hundreds Of Thousands Of Lives At Risk. The FDA under Biden spent years developing a rule banning menthol in cigarettes and flavored cigars, sending a final rule to the White House in October 2023 that was never approved. Two days after Trump's second inauguration, his FDA withdrew the proposed rule entirely. Public health researchers estimated a ban could have saved up to 654,000 lives over 40 years, including 255,000 Black lives. Menthol cigarettes are used by more than half of kids who smoke and by over 83 percent of Black smokers, compared to about 30 percent of white smokers, a disparity the CDC attributes to decades of targeted marketing.

The FDA Blew Past Its Scientific Review Process to Approve Flavored Vapes, Then Quietly Let Unapproved Products Off the Hook. Without normal rulemaking, the FDA granted its first-ever authorization for fruit-flavored vapes in May 2026, a decision opposed by the American Academy of Pediatrics. The same guidance said the FDA would not prioritize enforcement against certain vapes and nicotine pouches that had applied for authorization but not yet completed review, even as it separately broadened enforcement against fully unauthorized products. A former FDA tobacco chief called the carve-out "a get-out-of-jail-free card" for companies that broke the law, saying the policy was "illegal from a process standpoint and just substantively flawed."

FDA Commissioner Marty Makary And Senior Health Officials Resigned in Protest Rather Than Sign Off On Fruit-Flavored Vapes. FDA Commissioner Marty Makary resigned May 12, 2026, before he could be fired by Trump, telling associates he couldn't defend a policy he didn't believe in. The next day RFK Jr.'s chief spokesman, Rich Danker, resigned too, warning in his letter that flavored vapes "would appeal to children and expose them to nicotine addiction, lung damage, and higher risk of cancer."

The FDA Authorized Zyn to Market Itself as Safer Than Cigarettes After the Pouches Became a Fixture In Trump's Inner Circle. In June, the FDA authorized 20 Zyn products to claim lower risk of cancer, heart disease, and stroke than cigarettes. Trump had personally called Kennedy to learn more about the product after his tobacco-executive lunch, and Zyn was reportedly "readily available" at CMS Administrator Mehmet Oz's home during a visit from Kennedy. Several of RFK's staffers are known users, part of a broader trend of ZYN becoming all the rage in Trump's orbit.

RFK JR. HAS GONE SILENT ON THE NATION'S LEADING CAUSE OF PREVENTABLE DEATH

Kennedy's Signature MAHA Report Doesn't Mention Smoking or Cigarettes Once, and He Couldn't Answer a Basic Question About It Under Oath. RFK Jr.'s much-hyped Make America Health Again report breaks with decades of public health practice and doesn't mention tobacco or the public health impact of smoking once, despite Kennedy building his entire health agenda around fighting chronic disease. When Sen. Dick Durbin asked Kennedy during a May 2025 budget hearing to name the "No. 1 cause of preventable death in America today," Kennedy replied, "I'm not sure what you're talking about."

RFK Has Repeatedly Downplayed Nicotine Risks. Kennedy has called nicotine pouches "probably the safest way to consume nicotine" and was seen appearing to place one in his mouth during his own confirmation hearing. RFK also told Congress this spring that "vapes reduce cigarette tobacco smoking, which is much worse."

RFK's CDC Confirms: Smoking Is The Leading Cause Of Preventable Death – Killing Almost Half A Million Americans Every Year. Smoking remains the leading cause of preventable death and disease in the United States, killing roughly 490,000 Americans every year. The smoking rate has fallen below 10 percent for the first time in American history, but that public health progress is being dismantled in real time — by the same administration whose leader is personally profiting from doing so.

"LETTING THE FOX INTO THE HENHOUSE": TOBACCO INSIDERS HAVE MOVED INTO KEY ADMINISTRATION POSITIONS

A Former Tobacco Executive Now Sits Inside CDC Leadership. In March 2026, the CDC named Stephen Sayle — who spent 2017-2018 as U.S. vice president of corporate affairs at a subsidiary of

British tobacco giant Imperial Brands — as deputy director for legislative affairs, a move a former OSH director called "letting the fox into the henhouse with open arms."

Trump's Chief of Staff Is A Former Tobacco Lobbyist And Her Daughter Is Now A Partner At A Firm Representing The Industry. At the White House, Trump's chief of staff, Susie Wiles previously lobbied on behalf of Swisher International. The tobacco company has continued lobbying the administration every quarter since she became chief of staff, including through Continental Strategy, a firm where Wiles' daughter, Katie, is a partner. Katie Wiles was promoted to partner at the firm the day after her mother's chief of staff appointment was announced.

A GOP Farm Bill Amendment Would Bring Back Tobacco Subsidies Eliminated Two Decades Ago. An amendment to the 2026 farm bill, introduced by Rep. David Rouzer (R-N.C.), would make tobacco farmers eligible for USDA disaster aid for the first time since the federal tobacco program ended in 2004, returning the federal government to a role of "subsidizing a product that kills half a million Americans every year," per one tobacco-control attorney.