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New Reporting Exposes Political Influence Behind “Big Kratom” Campaign Against 7-OH

HART: “This isn’t about public health, it’s about power, money, and market control.”

WASHINGTON, D.C. - New reporting from [Politico](#) and [Forbes](#) continue to reveal that the growing campaign against 7-OH is being driven less by science and more by political influence and industry money. “Big Kratom,” led by the American Kratom Association (AKA) and the Global Kratom Coalition (GKC), is working to suppress 7-OH because it threatens their billion-dollar grip on the market.

GKC and AKA, whose corporate members dominated the market until 7-OH came along, have used paid lobbyists, paid academics, paid political groups and even paid protesters to distort science, sway regulators, and eliminate any competition to their multibillion-dollar business.

Botanic Tonics, maker of [Feel Free](#), donated \$500,000 in March to MAHA PAC, a political effort tied to Health and Human Services Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr. This is the same Botanic Tonics founded by JW Ross, [the largest funder of the GKC](#).

The contribution, the largest in the past year, came just as federal scrutiny intensified on 7-OH, raising new questions about whether industry insiders are using political spending to shape enforcement in ways that protect their market share.

U.S. Secretary of Homeland Security Markwayne Mullin, who holds financial stakes in Botanic Tonics, [stood alongside federal officials](#) when he was a U.S. Senator and [advocated for federal action targeting 7-OH](#), including pushing for the Drug Enforcement Administration to evaluate the substance for potential scheduling, further blurring the line between industry interests and federal enforcement priorities.

“This isn’t about public health, it’s about power, money, and market control,” said Jeff Smith, National Policy Director for HART. “We are seeing political influence and industry pressure converge around a single narrative: make 7-OH the scapegoat.”

The real public-health danger is coming from unregulated products like [Feel Free](#), which combines kratom and kava into an addictive cocktail that [has caused severe physical and emotional harm to consumers](#), including intense withdrawal, depression, skin deterioration, and emotional instability.

The FDA abandoned its case against Feel Free but continues to pursue 7-OH, despite no FDA-reported deaths, fueling concerns that the politics and powerful relationships are outweighing real consumer protection.

7-OH is not a synthetic drug or a novel chemical, it is a bio-identical compound naturally found in the kratom plant. Yet it has become the focal point of aggressive lobbying and public messaging campaigns.

HART points to growing evidence that this narrative is being shaped not by science, but by competitive pressure within the kratom industry itself.

“7-OH represents something the legacy kratom market has long resisted: standardization, consistency, and accountability,” Smith said. “That makes it a threat, not a danger.”

HART also raised concerns about financial relationships shaping the scientific and regulatory debate around kratom and 7-OH.

Recent disclosures show:

- Industry funding directed toward academic research tied to regulatory advisory roles
- Longstanding financial relationships between kratom trade groups and consulting firms producing “independent” analyses.
- A network of aligned organizations advancing similar policy outcomes while presenting themselves as neutral actors

“This is a familiar playbook,” Smith added. “Control the science, control the narrative, and eliminate competition.”

The overlap between rising political funding tied to MAHA-aligned efforts and escalating attacks on 7-OH is raising red flags for consumer advocates.

“If ‘Make America Healthy Again’ is the goal, then policies should be driven by data, not by who has the biggest lobbying budget,” Smith said.

HART continues to advocate for a commonsense regulatory framework for kratom and its naturally occurring compounds, including 7-OH, focused on:

- Age restrictions
- Clear labeling and dosing standards
- Third-party testing and manufacturing controls
- Consumer transparency

“Americans deserve better than misinformation campaigns and backroom influence,” Smith said. “They deserve policies rooted in science, transparency, and consumer safety, not scapegoating.”

About the Holistic Alternative Recovery Trust (HART)

The Holistic Alternative Recovery Trust (HART) is a national nonprofit dedicated to promoting evidence-based, transparent policy around natural recovery compounds. HART supports responsible regulation that protects consumers while encouraging innovation in safe, science-driven alternatives to traditional pharmaceuticals.

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