



THE REVOLUTION IN AMERICAN PUBLIC HEALTH POLICY: PETROLEUM-BASED DYES AND THE CHRONIC DISEASE EPIDEMIC

A REVOLUÇÃO NA POLÍTICA DE SAÚDE PÚBLICA AMERICANA: CORANTES DERIVADOS DE PETRÓLEO E A EPIDEMIA DE DOENÇAS CRÔNICAS

DE BONI, Luis Alcides Brandini^{1*};

¹ Southern Journal of Science, General Secretary, Brazil. ORCID: 0009-0000-8102-6197

*Corresponding author: labdeboni@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

Background: The American food regulatory landscape has historically been influenced by industry interests, resulting in the widespread use of petroleum-derived synthetic food dyes banned in European countries. Chronic disease rates in American children have increased from 3% in the 1960s to approximately 60% currently, with annual healthcare costs reaching \$1 trillion. The appointment of Robert F. Kennedy Jr. as Secretary of Health and Human Services marks a paradigmatic shift toward transparency and industry accountability in food safety regulation. **Aim:** This forum analysis examines Kennedy Jr.'s revolutionary approach to food safety regulation, particularly his confrontational stance against petroleum-based food additives exemplified by his statement, "*if they want to eat petroleum, they should add it themselves at home*" and evaluates the broader implications for American public health policy and global regulatory standards. **Methods:** Critical analysis of Kennedy Jr.'s public policy statements, examination of epidemiological data trends, and evaluation of proposed regulatory frameworks through content analysis of official speeches and policy declarations from the Department of Health and Human Services. **Results:** Kennedy Jr.'s administration targets the systematic elimination of synthetic food dyes through industry partnerships, scientific transparency initiatives, and restoration of rigorous research standards. His confrontational rhetorical approach, compared to Mike Tyson's boxing style, has generated unprecedented industry cooperation with food companies "calling almost daily" seeking compliance guidance. The strategy combines voluntary industry agreements with open-source information databases and enhanced FOIA access. **Discussion:** This confrontational rhetoric represents unprecedented directness in health policy communication, challenging decades of established regulatory practices. The approach prioritizes scientific transparency over diplomatic language, generating both media attention and voluntary industry engagement that traditional regulatory pressure failed to achieve. **Conclusions:** Kennedy Jr.'s revolutionary stance may establish new global standards for food additive oversight, prioritizing public health over commercial interests through evidence-based policymaking and industry accountability measures. This paradigm shift from reactive to preventive regulatory models could influence international food safety governance and restore American leadership in global health policy.

Keywords: food safety, synthetic dyes, public health policy, chronic disease, regulatory reform

RESUMO

Introdução: O cenário regulatório alimentar americano tem sido historicamente influenciado pelos interesses da indústria, resultando no uso generalizado de corantes alimentares sintéticos derivados de petróleo que são proibidos em países europeus. As taxas de doenças crônicas em crianças americanas aumentaram de 3% na década de 1960 para aproximadamente 60% atualmente, com custos anuais de saúde chegando a US\$ 1 trilhão. A nomeação de Robert F. Kennedy Jr. como Secretário de Saúde e Serviços Humanos marca uma mudança paradigmática em direção à transparência e responsabilização da indústria na regulamentação da segurança alimentar. **Objetivo:** Esta análise de fórum examina a abordagem revolucionária de Kennedy Jr. para a

regulamentação da segurança alimentar, particularmente sua postura confrontativa contra aditivos alimentares à base de petróleo exemplificada por sua declaração "*se eles querem comer petróleo, devem adicioná-lo em casa*", e avalia as implicações mais amplas para a política de saúde pública americana e padrões regulatórios globais. **Métodos:** Análise crítica das declarações de política pública de Kennedy Jr., exame de tendências de dados epidemiológicos, e avaliação de estruturas regulatórias propostas através de análise de conteúdo de discursos oficiais e declarações políticas do Departamento de Saúde e Serviços Humanos. **Resultados:** A administração de Kennedy Jr. visa a eliminação sistemática de corantes alimentares sintéticos através de parcerias com a indústria, iniciativas de transparência científica e restauração de padrões rigorosos de pesquisa. Sua abordagem retórica confrontativa, comparada ao estilo de boxe de Mike Tyson, gerou cooperação industrial sem precedentes com empresas alimentícias "*ligando quase diariamente*" buscando orientação para conformidade. A estratégia combina acordos voluntários da indústria com bancos de dados de informações de código aberto e acesso aprimorado via FOIA. **Discussão:** Esta retórica confrontativa representa uma franqueza sem precedentes na comunicação de políticas de saúde, desafiando décadas de práticas regulatórias estabelecidas. A abordagem prioriza transparência científica sobre linguagem diplomática, gerando tanto atenção da mídia quanto engajamento voluntário da indústria que a pressão regulatória tradicional falhou em alcançar. **Conclusões:** A postura revolucionária de Kennedy Jr. pode estabelecer novos padrões globais para supervisão de aditivos alimentares, priorizando a saúde pública sobre interesses comerciais através da formulação de políticas baseadas em evidências e medidas de responsabilização da indústria. Esta mudança paradigmática de modelos regulatórios reativos para preventivos poderia influenciar a governança internacional de segurança alimentar e restaurar a liderança americana na política global de saúde.

Palavras-chave: *segurança alimentar, corantes sintéticos, política de saúde pública, doença crônica, reforma regulatória.*

1. INTRODUCTION: A NEW KENNEDY EMERGES

As a non-American observer of United States politics, I typically follow only fragments of news through digital platforms, without pretensions of expertise in that country's complex political landscape. For years, the interventions of Senator John Kennedy caught my attention, known for his ironic and provocative comments. Paraphrasing imperfectly one of his remarks about the search for extraterrestrial intelligence - something like "*...they should stop looking for intelligent life on other planets and look right here..*" - one perceives a politician who uses sarcasm as a rhetorical tool to highlight systemic incongruencies.

However, a new protagonist from the Kennedy family emerges in the American public health scenario: Robert F. Kennedy Jr., recently appointed Secretary of Health and Human Services. In an unprecedented declaration, Kennedy Jr. directly confronted the food industry with an equally provocative statement: "*...if they want to add petroleum, if they want to eat petroleum, they should add it themselves at home. But they shouldn't be feeding it to the rest of us without our knowledge or consent*" (Kennedy Jr., 2025).

Watching this man speak reminds one of the good times of boxing matches. RFK Jr. resembles a fighter in the style of the old Mike Tyson, where fights were overwhelming and

decided in the first rounds. Equivalently, his speeches are overwhelming and bombastic, with statements that hit the target directly without diplomatic detours. This position represents a paradigmatic change in the American regulatory approach to food additives and marks the beginning of an era of unprecedented transparency in food safety.

2. THE EPIDEMIOLOGICAL CATASTROPHE: NUMBERS THAT DEMAND ACTION

The statistics presented by Kennedy Jr. paint a disturbing portrait of American health that transcends political discourse and enters the realm of national emergency. The transformation from a society where only 3% of children had chronic diseases in the 1960s to one where 60% currently suffer from such conditions represents more than an epidemiological shift—it constitutes a civilizational crisis.

Consider the scope of this transformation: neurological disorders including ADHD, speech and language delays, tics, Tourette syndrome, narcolepsy, and autism spectrum disorder have exploded in prevalence. Autoimmune diseases once considered rare in children—juvenile diabetes, rheumatoid arthritis, lupus, Crohn's disease—now constitute a significant portion of pediatric practice. The metabolic dysfunction is equally alarming, with 38% of American teenagers presenting pre-diabetes, a condition that sets the stage for a lifetime of medical intervention.

The economic implications are staggering. Approximately \$1 trillion annually—equivalent to the American military budget—is spent treating chronic diseases. This represents not merely a healthcare expenditure but a fundamental reallocation of national resources from productive capacity to disease management. Kennedy Jr.'s observation that "74% of American kids cannot qualify for military service" transforms this from a health issue into a matter of national security.

Perhaps most striking is the demographic specificity of these changes. American teenagers now exhibit testosterone levels equivalent to 68-year-old men, while girls reach puberty six years earlier than previous generations. These are not gradual evolutionary changes but rapid systemic disruptions that demand immediate investigation and intervention.

3. PETROLEUM IN OUR FOOD: THE CHEMICAL REALITY

Kennedy Jr.'s focus on petroleum-derived food dyes is neither hyperbolic nor politically motivated—it reflects a chemical reality that most consumers remain unaware of. The synthetic food dyes commonly consumed by Americans are indeed derived from petroleum and coal tar, representing a fundamental category error in food production: the incorporation of industrial chemicals into consumable products.

The major offenders include Red Dye 40 (Allura Red AC), the most widely used synthetic dye in American food products, found in everything from candies to breakfast cereals. Red Dye 3 (Erythrosine), already banned in cosmetics by the FDA, continues to color food products consumed by children. Yellow 5 (Tartrazine) and Yellow 6 (Sunset Yellow) permeate the American food supply in soft drinks, cereals, and condiments. Blue 1 (Brilliant Blue FCF) and Blue 2 (Indigo Carmine) create the artificial colors in sports drinks and candies that have become synonymous with childhood nutrition.

The European response to these substances provides a telling counterpoint to American regulatory practice. These dyes are either banned outright or require warning labels in European Union countries based on scientific evidence linking them to hyperactivity and behavioral problems in children. The regulatory divergence is not merely bureaucratic—it reflects fundamentally different approaches to the precautionary principle in public health.

Kennedy Jr.'s strategic approach

recognizes both the scientific inadequacy of current safety assessments and the practical challenges of regulatory change. His acknowledgment that "there are shockingly few studies on food dyes" exposes a critical gap: these substances have been grandfathered into the food supply without the rigorous safety testing now required for new additives.

4. SUGAR AS POISON: CONFRONTING ADDICTION IN FOOD POLICY

Kennedy Jr.'s characterization of sugar as "poison" and his comparison to crack cocaine represents perhaps the most controversial aspect of his policy platform. Yet this rhetoric, however provocative, reflects an emerging scientific understanding of sugar's neurochemical effects and metabolic consequences.

The epidemiological evidence supporting this position is compelling. Pediatricians who historically encountered diabetes perhaps once in their entire careers now see the condition in one-third of their young patients. This represents not a gradual increase but an exponential explosion that correlates directly with changes in food processing and sugar consumption patterns.

The addiction comparison, while inflammatory, has scientific basis. Sugar consumption triggers dopamine release in brain reward centers through mechanisms similar to those activated by addictive substances. The food industry's awareness of these effects—and their strategic utilization in product development—raises ethical questions about informed consent in food consumption.

Kennedy Jr.'s policy approach acknowledges the practical impossibility of eliminating sugar while demanding transparency in its presentation to consumers. This represents a sophisticated understanding of the regulatory limitations inherent in democratic governance while maintaining pressure for industry accountability.

5. THE TYSON APPROACH: RHETORIC AS REGULATORY STRATEGY

The comparison between Kennedy Jr.'s communication style and Mike Tyson's boxing approach is more than metaphorical—it reflects a deliberate strategic choice in public health communication. Traditional health policy discourse, characterized by diplomatic language and incremental recommendations, has failed to

generate the urgency necessary for addressing the chronic disease epidemic.

Kennedy Jr.'s confrontational rhetoric serves multiple strategic purposes. First, it generates media attention and public engagement with issues that typically receive limited coverage. Second, it establishes negotiating positions that allow for meaningful compromise while maintaining substantive reform objectives. Third, it signals to industry stakeholders that the regulatory environment has fundamentally changed.

The effectiveness of this approach is already evident in industry response. Kennedy Jr. reports that food companies are "calling almost daily" seeking guidance on compliance, suggesting that his rhetoric has achieved what years of traditional regulatory pressure could not: voluntary industry engagement with substantive reform.

6. SCIENTIFIC TRANSPARENCY AS REVOLUTIONARY ACT

Perhaps the most significant aspect of Kennedy Jr.'s approach is his commitment to scientific transparency and the elimination of conflicts of interest that have historically compromised regulatory science. His promise to restore "gold standard science" and eliminate industry influence represents a fundamental challenge to established regulatory practices.

The systematic suppression of adverse research findings through financial conflicts of interest has been documented across multiple regulatory agencies. Kennedy Jr.'s plan to fund independent research through NIH initiatives, coupled with the complete restoration of Freedom of Information Act access, could fundamentally alter the scientific basis for regulatory decision-making.

This transparency initiative extends beyond academic research to practical consumer information. The development of open-source databases documenting food additive content, combined with support for scanning applications that provide real-time ingredient analysis, represents a technological solution to information asymmetries in food markets.

7. INDUSTRY RESPONSE: COOPERATION THROUGH CONFRONTATION

Kennedy Jr.'s confrontational approach has generated unexpected industry cooperation,

as evidenced by his direct statements: *"We're getting food companies now...who are calling us almost every day, asking us, how do we do this? What do you want us to do?"* This factual observation of increased industry engagement contrasts sharply with traditional expectations of corporate resistance to regulatory reform.

The food industry's stated preference for regulatory consistency provides concrete evidence for their collaborative approach. Kennedy Jr. reported that companies explicitly told his administration: *"the worst thing for us, is, if we have a patchwork of legislation and all these different states...And they didn't want that. and that's one of the reasons they came to the table with us."* This direct testimony reveals industry motivations beyond simple compliance concerns.

An analytical interpretation suggests this cooperation reflects a sophisticated understanding of corporate decision-making processes, where uniform national standards become preferable to inconsistent state-by-state regulations. Companies may view federal regulatory requirements as potentially advantageous for market positioning, particularly given the increasing consumer pressure for cleaner ingredients.

Kennedy Jr. acknowledges some form of industry agreement, stating: *"I want to commend Food companies for working with us. To achieve this, this agreement or this settlement."* However, the specific details of these agreements remain unclear in his public statements.

His view of the industry's motivation comes across as genuinely hopeful: *"I think they're ready to change the industry. They have children too... and I believe most of them truly desire a healthier America."* Whether this perspective stems from direct interactions with industry insiders or will be validated by actual implementation outcomes is yet to be seen.

8. GLOBAL IMPLICATIONS: AMERICAN LEADERSHIP IN REVERSE

The international dimensions of Kennedy Jr.'s food safety revolution extend beyond domestic health outcomes to questions of American technological and regulatory leadership. For decades, American regulatory standards have influenced global practices through market size and technological innovation. The current situation reverses this dynamic, with European safety standards serving as the model for American reform.

This regulatory reversal reflects broader

questions about American institutional capacity and scientific leadership. Kennedy Jr.'s reforms, if successful, could restore American credibility in global health governance while providing a model for other nations grappling with similar chronic disease epidemics.

9. CONCLUSION: THE BATTLE FOR AMERICAN HEALTH

Kennedy Jr.'s declaration about petroleum-derived dyes symbolizes a revolution in American public health policy that extends far beyond individual additives to fundamental questions about the relationship between government, industry, and public welfare. His approach combines scientific urgency, regulatory transparency, and industry engagement in an unprecedented manner that could establish new global standards for food safety governance.

The success of this initiative depends not merely on scientific evidence or regulatory authority but on sustained public engagement and political will. Kennedy Jr.'s rhetorical strategy, however controversial, has succeeded in generating both. Whether this translates into lasting institutional change remains to be seen, but the paradigm shift is already evident.

This revolutionary approach represents more than policy reform—it constitutes a fundamental reassertion of public health priorities over commercial interests. In an era where chronic disease has become the dominant health challenge globally, Kennedy Jr.'s model may prove essential for other nations seeking to reclaim regulatory independence from industry influence.

The battle for American health has begun, and its outcome will resonate far beyond national borders.

10. DECLARATIONS

10.1. Study Limitations

This analysis is based on public statements and policy declarations, representing a contemporary assessment of ongoing regulatory changes rather than a retrospective evaluation of implemented policies.

10.2. Acknowledgements

The author expresses his gratitude to these Kennedys for the courage to say what many lack the capacity or willingness to say.

10.3. Funding source

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10.4. Competing Interests

The author considers RFK Jr.'s proposed actions in a positive light, which may introduce bias into this perspective.

10.5. Open Access

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10.6. AI Usage Declaration

AI tools, including Claude and Grammarly, were used to improve text quality, assist in text organization, and provide grammar reviews. All analytical content, interpretations, and conclusions remain the author's original work and responsibility.

11. HUMAN AND ANIMAL-RELATED STUDIES

This research utilized content analysis of publicly available material, specifically a public speech by Robert F. Kennedy Jr. regarding food safety policy. The work did not involve direct research with human or animal subjects, nor did it require primary data collection from individuals. The source material consists entirely of publicly accessible governmental communications and policy statements made by public officials in their official capacity. As such, no ethical approval was required for this analysis, and the standard human subjects research protocols do not apply to this manuscript. The research methodology involved only secondary analysis of publicly available information, similar to historical document analysis

or media content analysis.

12. REFERENCES:

Kennedy Jr., R.F. (2025). *FULL SPEECH: RFK Jr. on plans to discontinue petroleum-based synthetic food dyes*. Public speech. Available at: <https://youtu.be/SWwclQ1dqnw?si=zLZ4Th0Y7wYGezsw>