



CALIFORNIA, 30TH DISTRICT

CONGRESSMAN BRAD SHERMAN

July 16, 2018

The Honorable Mike Pompeo  
Secretary  
U.S. Department of State  
2201 C Street, NW  
Washington, D.C. 20520

Dear Secretary Pompeo,

When the United States engages in multilateral global health efforts, we should stand up for people, not profits. We should not be in the business of prioritizing the interests of the infant formula industry over the dissemination of scientific information regarding the benefits of breastfeeding.

On July 8, the *New York Times* reported that the American delegation to the World Health Assembly sought to block the introduction of a resolution promoting breastfeeding. The resolution's intended sponsor, Ecuador, was threatened with "punishing trade measures" and the "withdraw[al of] crucial military aid."<sup>1</sup> It has also been reported that our Ambassador in Quito said the Administration might end military assistance in northern Ecuador if the resolution was introduced.<sup>2</sup>

Only after Russia offered a revised resolution did the United States back down. However, the resolution that has been adopted is both weaker than the originally drafted version and previous resolutions on the same topic.

At a recent House Foreign Affairs Committee hearing, I asked the Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs' Acting Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary to answer my simple questions about this incident. But when I asked if Ecuador would be "free to go forward," he responded that "I am not here to guarantee that."

Although breastfeeding is not an option for all mothers, and I fully understand the value of infant formula as a solution, the science is clear: breastfeeding benefits both babies and their mothers. In fact, medical studies have concluded that children who are breastfed for longer periods have a lower risk of infection and mortality.<sup>3</sup> Additionally, breastfeeding also benefits mothers by preventing breast cancer and increases the likelihood of sufficient intervals between pregnancies.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/07/08/health/world-health-breastfeeding-ecuador-trump.html>

<sup>2</sup> *Id.*

<sup>3</sup> [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736\(16\)00210-5/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(16)00210-5/fulltext)

<sup>4</sup> *Id.*

Recognizing breastfeeding as an important contributor to infant and maternal health has been a longstanding policy for the United States. In a "Blueprint for Action on Breastfeeding," David Satcher, who went on to serve as President George W. Bush's Surgeon General, wrote "breastfeeding is one of the most important contributors to infant health. Breastfeeding provides a range of benefits for the infant's growth, immunity, and development."<sup>5</sup>

I am writing to ask for additional information about this incident and may be submitting corresponding FOIA requests. I would appreciate your prompt response to the following inquiries:

1. Was Ecuador threatened over its potential introduction of the resolution by the State Department or any other U.S. government agency? Did Ambassador Chapman, or any other official, "suggest" or otherwise imply economic or military cooperation consequences if the resolution was introduced?
2. After Ecuador opted to not introduce the resolution, did the United States pressure or encourage other countries to not introduce, or to revise the language of, any resolutions relating to breastfeeding?
3. Was the State Department in contact with representatives of any infant formula company in advance of the World Health Assembly? Is the State Department aware of any Assembly-related contacts with such companies by any other U.S. government agencies or White House officials? If so, please describe the nature of these contacts.
4. Will you commit to support efforts to promote breastfeeding at the World Health Assembly? Specifically, if an identical resolution to the one originally proposed by Ecuador is offered at next year's Assembly, will the United States support it?

Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,



BRAD SHERMAN  
Member of Congress

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<sup>5</sup><https://webarchive.library.unt.edu/eot2008/20081105071313/http://www.womenshealth.gov//archive/breastfeeding/programs/blueprints/bluprntbk2.pdf>