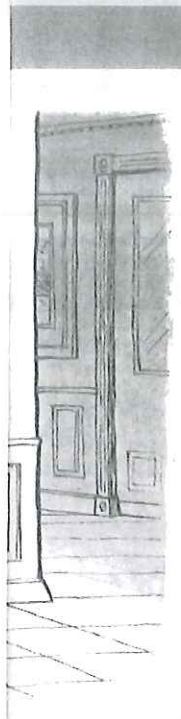


POINT OF VIEW | THREATS OVER BREASTFEEDING

Outrageous move by US delegates

BY CHRISTINA JURIS BENNETT AND BECKY MANNEL



(GA.) CHRONICLE

The New York Times published a front-page article last week detailing how our American delegation to the World Health Assembly, affiliated with the United Nations, threatened other countries with cutting military aid and imposing trade sanctions over the issue of breastfeeding. How is breastfeeding so threatening to our government that they had to resort to these tactics?

Ecuador had introduced a resolution that sought to “protect, promote, and support (breastfeeding)” with a renewed focus on preventing infant and young child deaths in developing countries. This resolution was supposed to be a no-brainer. The science has been clear for decades that mother’s milk is the optimal nutrition for infants.

Who was threatened by renewing this initiative? An industry whose profits have stagnated recently and whose new target market is developing countries. Incited by the U.S.-controlled infant formula industry, our American delegation sought to weaken the policy statement. Other attendees relayed how they were “astonished” that the United States was blackmailing the rest of the world to prevent any restriction on marketing of food products that have known negative effects on young children. Ultimately, all smaller countries shied away from the resolution, and the Russians had to introduce the policy statement promoting breastfeeding that ultimately passed. We are outraged and saddened by the behavior and tactics of our own representatives.

First, the desire to weaken the resolution contradicts decades of evidence-based federal and state initiatives to increase breastfeeding rates in the United States. The U.S. Surgeon General issued a nationwide Call to Action to Support Breastfeeding in 2011. The U.S. Preventive

Services Task Force recommends actions to help support women to successfully breastfeed. The U.S Healthy People 2000, 2010 and 2020 goals include several to increase breastfeeding rates. The Oklahoma Department of Health supports several statewide breastfeeding projects as key factors in reducing Oklahoma’s dismal infant mortality rate, which ranked 47th in 2017.

Second, American delegates sidetracked the argument by raising the point that not all women can breastfeed. President Trump even tweeted that women “need access to formula.” While it is true that a small number of women cannot breastfeed, the resolution was not about limiting access to formula but about helping more women succeed with breastfeeding.

Third, the American delegates shockingly threatened other countries — over breastfeeding! In the past, U.S. delegates have been lukewarm about the International Code of Marketing of Breastmilk Substitutes and other international public health policies. Refusing

to support a global public health initiative is one thing. Bullying and threatening other countries’ safety and security, particularly smaller ones, is unethical and does not reflect the values of the American people. At what point did our country take this turn?

We urge Oklahomans and Americans to inform state and federal leaders that our delegation’s actions at the World Health Assembly were abusive and unethical. As Americans, we do not bully others. We value free speech and independent voting, we support scientific evidence and we value the health of children. As Americans, we do not support the recent actions of our own delegation to the World Health Assembly.



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