



Biden's 'Operation Fly Formula' an Unnecessary PR Stunt

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Joe Biden announced plans to use military aircraft to import baby formula from abroad. The White House is calling the effort “Operation Fly Formula” and the stunt will bring formula from Europe to America.

Has anyone stopped to think how ludicrous this is? The private sector is already set up to move products from one part of the world to another. What’s standing in the way is the U.S. government’s protectionist policies that prevent foreign formulas from being sold in the U.S.

Reason.com’s Eric Boehm points out that 98 percent of formula sold in the U.S. is manufactured here. And while the EU is the largest seller of baby formula in the world, trying to penetrate the U.S. market is nearly impossible.

As *Reason*’s Elizabeth Nolan Brown explained earlier this week, the Food and Drug Administration’s (FDA) rules that prohibit many baby formulas made in Europe from being imported to the U.S. have nothing to do with health or nutritional safety issues. Often, those brands are banned because they fail to meet the FDA’s labeling requirements.

In addition, the U.S. imposes huge tariffs—technically tariff-rate quotas, which are designed to make it completely unprofitable to import more than a small amount of a certain product—on imported formula. Those tariffs exist for no reason other than to protect domestic formula manufacturers and the American dairy industry that supplies them. As a result, about 98 percent of the formula sold in the United States is produced here as well.

“EU exports enough infant formula to potentially supply the entire U.S. market,” Bryan Riley, director of the Free Trade Initiative at the National Taxpayers Union Foundation writes. “Had American families been free to import tariff-free formula from the start, the temporary shuttering of one U.S. factory would have been much less costly.”

So why, all of a sudden, has EU baby formula met U.S. standards and can safely be sold here?

Senator Mike Lee has a solution that makes too much sense for the congressional protectionists.

Sen. Mike Lee (R-Utah) has introduced a bill that moves things in the right direction. His proposal, the Fixing Our Regulatory Mayhem Upsetting Little Americans (FORMULA) Act, would temporarily waive the tariffs on baby formula, temporarily remove the FDA regulations for labeling, and expand the number of products covered by the Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) program, which subsidizes the purchase of baby formula but currently does so only for specific brands. (For more on how the regulations in the WIC program are adding to this government-created formula mess, [read this excellent analysis](#) from the Cato Institute's Scott Lincicome)

“American babies are going hungry and the federal government is standing in the way,” Lee said in a statement.

Blaming supply chain snafus for a problem caused by the administration is about what you'd expect from this White House. After the Sturgis plant had been forced to close, European companies could have stepped in and filled the void if the tariffs and cockamamie FDA labeling requirements weren't in the way. There would have been very little supply disruption and the formula crisis would have only registered as a blip on the screen.