

Buying American is not un-American when it comes to running shoes

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HOW IS it possible that The Boston Globe finds that buying American is somehow un-American?

In the May 27 editorial "Scrap special 'running shoe' earmark," the Globe characterized the provision in the National Defense Authorization Act that gives preference to American suppliers of athletic footwear as tantamount to corporate welfare. The proposed legislation would be a boon to local sneaker manufacturer New Balance, which otherwise would have been cut out of the procurement process for providing shoes to the military.

The Globe argues that soldiers should be given the opportunity to select their own brands and that somehow New Balance products may compromise their individual needs. Ironically, New Balance is the only manufacturer that provides a wide range of variable widths on sneakers, which was responsible for the company's huge success in the first place. The likelihood that a shoe made in China or another part of the world is better suited for a member of the armed services is remote.

The provision in the act known as Section 808, to which the Globe objects, would likely benefit Asian manufacturers over US firms. China, the home of products ranging from toxic drywall to tainted baby food, could find itself as the main supplier of military footwear.

In the case of the military, there is something about outsourcing products to potentially hostile governments that just does not seem to fit. Clearly, protectionist legislation that results in diminished competition and higher prices is not in the American consumer's best interest. However, giving New Balance a leg up by assuring a dependable domestic supply chain, thereby keeping jobs in the United States and producing a high-quality product at a fair price, seems hard to question. There are times when taking a stand on corporate welfare is appropriate, but this is not one of them.

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