

Minutes
Advisory Committee on International Trade
Virginia Economic Development Partnership
September 10, 2024

9th Floor, Board Room
901 E. Cary Street
Richmond, Virginia 23219

Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 10:06 a.m. by Mike Ligon, Chairman of the VEDP Advisory Committee on International Trade.

Members Present:

Hobey Bauhan
Michael Coleman
Bob Feeser
Anne Marie Lacourse
Mike Ligon, Chair
Secretary Lohr
Will Sessoms
David White

Members Absent:

Tag Greason

Staff Present:

Stephanie Agee
Anita Begnaud
Lindsey Bertozzi
Jamie Canup
Pryor Green
Alexia Inge (Intern)
Eric Jehu
Scott Kennedy
Julie Richmond
Adam Watkins
Krissy Watson
Abigail Wescott

Guests Present: None

Welcome and Chairman's Remarks

Chairman Mike Ligon welcomed everyone to the meeting at 10:06 a.m.

Chairman Ligon stated that James Xu's term on the Committee had expired, and that John Huddle was appointed by the Governor as his replacement but was not able to attend the meeting. The Chairman mentioned he would like to invite James Xu to attend a future meeting in order to thank him for his contributions to the Committee.

Public Comments

Chairman Ligon solicited for public comments. There were none.

Review and Approval of June 11, 2024, Meeting Minutes

After a review of the minutes, Chairman Ligon requested a few revisions and motioned to approve the revised minutes. A motion was made by Bob Feeser. The motion was seconded by Michael Coleman and was unanimously approved by all Committee members present.

Committee Discussion

Chairman Ligon initiated a conversation about how the ACIT can help to get the message out to various audiences about the importance of trade. He reminded the Committee of the conversations with Senator Kaine and Representative Spanberger in previous meetings, recommending that it would be helpful for the Committee to do this as additional support for trade by the general public would assist them in their trade-related efforts at the national level. The conversation continued with Chairman Ligon suggesting the Committee should discuss the types of communications they would like to make on this subject, the timing, whether to take a statewide or regional approach, and what specific messages they wanted to convey. The Chairman also requested the Committee take note of future communications from VEDP regarding trade-related events either hosted by VEDP or other stakeholder organizations and consider attending.

Anita Begnaud, VEDP Vice President of Marketing and Communications, and Abigail Wescott, Managing Director of External Affairs, were introduced and joined the meeting to provide support in offering suggestions for overall trade communications.

David White remarked that in the current political environment trade has been put in a negative light, noting that both major political parties' national-level platforms include tariffs. He suggested focusing on discussions with state-level political candidates immediately following the presidential election, to encourage the candidates not to project an anti-trade stance as they head into next year's elections. He noted that one point of positivity on trade currently is how it ties to national defense interests, specifically noting the Australia-UK-US (AUKUS) agreement as a perfect area where that connection can be made and where Virginia can benefit. He also mentioned the opportunity with more college students studying abroad and gaining global perspectives that they can take into their careers after school and hopefully impact overall impressions of trade.

Ann Marie Lacourse referenced the U.S. having the lowest tariff rates which could be used in messaging the positives of international trade. She suggested VEDP developing key talking points on the benefits of trade to Virginia and sharing those with the Committee and media. She also mentioned the importance of stories and focusing on local companies that have benefited from trade.

Bob Feeser recommended considering the audiences we are trying to reach with the positive trade messaging, whether business communities, government leaders, universities, or the public.

He suggested using simple stories and case studies about the benefits of trade to companies and individuals.

Hobey Bauhan said that utilizing brief and repetitive communications, similar to a campaign approach, would be effective.

Secretary Lohr asked all in attendance to focus on the overall goal of the communications campaign and the intended outcomes.

Will Sessoms also emphasized the importance of simple talking points and focusing on the things people care about – good jobs, their livelihoods – and the economic impact of international companies in places like Virginia Beach, as well as the impact of the Port of Virginia.

Mike Coleman said that an important part of the story is how many jobs are supported by trade.

David White reflected that the Committee has worked together to develop pro-trade programs, and policies, and to obtain the funding for VEDP to implement programs that increase trade. He said at this point, while we are not going after additional funding or new programs, it is important to focus on defending our ground, protecting what we have, and how it has left a positive impact.

Anita Begnaud offered ideas to be considered when developing talking points and how to use them and what audience to target. She too recommended holding off on developing any communications on this topic until after the elections. She suggested the target audiences for communication include the general public, business communities, universities' business schools, and the General Assembly. She suggested choosing three story lines to be pitched via the media and that the VEDP Marketing and Communications team continue to help share the story of trade via social media.

Chairman Ligon proposed, in the essence of time, that a sub-committee of the ACIT be formed to continue the conversation and develop plans. Bob Feeser, David White, and Anne Marie Lacourse volunteered to participate in this group, along with Chairman Ligon.

Closed Session

Chairman Ligon requested that the Committee move into a closed meeting at 10:52 a.m. A motion was made by Bob Feeser and seconded by Will Sessoms. Jamie Canup, Assistant General Counsel, voiced the following motion for adoption by the Committee to enter into a closed meeting. The following motion was unanimously adopted by all Committee members present.

I MOVE THAT THE ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON INTERNATIONAL TRADE OF THE VIRGINIA ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PARTNERSHIP AUTHORITY CONVENE A CLOSED MEETING TO DISCUSS SPECIFIC STRATEGIES PURSUANT TO SUBDIVISION A 50 OF §2.2-3711 OF THE CODE OF VIRGINIA, WHICH ALLOWS FOR THE DISCUSSION OF ACTIVITIES RELATED TO THE STRATEGIC PLAN THAT WOULD REVEAL TO COMMONWEALTH'S COMPETITORS FOR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS THE STRATEGIES INTENDED TO BE DEPLOYED BY THE COMMONWEALTH.

Upon the return to the open meeting, the Committee members considered the following certification:

DO YOU CERTIFY, THAT TO THE BEST OF YOUR KNOWLEDGE, (i) ONLY PUBLIC

BUSINESS MATTERS LAWFULLY EXEMPTED FROM THE OPEN MEETING REQUIREMENTS OF FOIA WERE DISCUSSED IN THE CLOSED MEETING, AND (ii) ONLY SUCH MATTERS AS WERE IDENTIFIED IN THE MOTION TO GO INTO THE CLOSED MEETING WERE HEARD, DISCUSSED, OR CONSIDERED DURING THE CLOSED MEETING?

The Committee approved the foregoing certification by roll call vote, bringing the Committee out of the closed meeting at 11:43 a.m.

Yeas: Chairman Mike Ligon, Hobey Bauhan, Michael Coleman, Bob Feeser, Anne Marie Lacourse, Secretary Lohr, Will Sessoms, David White

Nays: None

Virginia Maritime Association International Trade Symposium Update

David White extended a sincere thank you to VEDP for being a top sponsor once again of the Virginia Maritime Association's annual International Trade Symposium Banquet in October. The symposium is considered the premier conference on the east coast for international trade, attended by over 400 participants, while the VMA was expecting 900 attendees at the banquet.

Mr. White discussed the symposium program, saying it is designed to spotlight Virginia and attract more businesses that are trade-related to the Commonwealth to utilize the port and trade-related infrastructure. This year there is also a new track focused on bulk trade. Attendees from around the country and the world are registered to attend.

Mr. White also took the opportunity to alert the Committee about the potential for a strike of the International Longshoremen's Association and the need to get this issue and its consequences highlighted to the general public and politicians.

Virginia Global Business Internship Program Update

Stephanie Agee introduced Krissy Watson, VEDP's Global Internship Manager, to provide an update on the Virginia Global Business Internship. Ms. Agee commended Ms. Watson for her great work on the program in her short six months with VEDP. Ms. Watson described the program, designed for students from Virginia colleges and universities to explore what they are currently learning in a classroom setting and bring it to an international business environment, and the successes she saw in the last intern cohort. The summer 2024 internship program paired 17 students with 15 different Virginia international businesses representing a diverse set of industries and regions across Virginia. She described some of the additional export-focused training and professional development training provided to the interns by VEDP and partner organizations, such as the Small Business Development Center, throughout the summer.

Overall, the program received rave reviews both from the students as well as host companies. Ms. Watson shared that one intern received and accepted a full-time offer of employment from a host company at the end of the summer while another student was asked to remain on as a part-time employee while they continued their education.

Adjournment

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 12:16 p.m.