

**Minutes
Advisory Committee on International Trade
Virginia Economic Development Partnership
March 10, 2026**

**VEDP
9th Floor, Board Room
901 E. Cary St., Suite 900
Richmond, VA 23219**

Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 10:02 a.m. by Mike Ligon, Chair of the VEDP Advisory Committee on International Trade.

Members Present:

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

Remote:

Mike Coleman
John Huddle

Members Absent:

N/A

Staff Present:

Stephanie Agee
Lindsey Bertozzi
Josh Kaplan
Ed Laughlin
Julie Richmond
Lee Sanderson
Jordan Watkins
Mary Wood

Guests Present:

Connie Loughhead

Public Present:

N/A

Welcome and Chairman's Remarks

Chairman Ligon welcomed members and staff and formally welcomed Secretary Katie Frazier as the newest member of ACIT. He noted the value of her background in agriculture, research, advocacy, and public service and expressed appreciation for her willingness to engage on trade issues impacting Virginia.

The Chairman reviewed the agenda and highlighted key topics for discussion, including trade policy developments, program audits and funding, and defense-related opportunities.

Public Comments

Chairman Ligon solicited for comments from members of the public in attendance. There were none.

Review and Approval of December 2, 2025, Meeting Minutes

After a review of the December 2, 2025, minutes, Chairman Ligon requested a motion to approve. Bob Feeser made a motion. The motion was seconded by Hobey Bauhan and was unanimously approved by all Committee members present.

Comments from Secretary Frazier

Secretary Frazier discussed recent actions taken by Governor Spanberger, including the creation of the Economic Resiliency Task Force through Executive Order #5 to assess impacts from federal workforce reductions, funding uncertainty, tariffs, and immigration changes. She noted her agency's role in developing strategies to grow Virginia's agricultural and forestry exports amid ongoing tariff uncertainty.

She shared concerns about recent export declines in sectors such as soybeans and tobacco and emphasized the importance of diversification, cross-agency collaboration, and leveraging VEDP programs and partnerships. She also highlighted an upcoming working session with producers and partners aimed at developing adaptive strategies in the current trade environment.

Recorded Remarks from Senator Tim Kaine

The Committee viewed pre-recorded remarks from Senator Tim Kaine, who addressed the volatile global trade environment, the role of federal trade policy, and the importance of preparing Virginia businesses for rapid policy shifts. He reaffirmed his interest in continuing to work closely with ACIT and VEDP.

Committee members expressed appreciation for the Senator's engagement and leadership on trade and defense-related matters, including his support of AUKUS and his focus on emerging opportunities in South and Central America. Chairman Ligon extended a special thanks to Michael Henry and Paul LaPointe from the office of Senator Kaine for their support in connecting the Committee with the Senator. Hobey Bauhan appreciated the continued support from the Senator. Ms. Lacourse commented on the senator's leadership at the federal level and her appreciation for the time he takes to advocate for trade. David White noted Senator Kaine's leadership position in the Senate, his support for the AUKUS agreement, and his focus on US relations with South America.

Trade Policy Update

David Olave of Sandler, Travis & Rosenberg provided a high-level overview of the evolving federal trade policy landscape, noting continued uncertainty driven by tariff actions, emergency declarations, judicial decisions, and ongoing investigations. He emphasized that tariff policy remains fluid and is influenced by national security considerations and geopolitical relationships.

Committee discussion focused on:

- How tariff uncertainty is affecting business planning and pricing
- Whether cost impacts are absorbed by businesses or passed on to consumers
- The practical considerations companies face when deciding whether to pursue protests or legal action

Mr. Olave noted that companies are taking varied approaches depending on risk tolerance, cost, and visibility, with some seeking administrative solutions rather than litigation.

OSIG Audit and STEP Update

Stephanie Agee provided an update on VEDP's response to the Office of the State Inspector General's audit of the International Trade division. She reported that VEDP is on track in addressing all recommendations, noting that the audit did not identify major findings and that final actions are expected to be completed by the end of June.

Ms. Agee also discussed the status of the State Trade Expansion Program (STEP). While Congress has appropriated funding, awards to states have not yet been issued, creating uncertainty for future support of small businesses. She noted the potential impact this could have on VEDP's ability to meet participation goals and shared that outreach efforts are underway to keep stakeholders and congressional offices informed.

Committee members discussed the importance of STEP funding and encouraged continued advocacy at the federal level. Bob Feeser recommended that the ACIT or VEDP notify Senator Kaine's office of the uncertainties regarding STEP.

VEDP's Global Defense Program

Ed Laughlin and Jordan Watkins provided an overview of VEDP's Global Defense Program, highlighting its role in supporting Virginia's defense companies through export assistance, trade mission and trade show opportunities, compliance support, and international partner matchmaking. They emphasized the scale and importance of Virginia's defense economy and the program's long-standing impact, sharing examples of successful collaborations facilitated through the program.

David White commented positively on the program's effectiveness and its emphasis on results-driven engagement.

Advancing Virginia's Leadership in the Defense Sector

David White led a discussion on the need for increased coordination and strategic focus to strengthen Virginia's position in the defense and maritime sectors. He emphasized the urgency of reinvesting in the maritime industrial base and noted that other states are moving aggressively to capture federal and international opportunities.

Key themes included:

- The need for statewide coordination to complement strong regional assets, particularly in Hampton Roads
- The importance of aligning state, regional, and federal efforts to support shipbuilding, repair, and supply chains
- Consideration of whether a dedicated statewide leadership or coordination mechanism is needed to maintain competitiveness

Committee members discussed possible models used by other states, the role VEDP could play in coordination, and the value of elevating these efforts within the administration.

Adjournment

Chair Ligon thanked participants for their insights and engagement on trade issues, and the meeting adjourned at 12:12 p.m.