

Field Hearing: “Beyond the Trailhead: Supporting Outdoor Recreation in an Uncertain Economy”
U.S. Senate Committee on Small Business and Entrepreneurship
May 30, 2025 | History Colorado Center | Denver, Colorado

Thank you Senator Hickenlooper and distinguished guests-

My name is Trent Bush, and my life has revolved around Colorado’s outdoor industry since childhood. Growing up, my dad was one of the first employees at Boulder-based Frostline Kits, an innovative outdoor brand that started in the 60’s.

Frostline enabled countless American families, from diverse economic backgrounds, to enjoy the outdoors affordably, making their jackets, sleeping bags, tents, and packs at home, since back then, most American households had sewing machines and knew how to use them. Unfortunately, market conditions dramatically shifted by the early 80s, and Frostline, along with other Boulder-based innovators like Holubar, Gerry, and Altra, became obsolete as competitors leveraged overseas manufacturing to deliver finished products at significantly lower costs – With no sewing necessary.

In the mid 80’s I began own my career at Wave Rave, a small snowboard shop in Boulder. Although we initially produced our own jackets and pants locally, our limitations started to become apparent when competing brands began to source in their products overseas, bringing a new level of quality and performance that we couldn’t achieve.

At Boulder High in 1989, my brother, a friend, and I decided to launch our own brand, Twist, determined to produce domestically, because even though it was harder, that's what we believed in. We soon outgrew Colorado's limited capabilities and moved to the Bay Area, aiming to utilize factories abandoned by the large American outdoor brands who were off-shoring.

But at just a few million dollars in sales, Twist lacked the scale to sustain these factories, and they quickly shuttered, forcing us to try to move our goods to Los Angeles factories, which were more accustomed to producing Halloween costumes and denim jeans rather than technical outerwear.

Without the necessary specialized equipment or sewers available, our products faced severe quality issues—The waterproof coating failed on our US-sourced fabrics, the snaps fell off, and seams leaked. Even back then, the know-how had already moved on.

Ultimately, survival forced us to move our manufacturing overseas, but it was too little too late, and we ended up losing everything.

That was way back in the 90’s, and US-based performance apparel manufacturing capabilities have only decreased from there.

I know this is true, because after Twist, the past 30 years of my career have revolved around senior roles in design and development for global performance brands like Burton, Spyder, Oakley, Outdoor Research, Mountain Hardwear, Black Diamond Equipment, and my recent startup, ARTILECT. At each of these brands, we made sincere attempts to reshore partial production, but those have ended in costly failures, with only basic products like t-shirts and socks being successful.

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Today at ARTILECT, we create innovative, high-performance merino wool apparel in Vietnam, because domestic production remains impossible due to the lack of merino sheep, specialized yarns, equipment, and infrastructure.

Because of this, and even with interest from the U.S. military, we can't comply with the Berry Amendment because the necessary domestic supply chain simply doesn't exist, leaving our brand without a valuable business opportunity, and our military is left with sub-standard equipment.

While the post-covid outdoor market has already been harder than any I've ever faced, our entire industry faces a new, unprecedented crisis amplified by recent U.S. tariff policies.

For a small wholesale-focused brand like ours, these tariffs dramatically inflate landed product costs, forcing us to either raise retail prices—or accept significantly diminished margins— Or most likely both.

Our retail partners can't absorb these price increases without reducing their orders significantly, and their customer's unable to pay more, endangering both their own businesses and ours.

Additionally, these tariffs severely undermine ongoing industry efforts towards greater equity and inclusion, making outdoor participation much more expensive and illusive.

Even if Tuesday's ruling against the tariffs stands, the uncertainty of U.S. trade policies have also sparked anti-American sentiment in our foreign markets, causing outright rejection of American brands and severely damaging our global competitiveness.

This is all so hard for me personally. I held on to producing in the US as long as I could, and I feel I've done everything I've been asked to do since, including moving production out of China six years ago. Now, even the staggeringly high tariffs outside China may force my business to close. This just isn't the American Dream I believed in and have tried so hard to achieve. The rules keep changing, and we just can't keep up.

I respectfully urge Congress to reconsider these policies that cripple small outdoor businesses like mine, recognizing the unintended damage they're causing. Thank you sincerely for your time, consideration, and thoughtful understanding.



Trent Bush
ARTILECT