

Field Hearing: “Beyond the Trailhead: Supporting Outdoor Recreation in an Uncertain Economy”
U.S. Senate Committee on Small Business and Entrepreneurship
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Senator Hickenlooper and distinguished guests—thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today. My name is Mike Mojica. I was born on a U.S. Army base in Nurnberg, Germany, where I watched my father—a man of integrity and respect—salute every shade of skin, and every shade salute him back. That image has stuck with me my entire life. It taught me what this great country could represent: unity, opportunity, and the confidence to chase dreams with grit and courage. This country, while not without flaws, has long inspired dreamers and doers. I count myself as one of them.

By education, I’m a mechanical engineer. For years, I had the honor of designing for our military—both Army and Air Force. And in 2012, I moved to Colorado, rediscovered the outdoors, and started something on the side: Outdoor Element. My Native name is Bodaway, meaning “*fire maker*,” and that spark turned into a mission—creating rugged, innovative gear that helps people explore with confidence, themed around fire.

About 7.5 years ago, I left a stable aerospace job to go all-in with Outdoor Element. I’ve gone through accelerators programs with Moosejaw and REI, secured 10 patents with more pending, and we just came off our best year ever. And then, two months ago, everything changed.

Overnight, tariffs on our core products jumped to 145%. That’s not a misstatement. What felt like a mood swing from my commander-in-chief now feels like a knife in my back. What I thought was an approachable path to the American Dream has suddenly turned into quicksand.

We are now down to 30% additional tariffs, 10 for reciprocal and 20 for fentanyl – Fentanyl, I’m taking the punishment for a crime I didn’t commit. So here I am in this quicksand ...just drowning a little slower.

We’ve had to pause production. Tell our factories to simply hold goods and not ship in some cases; what I am shipping is to fulfill wholesale pre-orders. But I am doing that to keep relationships alive at little or no profitability. I’ve already lost one key wholesale account because of a slight price increase. I laid off team members. Asked others to work less hours, my wife now works without pay. My kids—who are here with me today—are helping pack orders. This isn’t a pity story. And I’m not here to scream or yell. In fact, my spiritual mentor said, “Anger never persuades. Hostility builds no one. Contention never leads to inspired solutions.” This is a plea for conversation of clarity. Let’s come together. Let’s be inspired!

I understand we operate in a global economy. It’s complex. But small businesses like mine can’t plan for success when the rules change overnight, again and again without warning -without a clear strategy or line of communication. This country is supposed to promote and build businesses, not crush them. I’m not asking for a handout, I’m asking for a plan. I’m asking for transparency that

inspires confidence. Chairman Mike Crapo recently said, “*Trade is supposed to provide businesses with the certainty we need to make long-term investments to drive growth.*” I couldn’t agree more. Today, that certainty is missing. I am no longer thriving, I’m working on surviving.

In the past, I’ve tried to reach out to leadership with the USTR, during the 301 tariff battles. It fell on deaf ears. I’d welcome a conversation with Ambassador Jamieson Greer – lets’ forge a smarter path forward, one that doesn’t treat small businesses as collateral damage but rather invites small business as an important part of the economic equation...as part of the economic solution.

Ambassador Greer recently said he “wants what’s best for America.” My question is: What part of America? Do I need to be building microchips or be in the auto-industry to matter? It currently feels like I do not matter.

Right now, my food, fuel, and shelter cost more—and my profit margin is shrinking. That’s not sustainable. Not for me. Not for hundreds of other small outdoor brands facing the same uncertainty.

We’ve begun shifting production out of China. And when we can, we proudly manufacture right here in the U.S.—like with our newest fire-starting product, Fiber Light. But that’s a journey, not a switch anyone can flip on overnight. But, I also believe this: international commerce promotes peace. It’s not a new idea, in the 1800’s French economist Frédéric Bastiat once said, “*If goods don’t cross borders, soldiers will.*” Phil Knight echoed this idea in his memoir, saying Nike would rather build boots in Vietnam than see combat boots there. I agree. And every international purchase order we place is my vote for peace and partnership, not conflict. Collaboration over conflict is where I stand.

Let’s use our foreign policy to foster the bridge we’ve spent decades building.

Outdoor Element was born from a spark—literally. We design survival and adventure gear themed around fire that helps people explore the great outdoors with confidence. And behind every piece of gear are real people. Families. Teams. Communities.

To those of you who carry our gears in your packs, light fires on cold nights with our firebiners or a scout feather knife or simply believe in small business—thank you. You’re part of our story.

To this committee: please don’t forget or undermine small, scrappy companies who form the backbone of America -building futures one spark at a time. Let’s keep the fire going.

Thank you.