



Congressional U.S. Foreign-Trade Zones Caucus Holds First Meeting, Advancing Bipartisan Focus on U.S. Jobs, Competitiveness

First official D.C. briefing brought congressional staff together with NAFTAZ, other U.S. FTZ stakeholders to explore the program's impact across American industry

WASHINGTON – Sept. 24, 2026 – The [National Association of Foreign-Trade Zones \(NAFTZ\)](#), the only national trade association focused solely on the [U.S. Foreign-Trade Zone program](#), yesterday helped host the first official meeting of the [bipartisan Congressional Foreign-Trade Zones Caucus](#) on Capitol Hill. The inaugural gathering highlighted how these federally designated areas give companies greater flexibility in managing imported and domestic goods before they enter U.S. commerce – supporting U.S. manufacturing, jobs, investment and exports while strengthening America's global competitiveness. The caucus is co-chaired by Reps. Aaron Bean (R-Fla.) and Marilyn Strickland (D-Wash.).

During the Sept. 23 kick-off, NAFTAZ outlined key policy priorities tied to recent executive actions and congressional proposals. The discussion also brought together “grantees,” or zone administrators, and trade and compliance representatives from member companies, giving policymakers an on-the-ground look at how the program works and the issues shaping its future.

“Yesterday’s meeting demonstrated why this bipartisan caucus is so important: Congress needs a clear understanding of the tools that can help American businesses invest, manufacture and compete in global markets,” said Rep. Bean, of Florida’s 4th Congressional District. “U.S. FTZs help companies make, move and sell their products more efficiently, and I’m proud to work with Congresswoman Strickland to advance that understanding on both sides of the aisle and look forward to growing the caucus in the months ahead.”

“U.S. Foreign-Trade Zones have a direct impact on communities and workers across the country,” said Rep. Strickland, of Washington’s 10th Congressional District. “This first meeting was an important opportunity to hear directly from U.S. FTZ users about manufacturing and investment, and trade and supply-chain challenges so American businesses can stay competitive at home and around the world.”

The U.S. FTZ program, created by Congress in 1934, is a secure and highly regulated federal program designed to encourage U.S. manufacturing and distribution, particularly where foreign competitors may have tariff advantages. In 2024, approximately 543,000 U.S. jobs were associated with more than 1,300 active U.S. FTZ operations nationwide, while U.S. FTZ exports totaled approximately \$133 billion, representing about 6.5% of U.S. goods exports.

“This represents an important milestone, not simply because the caucus has been formed, but because it is now actively bringing policymakers and the U.S. FTZ community to the same table,” said Jeffrey J. Tafel, president, NAFTAZ. “The program is a proven part of the U.S. economic infrastructure, supporting American jobs, manufacturing, investment and exports in communities across the country. We appreciate Congress’s leadership here and look forward to helping the caucus expand its membership and continue its work.”

The inaugural meeting also came at a particularly consequential time for U.S. trade and tariff policy. NAFTAZ is actively engaged with congressional offices and federal agencies on several issues affecting U.S. FTZ operations, including:

- The implications of ongoing tariff actions under authorities including Sections 301 and 232;
- The ongoing U.S.-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA) review – advocating for policies that address longstanding competitive disadvantages facing U.S. FTZ companies exporting to Canada and Mexico, [including legislation designed to restore parity](#) for qualifying U.S. exports;
- And the need for directed funding for U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) to support recent growth in the usage of the U.S. FTZ program.

“Education and engagement are at the heart of effective U.S. FTZ advocacy,” said Melissa Irmen, director of advocacy, NAFTAZ. “Yesterday’s meeting gave congressional offices a practical look at how U.S. Foreign-Trade Zones function, and why the program matters to employers, workers and communities in their districts. With trade policy evolving so quickly, it is more important than ever for policymakers to understand the real-world implications of those decisions and hear directly from the businesses affected by them.”

For Patty Cannon, incoming chair of the NAFTAZ Board of Directors, director of special projects for the Delaware Division of Small Business and grantee administrator for U.S. FTZ No. 99, the caucus represents an opportunity to highlight the local impact of the program.

“U.S. Foreign-Trade Zones are not an abstract trade policy, they are operating in communities across America, supporting employers, investment and jobs,” said Cannon. “As a grantee administrator in Delaware, I see firsthand the value these operations can bring to a region. The caucus creates an important avenue for members of Congress and their staff to hear those real-world stories and better understand how the program supports economic activity in their own districts.”

The caucus plans to convene several times per year, providing ongoing opportunities for congressional members and staff to receive timely briefings, engage with U.S. FTZ users and examine emerging issues affecting U.S. manufacturing, trade and supply chains. NAFTAZ will continue working with the caucus to support its educational efforts and encourage additional congressional offices to participate.

“This week was an important first step,” added NAFTAZ’s Tafel. “Now, the caucus can begin building on that foundation.”

For more information about NAFTAZ, its mission and active policy discussions, head to naftz.org.

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About the National Association of Foreign-Trade Zones (NAFTZ)

The National Association of Foreign-Trade Zones (NAFTZ) is the collective voice of the U.S. Foreign-Trade Zones community. Representing public and private sector members across the U.S., NAFTAZ is dedicated to advancing the U.S. Foreign-Trade Zones program through advocacy, education and collaboration. The association works to promote policies that strengthen U.S. competitiveness, encourage domestic investment and job creation, and support secure and efficient international trade operations. For more information visit: www.naftz.org.

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