

PRESS RELEASE | May 6, 2025

FDRA Gathers Footwear Leaders in Washington, D.C. to Advance Industry Innovation and Urge Tariff Reform

Summit concludes with industry executives taking the tariff fight directly to lawmakers on Capitol Hill

WASHINGTON, D.C. — The **Footwear Distributors and Retailers of America (FDRA)** hosted its annual Executive Strategy Summit, uniting footwear's top executives, economic experts, and policymakers in the nation's capital to focus on the industry's future and make a clear call for trade reform.

The Summit officially took place April 30–May 1, but opened with a dynamic evening reception and dinner on April 29 at the Smithsonian American Art Museum and National Portrait Gallery. The event featured a live artist activation, underscoring this year's theme of innovation and inspiration.



[FDRA President and CEO Matt Priest addresses members at the dinner on April 29th.]

On April 30, leaders convened for a day of expert briefings, policy conversations, and data-driven insights. From consumer behavior shifts and domestic manufacturing innovation to White House strategy and global trade policy, the program was designed to equip footwear executives with tools and knowledge to elevate decision-making and bottom-line strategy.

"The past week showed what happens when a vital American industry is united and focused on serving our consumers and growing our economy in the face of tariffs," **said Matt Priest, President and CEO of FDRA.** "The footwear industry is innovative, resilient, and ready to lead. But we need Washington to step up and remove outdated trade policies."

The policy track began with Former Congressman and House Ways and Means Committee Chairman Kevin Brady, who offered a candid and compelling Congressional perspective on trade. Drawing on his deep expertise in tax and trade law, Brady underscored the urgent need for reciprocal trade relationships and challenged industry leaders to stay vocal and united.



[Former Congressman and House Ways and Means Committee Chairman Kevin Brady during his session with FDRA's Senior Vice President Thomas Crockett]

FDRA and presenters shared newly commissioned consumer research throughout the day, offering the latest trends and sentiment analysis to help brands adjust in real time. Presenters included Dr. Joanne Hsu (University of Michigan), Courtenay Brown (Axios), and Bryan Eshelman (AlixPartners).

A panel on rethinking domestic manufacturing spotlighted innovative production strategies and new business models led by companies like Meridian Footwear and Oka Brands.

On May 1, executives transitioned from insight to action—meeting with members of Congress to press for real, lasting trade reform, including the reduction or elimination of outdated tariffs that add costs to every pair of shoes sold in the U.S.



[Members of FDRA with Congressman Max Miller]

“We were able to sit down face-to-face with members of Congress and explain the real-world impact of these tariffs—not in theory, but in terms of lost jobs, higher prices, and fewer choices for consumers,” said **Rick Muskat, President of Deer Stags**. “They were listening.”

FDRA also sent a formal letter to President Donald Trump, echoing the same message and urging him to act. In the letter, FDRA wrote:

“Our industry is uniquely vulnerable,” **the letter states**. “With some of the highest tariff rates already in place—especially on children’s and low-cost shoes—these new tariffs are simply unsustainable. They won’t bring manufacturing back, but they will hurt families at the register.”

For more information about FDRA or the Executive Strategy Summit, click [HERE](#).

For more images from the Executive Strategy Summit, click [HERE](#).

Recent Coverage on Footwear and Inflation Trends:

1. **Footwear News** – [Industry Leaders Launch Footwear Innovation Foundation](#)
2. **New York Times** – [How Tariffs Work](#)
3. **Reuters**: [Clothing retailers delay orders, freeze hiring as tariffs hit](#)
4. **AP**: [Tariffs will make sneakers, jeans and almost everything Americans wear cost more, trade groups warn](#)

For more information or to schedule an interview with Matt Priest, please [contact FDRA](#).

About FDRA

FDRA is governed and directed by footwear executives and is the only trade organization focused solely on the footwear industry. Serving the full footwear supply chain, it boosts its members’ bottom lines through innovative products, training, consulting on footwear design and development, sourcing and compliance, trade and customs, advocacy, and consumer and sales trend analysis for shoe retailers around the world. FDRA supports 500 companies and brands worldwide, representing 95% of the total U.S. footwear industry. Learn more: fdra.org