

## US: Bill seeks to cut outdoor apparel tariffs

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New legislation that proposes to eliminate tariffs on imports of outdoor performance apparel into the US, as well as funding research into sustainable manufacturing technology, was introduced on Friday (10 July).

The US Optimal Use of Trade to Develop Outerwear and Outdoor Recreation (OUTDOOR) Act wants recreational performance outerwear – jackets and pants used for outdoor activities like skiing and hunting – to be reclassified in the US Harmonized Tariff Schedule (HTS).

It also seeks to make these products duty free, and fund research in environmental technologies to make the production of outdoor apparel as environmentally sound as possible.

Introduced simultaneously in the US House of Representatives and Senate, the Act marks two years of development and consultation between the Outdoor Industry Association (OIA), apparel manufacturers, the US textile industry and Congressional leaders.

It is similar and, to a certain extent, a reintroduction of last year's Recreational Performance Outerwear Act (RPOA), Alexander Boian, director of trade policy at the Outdoor Industry Association, told just-style.

"But this year the bill has received greater bipartisan support and more co-sponsors on introduction," he added.

Representative Earl Blumenauer (D-OR), who led its introduction, said: "This bill will make outdoor apparel more affordable while creating investment and job opportunities at home."

It "removes unnecessary tariffs on apparel not currently made in the US," and will allow companies to contribute toward research programs that are developing ways to "keep America's apparel industry globally competitive and more environmentally sustainable."

He added: "This is a win for consumers and a win for strong American companies like Columbia, REI, North Face and others looking to reduce costs, improve the quality of their goods and implement sustainable processes."

The US OUTDOOR Act is based on a 2007 International Trade Commission report which confirmed there is no commercially viable production of recreational performance outerwear in the US.

While the average duty on imports is less than 2%, the rates on recreational performance outerwear averages a much higher 17%, and sometimes up to 28%.

These high tariffs were originally implemented to protect US manufacturers from foreign competition.

As well as striving to make apparel more affordable, the legislation also proposes to set up a Sustainable Textile and Apparel Research (STAR) Fund.

This will make grants available to certain non-profit organisations to help the textile and apparel industry minimise energy and water use, reduce waste and global warming emissions, and incorporate sustainable practices into a product's entire life cycle.

"We believe there is a greater likelihood of passage for the US OUTDOOR Act due to its increased bipartisan support and a renewed focus from Congress and the administration on programs like the STAR Fund that create and support jobs in sustainable business practices," Boian noted.

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