Airforwarders Association



2026 AfA ADVOCACY & ACHIEVEMENTS

Your Voice in Washington and Beyond

A year-end account of AfA's work for members: legislation, regulatory advocacy, education, events and industry representation.

2026 AfA ACCOMPLISHMENTS

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INTRODUCTION

Introduction

The Airforwarders Association is your voice in Washington, DC, and beyond. This report shows what your membership delivered in 2026 and what we are working on in 2027.

What this is. A year-end account of AfA's work for members: legislation, regulatory advocacy, education, events and industry representation. It reaches you with your dues notice so you can see what your membership delivers.

Why it matters. Tariffs, customs staffing cuts, organized cargo theft and new airline liability rules all land on forwarders. No single company can move Washington or IATA alone. Together, AfA can, and in 2026 that meant:

- Getting a cargo theft bill through the U.S. House of Representatives
- Challenging IATA's new Direct Air Waybill liability rules
- Keeping TSA's Known Shipper Program workable
- Handing the association to new leadership without missing a beat



AfA MEMBERS

AfA Members

How to get involved and get the most from your membership:

- **Tell Steve Smith what you think.** Our new CEO is on a member listening tour. Tell him what's working, what isn't, and what keeps you up at night. Your input shapes our 2027 priorities.
- **Join us at AirCargo 2027,** February 28–March 2 in the Dallas–Fort Worth area. Register now at aircargoconference.com
- **Join a committee.** Cargo Theft and Technology are two examples where members shape our positions and programs.
- **Attend webinars and town halls.** Topics are current and practical, and speakers often include regulators and agency staff.
- **Respond to member surveys.** Our tariff and Direct Air Waybill polls became data we used in Washington and in the press.
- **Watch for AIRMAIL alerts** and the monthly newsletter on breaking issues. Forward them to your operations, compliance and legal teams.

New members: you are paired with a board liaison who helps you get the most from AfA.
Questions about membership? Reach out to info@airforwarders.org



THE YEAR IN REVIEW

2026 at a Glance

Leadership	Steve Smith named AfA's first CEO on September 28, succeeding Brandon Fried after 21 years
Cargo theft	Combating Organized Retail Crime Act (CORCA) passed the House in May; now pending in the Senate
Direct Air Waybill	Member poll, guidance, press statement and a joint white paper with NCBFAA challenging IATA's new liability rules
TSA	Co-authored Known Shipper white paper; seat on TSA's Known Shipper Working Group
Customs and trade	Member survey found 83% of forwarders saw lower volumes from tariffs; letters to DHS and CBP on gateway staffing
Capitol Hill	4th Annual Congressional Staffer Cargo Tour at BWI Marshall with more than 20 staff
Events	AirCargo 2026 drew nearly 1,100 attendees, 103 exhibitors and 61 speakers
Education	Member webinars and town halls on topics from ONE Record to dangerous goods compliance
Membership	27 new members recruited so far this year

LEADERSHIP

A New Chapter: Steve Smith Named AfA's First CEO

Effective September 28, 2026



On September 28, the AfA Board of Directors appointed Steve Smith as the association's first Chief Executive Officer. He succeeds Brandon Fried, who led AfA as Executive Director for 21 years and stayed through the fall to hand off relationships with TSA, CBP, FAA, Congress, our airline partners and the trade press.

Steve brings more than 25 years in aviation, logistics and humanitarian response:

- 13 years as President and CEO of Airlink, which he grew from a one-person startup into a nonprofit with nearly $20 million in revenue, working with more than 50 airlines and logistics companies and 250 humanitarian groups across 100 countries
- Response to more than 200 disasters and crises, including COVID-19, the war in Ukraine, the Ebola outbreak and the 2023 Türkiye earthquake
- A senior commercial role at Rolls-Royce Civil Aerospace
- Board service at InterAction and as a Board Trustee of the Aero Club of Washington; advice to NATO on building resilience through public-private cooperation

The board ran a careful, confidential search and chose a leader who already knows how air cargo moves under pressure. Steve began his transition in mid-September and added onsite visits with AfA members in Chicago in October. If he hasn't called you yet, he will. You can also meet him at one of our industry conferences or at AirCargo 2027 in Dallas, February 28–March 2.

> *"The work of the AfA has rarely been more important, with shifting trade policy, geopolitical disruption, and aging infrastructure adding pressure on supply chains that are already stretched,"* Steve said when his appointment was announced.



CARGO THEFT

Taking the Fight to Cargo Theft

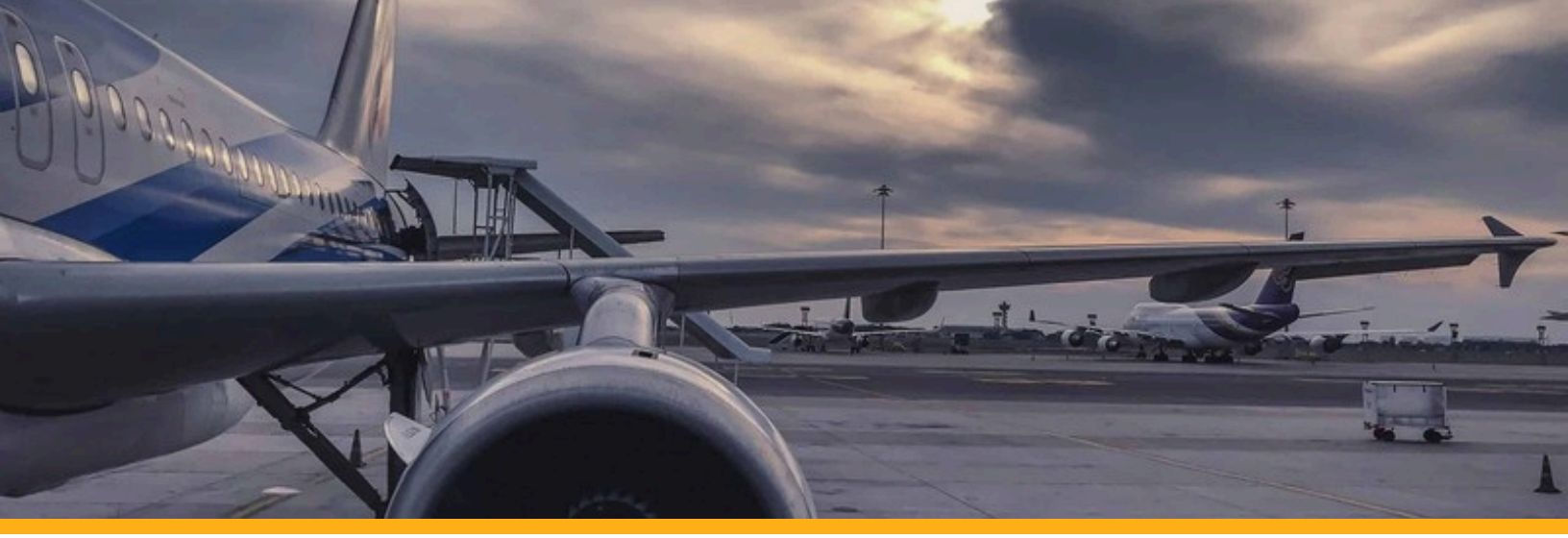
Cargo theft is organized, well-funded and aimed at the freight our members handle, from AI chips to e-commerce. In 2026, the AfA Cargo Theft Committee, chaired by Board Director David King and renamed from the Truck Fraud and Theft Committee to reflect its wider scope, moved the issue from committee calls to the floor of the House.

Legislation

The Combating Organized Retail Crime Act (CORCA) passed the U.S. House in May. Government Relations Director Michael Taylor and David King worked to make sure the bill reflects how theft rings actually target the air cargo supply chain. CORCA is now pending in the Senate, where lawmakers are working to attach it to the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA).

Tools members can use now:

- An April webinar with Lisa Perez of Avalon Risk Management on using insurance to tighten controls and prevent losses, not just pay claims
- Monthly trucking news updates from transportation attorney Hank Seaton
- An October 20 program, Cargo Theft: A Unified Federal Perspective, with FMCSA Deputy Administrator Jesse Elison and retired FBI Supervisory Special Agent Angel Martinez of the National Cargo Theft Task Force, moderated by Michael Taylor, on how CORCA's proposed coordination center could connect industry reporting with federal enforcement
- Analysis of the Supreme Court's unanimous May ruling in Montgomery v. Caribe Transport II, which removed the federal preemption defense brokers relied on in negligent-selection lawsuits and raised the stakes for forwarders arranging truck moves



DIRECT AIR WAYBILL

Standing Up for Forwarders on the Direct Air Waybill

IATA's revised Direct Air Waybill (DAWB) provisions took effect July 1. Under the new language, a forwarder tendering a DAWB can be treated as the shipper, taking on liability for misdeclared cargo, hidden dangerous goods, and sanctions or customs problems it didn't create. AfA didn't wait for the first claim to land:

- Polled members in May on awareness and concern, then turned the results into practical guidance posted on the AfA website
- Issued a July 3 press release warning that the rules could make forwarders liable for cargo they didn't pack or declare
- Relayed FIATA's formal review request and follow-up updates to members through AIRMAIL, using our FIATA membership to keep U.S. forwarders informed
- Urged members to get written confirmation from every airline before tendering cargo and to check their insurance coverage
- Finalized a joint white paper with NCBFAA setting out the forwarder's view of the new rules

What's next: Application still varies by carrier. FIATA has now circulated a forwarder questionnaire, which we will use to keep pressing for changes.



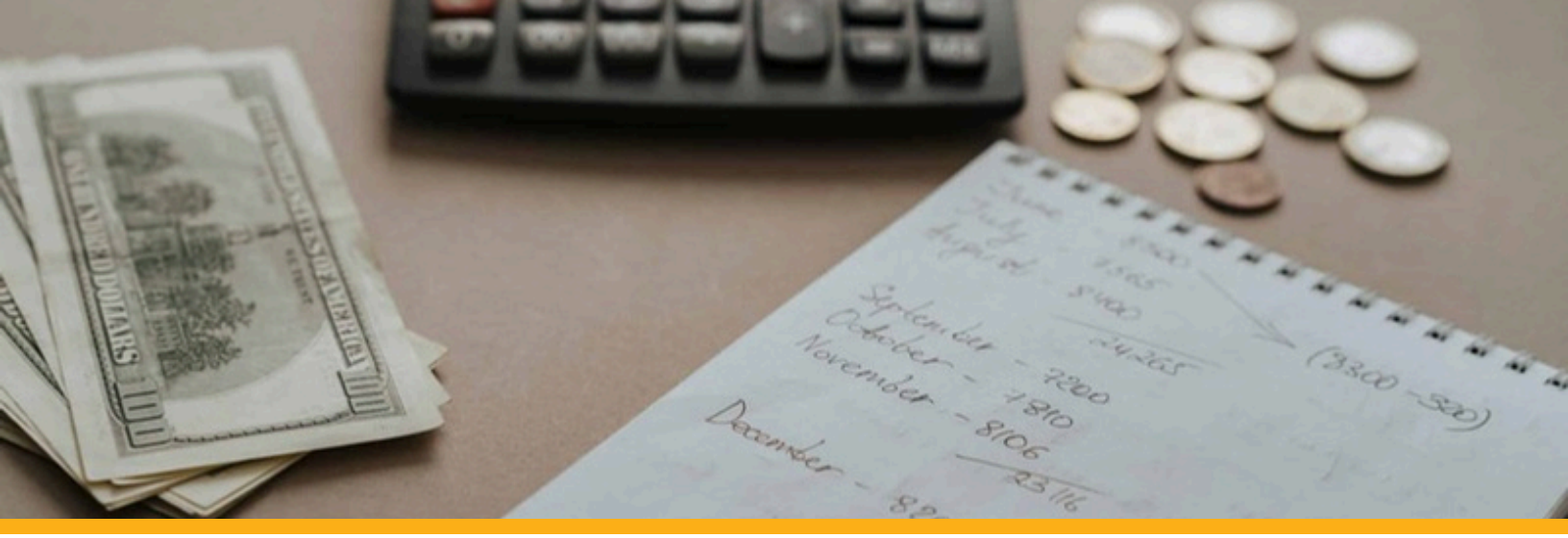
SECURITY

Air Cargo Security: Working with TSA

Nearly every AfA member operates under TSA's Indirect Air Carrier program, and this year we were in the room whenever those rules came up.

- Co-authored a white paper with NCBFAA on the future of the Known Shipper Program, which TSA has received and is now taking to others inside the agency
- Served on TSA's Known Shipper Working Group, which met in Washington in June and September to evaluate new ways to establish known shipper status
- Met with TSA air cargo leadership on the Known Shipper Management System (KSMS), where Jake Fisher of The Rock-It Company and Tom Paciello of Kuehne+Nagel brought operational recommendations
- Kept pressing TSA for a response on proposed revisions to the Indirect Air Carrier Standard Security Program
- Spoke up during the TSA workforce furlough about stalled guidance and recertification bottlenecks, while pointing out that the industry's certified screening model kept freight moving
- Opposed proposals to privatize TSA passenger screening, arguing at the CNS Partnership Conference that strong federal oversight is what makes the cargo security partnership work
- Took part every month in the T.A.G. Team (TSA Advisory Group) alongside NCBFAA

New leadership at TSA: We also welcomed new leadership at the agency: David Cummins, confirmed as TSA Administrator in August, and Chris Chipps, named to lead TSA's Air Cargo Division after Manny Melendez.



CUSTOMS AND TRADE

Customs, Trade and the Cost of Uncertainty

Tariffs, staffing cuts and new enforcement priorities made 2026 a hard year to plan. In February, AfA's member survey found that 83% of forwarders saw lower shipping volumes because of U.S. import tariffs, and more than half had changed routings or supply chains. We put those numbers to work in Washington and in the press.

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- Sent letters to the DHS Secretary and CBP Commissioner Scott laying out what staffing cuts at gateway airports mean on the ground (slower releases, longer dwell times, trucks backed up at the gate), and began building a coalition of stakeholders feeling the same pressure
- Secured seats for members at CBP's September listening session on the Strengthening Customs Enforcement Executive Order
- Filed comments on CBP's Air Cargo Advance Screening (ACAS) requirements, due January 20
- Joined National Retail Federation coalition letters opposing secondary-sanction tariff authority in Russia sanctions legislation and asking USTR to extend the delay on Section 301 vessel fees
- Kept members current on the Justice Department's new trade enforcement section, tougher Importer of Record requirements and IEEPA tariff refund litigation

CAPITOL HILL

Maintaining a Strong Voice on Capitol Hill

Government Relations Director Michael Taylor kept AfA in front of lawmakers and staff all year. Beyond CORCA, we:

- Joined the CLDA Lobby Day in April
- Met with Realterm on federal funding for air cargo infrastructure
- Kept the airport truck congestion problem, which the GAO confirmed last year, on the agenda
- Hosted our 4th Annual Congressional Staffer Cargo Tour at BWI Marshall on October 22, walking more than 20 Capitol Hill staff members through the Southwest Airlines Cargo docks and a hard-hat tour of Amazon's BWI facility, so they see what forwarders do before they write rules about it

Strategic Framework call
The board also started a monthly Strategic Framework call on influencing government, led by Board Directors Aaron Ambrite (AIT Worldwide) and Jake Fisher (The Rock-It Company). The call reviews pending regulatory and legislative changes and decides where AfA should act.





EVENTS AND EDUCATION

AirCargo 2026, Webinars and Town Halls

~1,100	103	45	61
ATTENDEES	EXHIBITORS	SPONSORS	SPEAKERS

AirCargo 2026 (February 15–17, Orlando) drew nearly 1,100 attendees, 103 exhibitors, 45 sponsors and 61 speakers. Kendra Tanner, President of Allstates WorldCargo, gave the Monday keynote, and Brian Clancy delivered his market outlook on Tuesday. At the AfA Annual General Meeting, members worked through truck fraud, airport congestion and regulatory pressure, and committee chairs reported on their progress. AirCargo brings airlines, freight forwarders, ground handlers, and logistics technology leaders together for three days of insight, networking, and deal-making.

This year's carrier and vendor awards went to Lufthansa Cargo, 7LFreight, Forward Air and Southwest Cargo. Noel Howard of Allstates WorldCargo received the Jim Foster Award, the association's most prestigious honor, named for our founder. Thanks to our AirCargo partners at AEMCA and ACI-NA and to a planning committee that keeps raising the bar.







INDUSTRY VOICE

Elevating AfA's Industry Voice

Working with Meantime Communications, AfA remained the first to call when reporters needed the forwarder's view. In October, Brandon appeared on CNBC's Access Middle East to explain how forwarders kept trade moving through the Iran conflict, and spoke with BBC Radio, FreightWaves, Air Cargo Week and The Loadstar. He also joined Mike King and Neel Jones Shah on the Freight Buyers' Club podcast and wrote for cargo.one on why relationships still move freight.

AfA statements covered the U.S.–Iran peace deal in June, the DAWB rules in July, and the September Northeast ground stops, when we urged the FAA to act. The American Journal of Transportation picked up that last one within hours.

2,300+	399	26.7M
MENTIONS	ARTICLES	AUDIENCE REACHED

Leadership and representation

- Brandon chaired the Cargo Network Services (CNS) Advisory Board and delivered the keynote at the CNS Partnership Conference in San Francisco in May
- Former TSA Air Cargo Division chief Doug Brittin continued on AfA's TSA engagement team
- We worked alongside NCBFAA, FIATA, TIACA, CLDA and TIA on shared issues

On the road

We met members and made the forwarder's case in Park City, Miami, Orlando, Los Angeles, New York, Chicago, San Francisco, Reno, Washington and Baltimore.

- January: Delta Cargo customer event, Park City
- January 20: Miami Air Cargo Association luncheon address
- March 18: Los Angeles Air Cargo Association industry panel
- March 19: JFK Air Cargo Association panel, as moderator
- May 14: Northwestern University (Chicago) panel
- May 19: CNS Partnership Conference keynote, San Francisco
- September: NCBFAA Government Affairs Conference fireside chat on DAWB and Known Shipper
- October 26–29: TIACA Air Cargo Forum, Miami, where Brandon and Steve were available to members and press



Growing Membership and Member Services

New members joined from every part of the supply chain, and we have recruited 27 so far this year. They include Alitrans USA, Andy Frain Services, BioNatur Plastics/M&G Packaging, Candid Logistics, Fusepoint, Future Forwarding, Next Gen Transportation, RK Logistics, Sierra Global Link, Sprinter Air, STC Logistics, Surge Transportation, Tag-N-Trac, Transportation Development Group, United Transportation and Yusen Logistics. Röhlig USA rejoined, as did Bellair. Every new member is now paired with a board liaison to help them get the most from AfA. Nominations for the 2027 Board of Directors election closed October 13.

What members receive

- A monthly newsletter, including Brandon's Musings column, which closed out a 21-year run in September
- AIRMAIL alerts on breaking issues, from DAWB to TSA leadership changes to CBP listening sessions
- Monthly trucking news updates
- FORWARD magazine, in print and digital
- An upgraded HubSpot platform, to improve how we reach members, to be completed in 2027

Coming in 2027

- AirCargo 2027, February 28–March 2 at the Loews Arlington Hotel in the Dallas–Fort Worth area. Register now at aircargoconference.com
- Cargo theft: getting CORCA through the Senate and helping shape the coordination center it would create
- Direct Air Waybill: continuing our engagement with airlines and IATA, using FIATA's questionnaire results and our joint white paper with NCBFAA
- TSA: working on Known Shipper modernization, KSMS improvements and long-pending Indirect Air Carrier Standard Security Program revisions
- CBP: growing the staffing coalition to cut delays at gateway airports
- Member input: Steve's listening tour, so AfA's 2027 priorities come from what you tell him

Thank you for your continued support.