

Hello. My name is Young Choe. I live in (your new town). I'm here today representing Korean Americans for Fair Trade, KAFT. Korean Americans for Fair Trade (KAFT) is a national organization of concerned Korean-American citizens that calls for trade that promotes the equitable and sustainable development of working people and the environment. KAFT opposes the KORUS for nine reasons.

#1 The Korea-US FTA is a Bush legacy that pre-dates the financial crisis and contains many provisions that would further deregulate finance and banking at a time when we are still trying to build a sustainable, transparent and just economy. Why is Obama trying to pass a Bush-era agreement that further deregulates our economy?

#2 The investor-state rules that Andy will discuss in detail.

#3 Because the FTA was signed under Fast-Track authority, Congress can only vote Yes or NO on the FTA once it is introduced, and once passed, this FTA cannot be repealed. Unlike other bills, Congress cannot change the actual features of the trade deal. Meanwhile, corporate interests have been lobbying hard and spending millions to pass this deal quickly, without a larger debate among the American public or in the media. This is an undemocratic process where your voice must be heard.

#4 While Obama argues that an increase in exports will lead to job growth, we only need look at NAFTA and the industries that benefit from the FTA to see that exports may not lead to jobs. We will be losing even more quality manufacturing jobs and replacing them, if at all, with low-wage service jobs. Independent think tank Economic Policy Institute estimated that the US would lose approximately 159,000 jobs through the Korea FTA, while 55,000 jobs would be lost through the Colombia-US FTA.

#5 Worker rights and job security will be threatened in both countries. This is due to the Korea-US FTA's 'rule of origin' provision, which allows up to 65% of the foreign materials in US or Korean goods to be exempt from tariffs and encourages the off-shoring of jobs. This means that American goods made elsewhere, such as in Mexican maquiladoras (factories in special economic zones intended to draw investors with lower taxes and fewer worker protections), and Korean goods made in China would be largely tariff-free, and benefit the transnational corporations that are already profiting greatly from cheap labor. We cannot afford to further undermine worker protections and rights.

#6 The FTA has been used to dismantle Korea's environmental and public health laws, and in turn, threatens America's future environmental policy. Through negotiations, Korea agreed to a side deal which overturned its 2000 law that kept genetically modified organisms (GMOs) out of Korea's food supply. By 2008, Korea had approved 102 GMOs for import as feed or food, 70 percent from the U.S. firms Monsanto, Dupont and Dow Chemical. The Korean government also agreed to lower national emissions standards to accommodate the import of less fuel-efficient and more polluting U.S. vehicles. This would mean more greenhouse gases leading to global warming, more air pollution and related public health problems. The FTA also makes the passage of future environmental conventions related to international trade more difficult because both countries would have to agree to them.

#7 The Korea-US FTA would devastate Korea's farms and farmers and threaten Korea's food security, while further filling the pockets of large US agribusinesses as American family farmers continue to be squeezed. Korea has only 4.2 million acres of farmland, compared with the US's 434 million. The average farm size in Korea is 1.2 acres, compared with the U.S.'s 71 acres. If the FTA is implemented, it will force roughly half of Korean farmers off their land. In the US, the National Family Farm Coalition opposes the deal because only large U.S. agribusiness corporations will benefit.

#8 If passed, the FTA would severely cripple or even dismantle Korea's public healthcare system, and undermine the US's chances of ever achieving universal health care or negotiating government-set price controls. It overturns Korea's existing public-health laws, opens the door for U.S. pharmaceutical companies even further into Korea's markets, and it extends patents up to 75 years, making it difficult for generic medications to reach the market and making it easier for U.S. pharmaceutical companies to sue generic drug manufacturers, even after a patent expires.

#9 The FTA undercuts the democratic process in both countries. The FTA violates 169 Korean laws. To silence the opposition, the Lee administration in Korea has turned to authoritarian practices reminiscent of past dictatorships. It has used violent police force against peaceful gatherings protesting the FTA, banned public assembly against the FTA, and issued arrest warrants for more than 170 civil society leaders who organized against the trade deal. The Lee government has also blocked anti-FTA advertising from airing on TV while running its own pro-FTA commercials.

The political appointees who run the Korean Consulate have misrepresented the Grand National Party's support for the FTA as the consensus position of Koreans and Korean Americans. They tell members of Congress and members of the Korean community in the US that the Korean public wants this trade agreement. They cite polls that violate accepted standards for polling methodology and ignore polls that produce results unfavorable to their position, like the May 2008 News and Views poll that found that 55 percent of Koreans opposed the U.S.-Korea FTA, while only 29 percent supported it. According to the New York Times, a deal related to the Korea FTA has provoked "the biggest anti-government demonstrations since the end of military dictatorship in the late 1980s" and almost brought down the Lee administration.

In reality, The KORUS FTA is an unpopular policy pushed by an unpopular Korean government. President Lee Myung-Bak's approval rating is currently 30.3% according to a September 23rd RealMeter poll. Jim Wayman, political counselor for the U.S. Embassy in South Korea was quoted in Capital Press as saying "If we don't have the free trade agreement passed by April of next year, we're in trouble. The longer the delay, the greater the chances of failure." According to the article, "Wayman said U.S. support for the pact is critical because the progressive party here, which opposes the pact, is poised to do well in next year's national assembly elections." Koreans should not have a trade agreement that they do not want foisted upon them by a government they will soon vote out of office. Representative Rothman can prove he is a true friend to the Korean community both in New Jersey and in Korea by reversing his position and pledging to vote "NO!" on the Korea-US Free Trade Agreement.