

COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS
SUBCOMMITTEE ON ASIA, THE PACIFIC, AND THE GLOBAL ENVIRONMENT
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20515

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Opening Statement

April 23, 2008

Mr. Chairman, thank you for calling this important hearing regarding America's alliance with the Republic of Korea. The friendship between the United States and South Korea is one that was forged in the life and death struggle of the Korean War and it continues to be strong to this day.

President Lee Myung-bak of South Korea recently concluded a high profile visit to the United States where he reaffirmed the strength of our bilateral relationship. I had the honor of meeting with President Lee during his visit, and I am hopeful that under his leadership any remaining disagreements can be successfully resolved. I am very pleased that positive signals are already emerging from Seoul that this new president has a different way of doing business. Thus, we welcomed the agreement on beef that was announced last week regarding beef in the U.S.-Korea Free Trade Agreement. I hope that a similar agreement can be reached with regard to American automobile exports under the FTA.

The northern Illinois congressional district that I represent has a lot at stake in a successful free trade agreement with Korea. A good agreement will allow the hardworking people of the United States to sell their goods into the Korean market. In fact, Winnebago County has the second highest concentration of manufacturers in the nation behind Wayne County Michigan. In Boone County, Illinois where Chrysler employs thousands of workers in multiple shifts to build the Dodge Caliber, Jeep Compass, and the Jeep Patriot. In 2007, Chrysler exported 138,326 vehicles outside the U.S., representing 41.5 percent of total production. The cars made in Belvidere are made for consumers all around the world. So, opening markets can be very beneficial to America's economic health. There are obviously still problems with a free and open market in autos in Korea because all foreign automakers have only a three percent market penetration. For the U.S.-Korea FTA to be successful, the playing field for Chrysler and other U.S. auto makers must be leveled.

On the security side of the relationship, I fully support the current effort to enhance South Korea's military relationship with the United States. The U.S.-ROK Defense Cooperation Improvement Act of 2008, authored by my good friend Ed Royce from California, sends the right message that America cares about its friends. After all it is America's partnership with Korea that has helped to guarantee the security of Asia in the nuclear age. This strategic relationship has helped ensure Korea's development into a robust democratic state with a market economy that is the envy of the Asia-Pacific region. I know this is a top priority for the South Korean government and for the President of the

United States so I hope that the Committee takes action on the legislation.

South Korea plays an extremely important role in the Six Party Talks denuclearization process. With the exception of China, South Korea is the only country in the Talks that shares a common border with North Korea. The South Korean people have so much at stake in the outcome of the negotiations, and the people's support is critical to its success. We must remember that it is the South Koreans that will bear the direct economic, social, and emotional burden of any future reunification or deterioration of North Korea.

Some of my colleagues have expressed serious concern about the direction in which the Six Party Talks is progressing and about the sincerity of the North Korean state in the negotiations. I understand and appreciate their concerns, and I share their interests in getting North Korea to provide a full and accurate declaration of their nuclear programs, including any proliferation activity. However, let me state publicly that the stakes in the Six Party Talks are so high that we must not give in to unreasonable demands on either side of the issue. Because failure is really not an option, we have to do all we can to maximize our chances for success.

Mr. Chairman, I want to take this opportunity to recognize the role that Americans of Korean descent have played in strengthening the U.S.-Korea relationship. Given the importance of people to people contact in this alliance, I fully support the speedy implementation of the Visa Waiver Program. Businesses in both countries will benefit from improved cross border mobility. Buyers of American goods from Korea will have an easier time coming to the United States to conduct business. This is only fair since Americans can already travel to Korea without a visa. This is a win-win scenario.

Thank you for calling this hearing. I look forward to the testimony of our distinguished witness.