

U.S. Negotiates Trade Agreement with South Korea (KORUS)

April 25, 2007

The U.S. and South Korea agreed to terms on a trade agreement that would be the largest trade agreement since the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) was signed in the mid 1990's. Specifics are not available as the Bush United States Trade Representative (USTR) notified Congress at midnight on March 31st that they intend to sign the agreement even though the full text of the agreement doesn't exist yet. Regardless of the question of whether or not signing a nonexistent trade deal adheres to the fast track law which governs this process; the real question is why would our government sign something before negotiations are completed?

USTR did provide a rough outline within a [press release](#) pertaining to some of the sections of this ghost trade agreement and just like NAFTA, CAFTA and all the other damaging trade deals, the KORUS has the same weak worker protections where a country enforces their own laws and if they don't there's little workers can do about it.

USTR also produced a [summary of the KORUS](#) [Acrobat 76K] which highlights that a country should strive to ensure that their domestic labor laws comply with international workers rights while businesses like the drug companies once again get overreaching protections that will limit access to generic drugs that many citizens rely upon to make treatment affordable.

Congressional Democrats have been meeting with representatives from the White House and USTR for months to address fair traders' concerns with the way in which trade negotiations are conducted with a particular emphasis on strengthening the labor protections for all workers. The KORUS utilization of the same weak labor provisions is a clear sign that the Bush White House and USTR have no intention of addressing this concern prompting Congressman Sander Levin (D-MI) who is the Chairman of the House Subcommittee on Trade to voice his opposition to the KORUS. Former North Carolina Senator John Edwards became the first of what pundits refer to as "top tier" presidential candidates to state that he would oppose the KORUS because of its weak labor and environmental provisions.

The debate surrounding the KORUS promises to expose a deep rift between the demands American workers and the way in which GOP leadership and the Bush Administration attempt to conduct trade negotiations. This debate will also highlight the extremely flawed process of presidential fast track trade authority and the attempted abuse of the current rules by USTR.

As implementing language for trade agreements is the only type of legislation that permits the White House to introduce legislation in Congress hence bypassing members of Congress constitutional right to control their agenda and the very essence of separation of powers; it remains unclear to us if the White House will submit a deeply flawed KORUS to Congress given the extreme dissatisfaction that members of Congress have voiced regarding the KORUS. This process will provide us with valuable insight as to the prospect of fast track negotiating authority being reauthorized for the Bush White House when it expires on June 30th of this year.

Given that the KORUS contains the same weak labor language, far overreaching protections for drug makers, poor environmental protections and irresponsible dispute resolution mechanism for foreign investors that we saw in the CAFTA and Oman trade agreements; CWA

opposes the deeply flawed KORUS. Feel free to contact David B. Martin in the CWA Legislative Department at 202-434-1100 with any question you may have.