

U.S.-Korea trade deal draws protests in Portland, Eugene

Several dozen opponents of the proposed U.S.-Korea Free Trade Agreement demonstrated Jan. 12 outside the Portland office of U.S. Sen. Ron Wyden (D-OR).

In December, U.S. and Korean trade negotiators struck a deal that is expected to bring the Korea FTA to the floor of Congress early this year. It is the biggest free trade deal since the North American Free Trade Agreement passed in 1994, and it is opposed by the AFL-CIO and most labor unions.

Among the crowd of demonstrators in Portland was Kim Kyung-Ran, director of external relations for the Korean Confederation of Trade Unions. Kyung-Ran was on a West Coast tour speaking out against the trade pact. The previous evening at the Machinists Hall in Southeast Portland she presented a slide show exhibiting the opposition that is building against the trade deal in South Korea.

Kyung-Ran said the same provisions in the agreement that encourage off-shoring of U.S. manufacturing jobs — such as special investor privileges, deregulatory requirements, and substandard labor protections — also weaken labor's hand in South Korea.

"FTA only brings us chaos," she told protesters at Wyden's office. "For laborers and common people, FTA cannot be hopeful. It will greatly reduce our jobs, and it will also reduce the social welfare of the people. We need to unite to fight against the FTA."

Wyden was the target of the protest because he chairs the Senate Subcommittee on International Trade. Many union officials are upset that — given the history of 5 million manufacturing jobs lost to free trade and outsourcing since the inception of NAFTA — he hasn't made any attempt to stop the deal with Korea.

The Economic Policy Institute predicts that if the trade deal passes, within seven years Korean imports will have displaced 888,000 more American jobs.

"We'll obviously gain some jobs, too, as a result of the agreement," said Arthur Stamoulis, director of the Oregon Fair Trade Campaign, "but any way you cut it, Oregon should expect thousands more job losses. What's worse, the jobs being lost pay much better than the jobs created."

Madelyn Elder, president of Communications Workers of America Local 7901, said the Korea FTA "gives investment and legal protections to large multi-national corporations that shift jobs off shore in search of the lowest labor and environmental costs — and the highest profits. These protections could overrule the common good of all people on Earth."

Kyung-Ran's West Coast tour also included stops in Eugene and Seattle. Her Portland and Eugene visits were co-sponsored by Machinists Lodges 63 and 1005, Portland Jobs with Justice, and the Lane County Fair Trade Campaign.



Madelyn Elder, president of Communications Workers of America Local 7901, addresses several dozen opponents of the Korea Free Trade Agreement during a protest rally Jan. 12 in front of the Portland office of U.S. Sen. Ron Wyden. In December, U.S. and Korean trade negotiators struck a deal that is expected to bring the Korea FTA to the floor of Congress this year. In the background, Carpenters Local 247 retiree Bruce Dennis dons a "Corporate Greed" pig costume.

Union pilots at Evergreen Airlines authorize strike

McMINNVILLE — Unionized pilots at Evergreen International Airlines — a cargo airline headquartered in McMinnville, Oregon — voted overwhelmingly to strike if an agreement is not reached with management. Bargaining for a new union contract has been going on, without success, for six years.

Evergreen International Airlines is a cargo airline, operating a fleet of Boeing 747s out of New York (JFK) and Travis Air Force Base, California. The company is a subsidiary of privately-held Evergreen International Aviation, which also owns Evergreen Helicopters, Inc.

The saga began when pilots at Evergreen International Airlines formed their own independent union, The Aviators' Group (TAG) secured a union contract in 1999. The contract ran through the end of 2004.

Bargaining on a new contract began in 2004, but went nowhere. Mediated talks began in 2005, supervised by the National Mediation Board (NMB) — the federal agency that regulates railroad and airline union issues. Still no progress. In 2007, TAG members voted overwhelmingly to merge into the much larger Air Line Pilots Association.

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