REPORTERS’ MEMO

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Here’s an Impediment to Job Creation That Ways and Means Hearing Should Discuss: Korea Trade Deal Is Projected to Increase the Overall U.S. Trade Deficit

Summary: A comprehensive U.S. government study conducted by the U.S. International Trade Commission (USITC) projects that implementation of the Korea FTA will lead to an increase in the U.S. trade deficit in goods, which will likely cause layoffs here at home. The changes made to the deal by the Obama administration in December 2010 do not alter these USITC findings.

As the House Ways and Means Committee considers impediments to job creation at today’s hearing, will anyone raise the inconvenient truth that the U.S.-South Korea Free Trade Agreement (FTA), which the committee will consider in the coming weeks, is projected to increase the overall U.S. trade deficit and cause declines in seven industrial sectors?

This memo reviews five studies that have attempted to predict the economic effects of the Korea FTA, with particular attention paid to an often-cited USITC study, and examines some recent FTA job-creation claims made by members of Congress and corporate lobbyists.

The USITC concluded that the Korea FTA would increase the U.S. goods trade deficit. On both politics and policy, this is a troubling finding and suggests that implementation of the Korea FTA will likely lead to U.S. job losses.

The pact’s chief negotiator, Ambassador Karan Bhatia, offered a frank assessment while serving President George W. Bush’s deputy U.S. trade representative. Bhatia said that it was a “myth” that “the U.S. will get the bulk of the benefits of the FTA.” He went on to say, “If history is any judge, it may well not turn out to be true that the U.S. will get the bulk of the benefits, if measured by increased exports.” He added that, in the instance of Mexico and other countries, “the history of our FTAs is that bilateral trade surpluses of our trading partners go up,” meaning that the U.S. trade deficit with those countries increased.2

Table 1: USITC Estimates of Trade Balance Effects of Korea FTA, Selected Industries

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Industry</th>
<th>Change in U.S. trade balance (millions of dollars)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motor vehicles and parts</td>
<td>($531)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other transportation equipment</td>
<td>($340)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Electronic equipment</td>
<td>($790)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metal products</td>
<td>($169)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Textiles</td>
<td>($169)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apparel</td>
<td>($56)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iron-containing metals</td>
<td>($65)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>($2,120)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Lori Wallach, Public Citizen’s Global Trade Watch director, and Todd Tucker, research director, are available to comment on the political and economic implications the Korea FTA. To schedule an interview with Ms. Wallach or Mr. Tucker, please contact Bryan Buchanan, press officer for Public Citizen’s Global Trade Watch, at (202) 454-5108 or at bbuchanan@citizen.org.
South Korea is a major industrial power. The USITC predicts that U.S. imports of Korean goods will increase significantly if the FTA is implemented. U.S. export opportunities to Korea are murky. The pact was negotiated under the deadline of Fast Track termination in 2007. With literally minutes to go before losing Fast Track authority, the Bush administration agreed to allow certain Korea tariffs to remain in place for sectors in which the U.S. agreed to eliminate its tariffs immediately. Turning to U.S. imports from Korea, some goods from South Korea (including motor vehicles and industrial textiles) currently face high tariffs. This stands in contrast to goods from many developing countries that already enjoy U.S. trade preferences. Elimination of these tariffs on Korean goods could lead to a flood of imports, thereby reducing U.S. demand for domestically produced products and causing factories to reduce production and lay off workers.

A study by the Economic Policy Institute examined the employment impacts of Korea FTA implementation. EPI examined the U.S. historical experience with major changes in bilateral trade policy – namely changes in trade flows with Mexico and China after NAFTA implementation and Chinese World Trade Organization (WTO) ascension, respectively – to determine the likely impact of the Korea FTA on trade flows and jobs. EPI found that implementation of the Korea FTA would boost the U.S. trade deficit with Korea by $13.9 billion over the next seven years. This, in turn, would cost the U.S. economy about 159,000 net jobs. This would be equivalent to losing 90 percent of the manufacturing jobs in Detroit.

Public Citizen investigated the export growth record of U.S. FTAs in our report “Lies, Damn Lies and Export Statistics: How Corporate Lobbyists Distort Record of Flawed Trade Deals,” available at: http://bit.ly/bx3JIn. Examining the relative export growth record to the broader set of America’s 17 FTA partners, we found that U.S. exports to FTA countries have on the whole grown at less than half the pace of U.S. exports to countries with which we do not have such pacts. If the difference between the FTA and non-FTA export growth rates for goods for each year were to be put in dollar terms, the total U.S. FTA export “penalty” would be $72 billion over the past decade.

**Ways and Means Member Brady Repeats Debunked FTA Export Claims**

On his announcement of a March 17 hearing, Rep. Kevin Brady (R-Texas) said, “Since 2000, U.S. exports to the 13 countries with which the United States has implemented trade agreements have grown almost twice as fast as our worldwide exports.” This repeats similar claims floated by the U.S. Chamber of Commerce and the U.S. Trade Representative that were thoroughly debunked in our report, “Lies, Damn Lies, and Export Statistics.”

It seems Rep. Brady is engaging in the same apples-to-oranges comparison trick that we highlighted in our report (see page 18). If you take the unweighted average growth of exports to FTA partners and compare it to the weighted average growth of exports to the world from 2000-2010, you'll get an FTA growth rate almost twice as high as the growth rate of exports to the world. Comparing weighted and unweighted averages makes FTAs seem great for U.S. exports, but it’s a false comparison.

In fact, an apples-to-apples comparison of exports to FTA partners and non-FTA partners since 2000 shows just the opposite of Rep. Brady's claims: Exports to FTA partners have grown at half the pace of exports to non-FTA partners. In inflation-adjusted and trade-weighted terms, exports to FTA partners grew at an average annual rate of only 1.5 percent from 2000-2010 while exports to non-FTA partners grew at an average annual rate of 3.8 percent during the same
period. The best way to compare the FTA and non-FTA export rates is to use a weighted measure since it weights exports by their value – and thus their importance to U.S. workers who produce the exported goods. However, as we demonstrated in our September report, it is also the case that if you slice it the other way – comparing the unweighted FTA rate against the unweighted non-FTA rate – exports to FTA partners still have grown at half the pace of exports to non-FTA partners. Thus, any way you look at it, exports to FTA partners have lagged behind exports to countries with which we do not have FTAs.

The USITC Korea FTA Study: A Rising U.S. Deficit with Korea FTA

The USITC’s projections of the effects of the Korea FTA are based on a complex mathematical model of the global economy (a computable general equilibrium [CGE] model). The USITC found that the Korea FTA would result in an increase in the total U.S. goods trade deficit of between $308 million and $416 million.\(^\text{13}\) Imports are projected to increase by $5,100-5,692 million, and exports would increase by $4,792-$5,276 million.

The December 2010 supplemental deal – which extended the time period for but did not eliminate the tariff phase-out for certain autos and trucks – does not alter these findings. That is because the USITC model looks at the change in trade flows when the agreement is fully implemented and tariffs are fully phased out. Given that the supplemental agreement did not alter the ultimate elimination of these tariffs, but only the timeline for these cuts, it does not alter the USITC findings. (The study did not attempt to project the effects of the agreement on overall services trade, due to insufficient data and widely shared concerns among economists about the feasibility of modeling the non-tariff regulatory changes that affect services trade.)

The Korea FTA’s Damage To The U.S. Auto Sector

The USITC study showed that the (overall) U.S. deficit in autos and auto parts would increase by at least $531 million under the Korea FTA.

Korean Embassy’s claim: “The ITC study predicted that the KORUS FTA would increase U.S. auto exports to Korea by 45.5 percent to 58.9 percent and auto imports from Korea by 9.1 percent to 12.0 percent.”

Facts: Playing with percentages obscures the projected worsening of the auto trade deficit. The embassy’s use of percentage gains versus the net balance or quantities of vehicles obscures the reality of the data. The USITC’s prediction that exports of U.S. autos to Korea would increase by 46-59 percent seems impressive at first glance, but upon closer inspection it becomes clear that the very low starting point of U.S. exports to Korea (about 6,000 vehicles in 2009) means that this percentage increase is small potatoes that will be overwhelmed by the huge increase in Korean auto exports (at about 500,000 in 2009) to the United States projected to occur under the FTA. In the USITC study, U.S. auto exports to Korea start at only $0.7 billion, but Korean auto exports to the United States start at $14.5 billion. Thus, an increase in U.S. auto exports of 46-59 percent results in $294-381 million in greater auto exports, but the increase of 9-12 percent for imports of Korean autos leads to a $1,324-1,737 million import increase, dwarfing the U.S. exports and resulting in a net increase in the auto trade deficit with Korea of $1,030-1,356 million. (Note that due to trade diversion effects, the USITC found that the total increase in the U.S. auto trade deficit with the world is less than the increased deficit with Korea itself.)
What Does this Mean for U.S. Jobs?

In announcing his intentions to send the Korea FTA to Congress, President Barack Obama noted that it would “support at least 70,000 American jobs.”\textsuperscript{14} A fact sheet that accompanied the release said, “With the U.S. International Trade Commission (ITC) estimating that the tariff cuts alone in the U.S.-Korea trade agreement will increase exports of American goods by $10-11 billion, advancing this agreement will secure the tens of thousands of American jobs supported by those exports.”\textsuperscript{15}

Obama’s use of the term “support” is critical, as noted in a \textit{New York Times} story, “Few New Jobs Expected Soon from Free-Trade Agreement with South Korea.”\textsuperscript{16} The figure cites reflects the USITC’s projected gains of $10-11 billion in U.S. gross exports to Korea.\textsuperscript{17} It is likely that the jobs number was then derived by multiplying the estimated gain in bilateral exports by an exports-to-jobs ratio. An April 2010 report from the International Trade Administration estimated that every $150,000 in U.S. exports supports one American job.\textsuperscript{18} Applying this exports-to-jobs ratio to the $10-11 billion exports figure yields an estimate of 66,667-73,333 jobs.

However, this notably does not include the other side of the calculation – U.S. jobs lost to imports.

Just as greater exports tend to support more jobs, greater imports tend to eliminate jobs – all else being equal. The 70,000 figure ignores the USITC’s import estimates entirely. If we were to account for the effects of imports, use this same method of jobs calculation and consider the USITC’s estimate of the effect of the Korea FTA on the U.S. global trade balance (available on Table 2.3 on page 2-14 in the USITC report), we would find that the Korea FTA would cause a net loss of U.S. jobs, since the trade deficit will increase by $308-416 million.

The structure of the USITC’s projection model does not permit the total number of workers to vary, so their report does not contain a net job loss estimate to accompany the estimate of the increased deficit.\textsuperscript{19} While holding the total number of workers constant, though, the model does permit the movement of workers from one sector of the economy to another, so it can be useful in illustrating the types of jobs that may be lost with a Korea FTA.

The USITC study indicates that jobs may be lost in many high-wage industries, including auto manufacturing and electronics manufacturing. \textbf{Interestingly, the USITC predicted that, were the Korea FTA implemented, there would be an absolute decline in the total value of exports in some manufacturing sectors, including electronic equipment, other transportation equipment and iron-containing metals, not just a worsening of the balance.} For example, total U.S. exports of electronic equipment are expected to decline by $293-381 million due to the Korea FTA implementation.\textsuperscript{20} This is a particularly troubling development, since high-tech jobs are often touted as being the “jobs of the future.”

Average hourly earnings in the electronic equipment manufacturing industry, projected to lose a significant number of jobs, were $30.38 in 2008. This was 40.5 percent greater than the average...
hourly earnings of all workers employed in the private sector. The USITC study shows what would drive declines in employment in these industries: Large rises in the trade deficit in these sectors are projected under the Korea FTA, totaling up to $1.8 billion for motor vehicles/parts, other transportation equipment and electronic equipment.

The USITC projected that the workers shed by these high-paying industries would be absorbed by other industries – principally low-paying industries such as meat processing, which are expected to export more goods under the Korea FTA. Workers in the meat production industry are very poorly paid. Their average hourly earnings are only $13.69, which is 36.7 percent less than the average hourly earnings of all workers employed in the private sector.21 (Notably, 80 percent of the top 10 states with the highest concentration of meat processing jobs as a share of total jobs have been given a Republican-leaning Partisan Voting Index score by the Cook Political Report, ranging from R+4 to R+13.22 This makes it unlikely that Democrats will be able to politically capitalize on any job creation in the meat-processing sector.)

The unfavorable employment effects of the Korea FTA projected by the USITC model can be thought of as the minimum level of employment displacement and trade deficit increase (and related employment displacement) that the Korea FTA might bring about, given that past USITC projections have been overly optimistic. For example, a 1999 USITC study using roughly the same model estimated that China’s tariff offer for WTO ascension would increase the U.S. trade deficit with China by only $1 billion dollars.23 In reality, the trade deficit with China skyrocketed by $167 billion between 2001 and 2008.24 Although China’s WTO ascension alone (and the favorable trade treatment that came with it) likely did not cause the entirety of the huge rise in the trade deficit with China, it almost certainly contributed more than $1 billion dollars to the rise in the deficit.

The table on page 1 of this memo displays the USITC’s estimates of the trade balance impact upon a few sectors of the U.S. economy where it projects the Korea FTA will cause deficits: motor vehicles, electronic equipment, “other transportation equipment,” iron, metal products, textiles and apparel. The USITC developed ranges for the statistically likely effects of the FTA, which are labeled in the Table 1 as “low” and “high” estimates.

By identifying the location of businesses in these vulnerable sectors, it is possible to determine which U.S. states are most at risk for Korea FTA-related job loss.25 Interestingly, many of these are swing states that Obama must capture to win re-election.

- For the auto sector, the top five states that would face Korea FTA job loss threats are: Michigan, Indiana, Ohio, Kentucky and California.
- For the other transportation equipment sector, the top five states that would face Korea FTA job loss threats are: California, Texas, Florida, Georgia and Connecticut.
- For the electronic equipment sector, the top states that would face Korea FTA job loss threats are: California, Texas, New York, Illinois and Massachusetts.
- For the metal products sector, the top five states that would face Korea FTA job loss threats are: California, Texas, Pennsylvania, Michigan and Illinois.
- For the textiles sector, the top five states that would face Korea FTA job loss threats are: North Carolina, Georgia, California, South Carolina and Alabama.
- For the apparel sector, the top states that would face Korea FTA job loss threats: California, New York, Kentucky, Texas and Pennsylvania.
For the iron-containing metals sector, the top states that would face Korea FTA job loss threats are: Pennsylvania, Ohio, Texas, Michigan and Illinois.

The auto manufacturing industry may lose a significant number of workers due to the FTA. Indeed, the Korea Automobile Manufacturing Association (KAMA) celebrated the December 2010 supplemental deal in the following terms: “The deal wiped off uncertainties in the world’s largest automobile market and is forecast to drive up South Korean automakers’ market share in the U.S. ... Small and mid-size auto parts makers will also benefit from the elimination of tariffs.”

The USITC study projected that once tariffs are phased out, the sizable bilateral trade deficit with Korea in autos and auto parts (Korean sent 500,000 autos here in 2010 while the U.S. exported fewer than 6,000 to Korea) would increase by as much as $1.3 billion. To try to expand U.S. auto exports to Korea, the supplemental negotiations concluded in December 2010 included a four-year waiver of Korean auto fuel efficiency and emission standards for U.S. imports as well as a waiver of Korean auto safety standards for a high number of U.S. imports. Other Korean policies identified by the industry and United Auto Workers as posing significant non-tariff barriers to entry were not waived.

And, the low 35 percent domestic content rule for vehicles to obtain duty-free treatment was not altered, meaning Korean assembled vehicles containing 65 percent Chinese and other inputs would gain duty-free entry into the U.S. market. (Korea’s FTA with the European Union requires 55 percent domestic content to obtain favorable tariff treatment.) The elimination of U.S. auto and truck tariffs and the low rule of origin requirements raise the question of whether Korean auto firms now producing cars in the United States would continue their operations. The average hourly earnings of American workers in the auto industry was $23.61 in 2008, 9.2 percent higher than the average hourly earnings of all workers employed in the private sector ($21.62). According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), total hourly compensation per worker, which includes both wages and benefits, was $36.35 for American workers in the auto sector and $23.30 for Korean workers in the auto sector in 2007, so compensation for American auto workers is about 56 percent higher.

Confusion about the Seemingly Conflicting USITC Finding on the Korea FTA

Given that the fundamental question is what the FTA would mean for America’s trade balance and thus jobs, it is worth understanding the seemingly conflicting data in the USITC report. At first glance the USITC study seems to suggest that the U.S. trade balance in goods (also known as merchandise) would improve by $3.3-4 billion because this is the projected change in the bilateral trade balance with Korea. However, due to the way that bilateral trade agreements affect global trade flows, the Korea FTA’s results for overall U.S. trade balance in goods are dramatically different from the change in the bilateral balance with Korea.

Chapter 2 of the USITC report explains: “The last row in table 2.3 reports the simulated changes in total U.S. trade in sectors analyzed in this simulation. Total U.S. exports of these commodities is expected to be higher by $4.8–5.3 billion, and total imports of commodities in this analysis is expected to be higher by $5.1–5.7 billion.” Subtracting the import figures from the exports figures reveal that the USITC study predicts the total U.S. trade deficit in goods will increase by between $0.3 billion and $0.5 billion. This finding in sum is that the effect of trade diversion on U.S. exports is greater than the effect on U.S. imports, so the U.S. trade balance with the world
(including Korea) would worsen after the FTA went into effect, but the balance with Korea alone improves. The bottom line USITC finding contradicts Obama’s stated purpose for passing the FTA – to promote his goal of doubling exports to create two million U.S. jobs.

**Losing Ground Against Export Competitors With the FTA**

**Administration claim:** “America used to be Korea’s biggest trading partner. But since 2003, we have fallen to fourth place – behind China, Japan and the European Union. In just over a decade, our share of Korea’s import market for goods has fallen from 21 percent to just 9 percent – a smaller share than the European Union, which is preparing to secure more of the Korean market by implementing its own free trade agreement next summer. During that same period China’s market share increased from 7 percent to 18 percent. The U.S.-Korea trade agreement will help American companies and American workers regain a strong hand in the Korean marketplace, making sure that more of the goods and services sold there are made in America – not somewhere else. Those benefits will be in jeopardy if we do nothing while Korea moves forward on agreements with the EU, Australia, and others.”

**Fact:** The USITC finds that a lot of the impact of the FTA would simply be product shifting: U.S. exports that used to go to Europe or China would be redirected to Korea. This provides no additional benefit to U.S. workers, but can serve on a superficial level to boost the apparent gains from the FTA. Moreover, the rules of origin in the FTA would disproportionately benefit countries that are not signatories to the agreement, such as China and the countries of the European Union. In the auto sector, for instance, as much as two-thirds of the inputs can come from these other countries, and then be incorporated into a final product in South Korea and gain the same benefits as if it were wholly made in South Korea. Europe, in contrast, got a much better deal with its EU-Korea trade deal, which requires more than half the value of the auto parts to come from the EU or Korea to qualify for EU-Korea FTA benefits.

In sum, the Obama administration partially adopts a fair trade rhetoric by talking about competitiveness with other trading partners. What it fails to mention is that the benefits of the U.S.-Korea deal it negotiated will go largely to Europe, China and other countries – the countries we supposedly are trying to outcompete.

**Other Studies On Korea FTA Economic Effects are Questionable**

There are other studies on the Korea FTA’s possible economic outcomes, but they make questionable assumptions and/or do not explain their methodology fully. They thus are best ignored. For example, a 60-page study commissioned by the Korea Economic Institute accounts for a range of issues that other models do not account for, but also relies on the unrealistic assumption that “trade remains balanced for each country or region, that is, any initial trade imbalance remains constant as trade barriers are changed.” Hence, under the assumptions of the model, no matter how tariff levels between countries change, the U.S. global trade balance would stay constant.

To give another example, a 2009 study commissioned by the U.S. Chamber of Commerce that predicts large gains in U.S. jobs from the FTA is generally vague in its explanation of its methodology. More concerning, though, is that nowhere does the report give an estimate of the increase in U.S. imports due to the FTA. At a minimum, any study that claims to predict the effects of a trade agreement upon the U.S. economy should deal with both sides of trade –
exports and imports. Given that the study doesn’t even report any estimates of an effect on imports, it is not clear whether the study accounted for the effects of rising imports at all. Indeed, failing to account for the effects of increased imports would go a long way toward explaining how the study came up with the unrealistically large number of jobs that the Korea FTA would supposedly create.

A 2006 study on a potential Korea FTA from the Peterson Institute for Institutional Economics fails to even report its projected changes in trade flows due to an FTA, so the study’s results on effects upon the U.S. trade deficit are unknown. Since the study was carried out before the release of the text of the FTA, it studied two scenarios – one in which rice tariffs were eliminated and one in which they were left unchanged. Rice tariffs are left unchanged in the final text of the Korea FTA. The results of the model with unchanged rice tariffs predict that the U.S. would gain $6.3 billion in welfare in the medium term. However, it predicts that most manufacturing sectors would see significant declines in output, including a 0.3 percent decline in U.S. motor vehicle output and a 0.5 percent decline in the output of electronic equipment. It also projects that the wages of unskilled workers in the United States would change by less than 0.05 percent (the percent change in wage is rounded to 0.0 in the table) and the wages of skilled workers would decline by 0.1 percent.

Conclusion

In summary, an independent government study suggests that the implementation of the Korea FTA would lead to an increase in the U.S. trade deficit in goods, which would likely cause layoffs here at home. Members of Congress will face severe political liability back home if they vote for a NAFTA-style trade deal that is expected to kill jobs at a time of sky high unemployment.

ENDNOTES

2 Remarks by Ambassador Karan Bhatia (Deputy U.S. Trade Representative) at Yonsei University, October 24, 2006. Available at: http://ustraderep.gov/assets/Document_Library/Transcripts/2006/October/asset_upload_file496_9901.pdf
4 In 2008, imports of Korean goods into the United States faced a trade-weighted average tariff of 1.50 percent. Goods from Colombia and Panama, potential FTA partners, faced trade-weighted average tariffs of 0.95 and 0.56, respectively. World Trade Organization, “Tariff Analysis Online,” June 2010 version, Available at: http://tariffanalysis.wto.org/
11 Since Rep. Brady says “worldwide” exports, here exports to FTA partners are not subtracted out from exports to the world to get the non-FTA export growth rate. Also, Rep. Brady speaks of 13 U.S. FTA partners, but there are 17 FTA partners and all 17 were included in the calculations here. Finally, these numbers are not adjusted for inflation because the unweighted FTA export growth rate would actually be more than twice the weighted worldwide export growth rate if the data was adjusted for inflation, which would be inconsistent with Brady’s claims.