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THE PENINSULA

Texas Governor's Trip to Seoul Highlights Korean Ties with the Lone Star State

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While South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol is in Washington, DC this week for the NATO Summit, another landmark trans-Pacific visit has been made with Texas Governor Greg Abbott's arrival in Seoul. Coming as part of a ten-day trip to Korea, Taiwan, and Japan, Governor Abbott's visit highlights the many ways Korean companies are partnering with the Lone Star State.

Through his visit, Governor Abbott joins the ranks of Michigan's Gretchen Whitmer, Arkansas' Sarah Huckabee Sanders, Georgia's Brian Kemp, and Kentucky's Andy Beshear—set for his own Korea trip this week—in a growing list of US governors who have made a trip to Seoul in 2024 alone. This indicates a recognized interest among US states toward Korea as a major trade and investment partner.

For Texas, Korea has been its largest foreign direct investment (FDI) partner from 2013 to 2023, with more than $20 billion over 38 projects in the ten-year period. Meanwhile, Korea has surpassed this amount in just the first five months of 2024 with $27.52 billion invested, including the recent Samsung facility in Taylor.

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The interest that Korean companies are taking in Texas is part of a broader wave of Korean investments across the United States. In particular, Korea's mass investments in advanced technologies and supply chains are opening new pathways for trade between local communities in Texas and Korean corporations. Texas' Williamson County, where Hanwha Advanced Materials recently invested $100 million into a new auto parts facility, opened an economic development office in Seoul last year, and the Korea International Trade Association (KITA) opened its latest US office in Dallas last week, which will serve as the regional headquarters for the South Central and Western parts of the United States.

Governor Abbott's visit shows the strength of these types of partnerships, and his meetings during the Korea trip included talks with company leaders from Samsung, SK Americas, SK Signet, and SK SUPEX to touch on the work that Texas and Korea are moving toward regarding electric vehicle charging and other industries. Accordingly, Tuesday's events included a visit to the Samsung facility in Pyeongtaek, where Governor Abbott emphasized his state's appreciation for Korea's investments and stated that Texas' "door is always open." The Korea leg of the trip concluded with a $110 million commitment by Korea's SeAH Group to establish a Superalloy manufacturing facility in Texas.

Korea's lead in advanced tech industries and Texas' strong position in manufacturing means there is likely more to come, bolstered by a natural business complementarity between Texas' economy and Korea's innovations. Texas is home to more than 17,000 manufacturing companies supporting more than a million jobs, and industries such as aerospace, healthcare, technology, and energy are finding their place within this. The Port of Houston, which ranks number one in the United States for overall tonnage, also provides businesses in Texas with access to a strategic node within the global economy and paves the way for other prospective partnerships in energy, shipping, and maritime industries. With two-way trade between Texas and Korea reaching $32 billion in 2023 alone, the potential for future collaboration is immense.

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Photo *from the Office of the Texas Governor's Official Website*.

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