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THE PENINSULA

Views of Korea from Tulsa and Dallas

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I recently traveled to Dallas, Texas and Tulsa, Oklahoma to give talks on my new book on the US-South Korea alliance. It is increasingly difficult for me to travel around the United States without discovering new aspects of American interactions with the Korean Peninsula. As KEI fulfills our mission of promoting knowledge and understanding about the US-Korea relationship through our nationwide programming, I intend to periodically share stories from KEI programs on the road about how Americans perceive Korea.

The Tulsa Committee on Foreign Relations sponsored a program in which I spoke to over 150 community members who were interested in global affairs and curious about the US role on the Korean Peninsula. North Korea has always been a source of curiosity, fascination, and concern for such audiences, but that fascination now extends to South Korea's commercial, political, and cultural influence and impact on the world. Of particular interest to this audience was how South Korea is navigating its foreign policy in the context of both deepening US-China rivalry and the geostrategic impact of a revived North Korea-Russia relationship, as well as the potential impact of the US presidential election in November on the US-South Korea relationship.

Several student groups from the University of Tulsa, Oklahoma State University, and Oral Roberts University were among the participants in the Tulsa program, including a Korean student from the chemistry department at Oral Roberts University. One question came from a student who had developed an interest in North Korean human rights after having become friends with a South Korean exchange student in elementary school. They

wanted to know more about South Korea's cultural influence in the United States and the historical role of US military ties in South Korea. The audience reaction to my response indicated that my task was primarily to help close the knowledge gap between the older, casually informed audience members and the younger K-culture aficionados in the group.

The discussion in which I participated in Dallas included representatives from major US energy corporations as well as a businessman who had participated periodically in military exercises on the Korean Peninsula as a member of a US naval intelligence reserve unit based out of the Dallas area. South Korea's manufacturing prowess and technological leadership are on the radar of major US companies as both a partnership opportunity and a potential competition. As South Korea expands its investment in the United States and moves to play a more active role in the US market, US multinationals in the energy and defense sectors are paying attention to the efficiency and cost-effectiveness of South Korea's leading manufacturing companies.

South Korea is clearly present as both an issue of concern and an area of growing importance in Tulsa and Dallas. Given the rising profile of South Korean businesses and culture in the United States, public interest in Korea in both cities is only likely to grow.

Scott Snyder is author of The U.S.-South Korea Alliance: Why It May Fail and Why It Must Not. He is President and CEO of the Korea Economic Institute of America (KEI).

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