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THE PENINSULA

Future of Korea in Minnesota

Published September 26, 2024

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Category: [Views of Korea](#)



From September 17 to 19, 2024, the Korea Economic Institute of America (KEI) visited Minneapolis, Minnesota, as part of its long-running [Future of Korea \(FOK\)](#) program. In partnership with [Global Minnesota](#), KEI hosted a delegation consisting of the US Department of State's Office of Korean and Mongolian Affairs and the Republic of Korea (ROK) Embassy in Washington. The delegation participated in a three-day program that involved business leaders, community members, students, and legislative offices.

The week started with a business briefing with members of Global Minnesota's corporate network. Following welcoming remarks from Global Minnesota President Phil Hansen, KEI Program Officer Andy Hong, State Department's ROK Desk Officer Keome Rowe, and ROK Embassy's Counselor Jiho Lee each gave a brief overview of trends in US-Korea economic relations and investment. Minnesota is home to considerable Korean investment, particularly in food items by CJ and in heavy machinery by Doosan Bobcat. Of course, there are other Minnesotan industries that are household names in Korea—namely, Hormel Foods and 3M. There was also sustained interest in diversifying economic relations to other sectors, such as Minnesota's advanced medical technologies sector, and deepening South Korea's ongoing investments in semiconductor manufacturing in the United States.



The delegation also met with students at the University of Minnesota Twin Cities, which is one of the largest educational institutions in the United States. There, the delegation spoke to students about careers in foreign policy and opportunities for young people hoping to enter this field. The strong attendance was indicative of the high interest in Korean studies in schools across the country. Indeed, all of the students either spoke or were learning at least one additional language outside of English. Many were planning to participate in the study abroad program offered by the University of Minnesota at Korea University.

The main evening event at Saint Paul College was similarly well-attended. The event was moderated by Anne Linnee, who had more than two decades of experience as a Foreign Service Officer and a keen interest in Korean issues with her involvement in the Concordia Language Village. The moderated discussion touched on the implications of the upcoming US presidential election for the US-Korea relationship, as well as the challenges presented by US-China competition. Audience questions ranged from issues such as Korea's demographic challenges to prospects for reunification—a demonstration of the myriad Korean issues that the US public is increasingly aware of due to Korea's growing importance in the world.



No FOK trip is complete without meeting with local community leaders. KEI was fortunate to receive a warm reception from local Korean-American leaders such as Hyon Kim, President of MN Best, Inc. The delegation also met with the district offices of both Senator Amy Klobuchar (D-MN) and Senator Tina Smith (D-MN). There, the delegation discussed how US-Korea relations manifest for Minnesotans, particularly with respect to the economic impact of growing Korean investment in Minnesota and increasing people-to-people ties between Korea and Minnesota.

After weeks of planning, it is easy to look back on such an eventful trip by simply giving ourselves a pat on the back for a job well done and carrying on. But these trips are not a capstone to KEI's outreach efforts—rather, they are the cornerstone upon which our engagements are built. Each FOK trip is the beginning of further communication and cooperation with local communities across the United States, and few are more important than with Minnesota.

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