

U.S./South Korea agreement shows paradox of free trade

By Zachary Thomas
STAFF WRITER

Exploding a canister of tear gas on the floor of the South Korean Parliament, politician Kim Sun-dong expressed his disapproval of a free trade agreement with the U.S. by choking fellow Parliament members during a November vote.

"The legislators were passing a bill which will make ordinary people shed bitter tears," Sun-dong later told a crowd of supporters. "So I detonated tear gas so that they, too, shed tears."

The scene illustrates the decisiveness of opinions surrounding the much anticipated — and delayed — free trade agreement between the U.S. and South Korea, which will go into effect on March 15.

The deal — which aims to boost the economic output of both countries — has its critics, especially in South Korea. The opposition cites the harmful effects the treaty will likely have on the nation's agricultural and livestock sector.

"Free trade is a double-edged sword," said Associate Professor of Political Science George Guo. "It might benefit some industries and hurt others."

Free trade agreements work to increase and encourage trade by reducing or eliminating taxes on foreign goods. These taxes, called tariffs, are normally used to keep the price of foreign goods artificially high, allowing weaker domestic industries to stay in business in spite of international competition.

Prior to this deal, high tariffs on foreign agricultural goods to South Korea ensured that Korean farmers could stay competitive even though companies in the U.S. could produce and sell the

same goods at a much lower cost.

Those potential consequences of the agreement have caused a political maelstrom in South Korea. According to the Los Angeles Times, hundreds turned out in the capital city of Seoul for a Feb. 25 protest against the agreement, brandishing signs with printed messages such as "Be mournful, be angry! The U.S. colonization of South Korea has started!"

"In most countries agriculture is vital, because it holds stability for the country," said Guo. "Governments spend to maintain stability, to not rely on other countries."

"Be mournful, be angry! The U.S. colonization of South Korea has started!"

Message on protest signs in Seoul

In response to the criticism of the deal, South Korean President Lee Myung-bak said that the government would take on responsibility for threatened industries.

"For some agriculture and stock farming industries that are threatened, our government can take this chance to support those fragile industries and make it more competitive," Lee said. "I believe that the agreement could create many jobs."

The agreement should also help improve the American economy and create jobs.

According to U.S. Trade Commission, over \$10 billion will

be added to the U.S. GDP just from tariff and quota reductions and eliminations by South Korea. President Obama considers the deal part of his plan to double American exports by 2015.

U.S. Trade Representative Ron Kirk explained in an interview with the Dow Jones Newswire that the deal should support "tens of thousands of jobs" and boost trade between the countries by ten percent over the next five years.

"The United States is looking for more jobs," said Guo. "For jobs, you need more markets."

The deal also speaks to the United States' foreign policy priorities.

"The United States wants to have more influence in East Asia," said Guo, adding that our country wants to contain China's extending power in the region.

"The twenty-first century is likely to be the century of the Pacific," said Professor of Economics Bob Williams.

According to a press release from the Office of the U.S. Trade Representative, the agreement also underscores the U.S.' "geostrategic alliance" with South Korea. The relationship allows the two countries to work together on other mutual issues, such as the threat of North Korea.

Still, that's cold comfort to some in South Korea.

"Many say (the deal) is for the top one percent (of) wealthy people and that it doesn't consider the ordinary people," said Early College student Hannah Park, who is from South Korea. "Positive comments about the issue are very rare."

Williams bemoans this overarching problem of inequality that free trade presents. "There ought to be a mechanism for the winners to offset the losses of the losers," Williams said. "But unfortunately, there isn't."

Driving high: you may take a hit

By Natalie Sutton
STAFF WRITER

Through driver's education classes, mock crashes and organizations like Mothers Against Drunk Driving, we have all heard about the many dangers of drinking alcohol and driving.

But what about the effects of marijuana on one's ability to drive?

According to the BBC, drivers who use marijuana up to three hours before driving are twice as likely to be in a car collision as those who are not under the influence.

The BBC reports that, "Cannabis impairs brain and motor functions needed for safe driving."

While there is much media coverage and discussion about the dangerous effects of alcohol consumption before driving, there is less hype around the actual effects of marijuana and driving.

A Canadian study done by researchers at Dalhousie University in Halifax looked at "observational studies of collisions between one or more moving vehicles on a public road which involved the consumption of cannabis."

The study found a "near doubling of risk of a driver being involved in a motor vehicle collision resulting in serious injury or death if cannabis had been consumed less than three hours before."

Director of Student Health Helen Rice was not surprised by the statistics.

"A person may not be able to react to a situation as quickly as they could if they were not impaired," said Rice in an email interview. "People think they can smoke just a little and relax. They do not perceive marijuana (to be) as dangerous as drinking, and many do not want to believe a little could do any harm."

Third-year Emily Egan understands the possibly dangerous side effects of marijuana but does not feel it is dangerous to her driving abilities.

"The study makes sense because weed does impair your reaction time," said Egan. "From my experience, however, I drive slower and am more calm after smoking, so personally, I think that weed doesn't affect driving. In my case, it makes me safer because I drive slower and am not aggressive."

Third-year Noah Swanson also becomes a slower driver after marijuana use, but finds that it does affect his ability to concentrate.

"Whenever I drive high, I always drive really slow but I get kind of paranoid about all the other cars around me," Swanson said. "I feel like I try to pay attention to everything all at once and it doesn't work."

Swanson thinks marijuana might negatively affect one's driving abilities, but that it is still not as dangerous as consuming alcohol before driving.

"Sometimes I have friends who drive high and drive like crazy people," said Swanson. "I usually don't even like to drive at all when I'm high, but it's not half as dangerous as driving even a little drunk."

A first-year, who wishes to remain anonymous, thinks that the effects of marijuana depend on different circumstances.

"I think how harmful pot is for a driver is going to vary from person to person," said the first-year. "Weed doesn't personally affect my driving skills, but I have friends that are terrible high drivers. I think it really just depends on the individual and other factors, like their driving abilities in general, and how weed affects them."

Fourth-year Benjamin Heide believes that staying sober to drive is the best option.

"Driving impaired on any substance is something to avoid, whether alcohol, marijuana, or prescription drugs," said Heide. "I've been in the car with high drivers and I've also been in the car with someone who's been drinking, and high drivers are a lot more cautious. I've noticed that people who are too high to drive tend to be more reluctant to drive, whereas people who have had too much to drink tend to downplay their drunkenness."

Rice hopes that there will be more education about the overall effects of marijuana use in the future.

"More advertising and education programs would be helpful in educating children and young adults on the effects of marijuana in every aspect of their lives," Rice said. "I believe it would be helpful for young adults to see simulations of high people driving the same way as they see drunk people driving ... Marijuana is widely seen on campus so more education would be helpful."

MARIJUANA:
DON'T DOPE AND DRIVE

Marijuana is the illegal drug most often identified in impaired drivers, fatally injured drivers, and motor vehicle crash victims.

4-14%

of drivers who sustained injury or death in traffic accidents tested positive for THC, according to www.abovetheinfluence.com

Short-term effects of marijuana use include:
memory loss ■ trouble with thinking ■ anxiety
decrease in muscle strength ■ increased heart rate

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