

## Ambassadors' Double Header Hits The Road: Six Cities in Eight Days

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KEI recently completed its sixteenth annual **Ambassadors' Dialogue** program (previously called the *Korea Caravan*), featuring **Lee Tae-sik**, the Republic of Korea's Ambassador to the United States, and **Alexander Vershbow**, United States Ambassador to the Republic of Korea; they were accompanied by their wives. The 2007 tour took the Ambassadors to **Chicago, IL; Portland, OR; Denver, CO; Houston, TX; and New Orleans, LA** from April 12–18. In the aftermath of the shooting at Virginia Tech, Ambassador Lee returned to Washington one day earlier than scheduled, rather than proceeding to New Orleans. Ambassador Vershbow also participated in a stand-alone program in **Atlanta, GA**.

The Ambassadors delivered remarks and responded to questions at core events (typically luncheon or evening/dinner programs with leading public affairs groups) in each city. Attendance at core events reached up to around 200. They also participated in ancillary events in most cities and were interviewed by media representatives on several occasions. Some highlights among the ancillary events included a tour of the Nike Campus in Portland, Oregon, and a tour of the Hurricane Katrina Damage in New Orleans (for which Korea contributed approximately \$30 million to relief groups). Separate programs were also arranged for Mrs. Vershbow to speak on the topic of "Art and Diplomacy," before civic groups in Chicago and Denver.

KEI partnered with local organizations to plan the events and escorted the ambassadors. These local organizers included World Affairs Council affiliates in Portland, Denver, New Orleans, and Atlanta (SCIS); The University of Chicago; and The Asia Society in Houston.

As Korean and U.S. negotiators had reached agreement on the text of a KORUS FTA earlier in April, the ambassadors used the opportunity to promote and strengthen Korea-U.S. relations. "We believe that the agreement can strengthen our existing alliance, reaffirm US commitment to remain vigorously engaged in Asia, and create new opportunities for prosperity and peace for the people of both of our countries," said Ambassador Lee. He explained that the "FTA is a triumph on several levels—for consumers, who are the ultimate beneficiaries; for the Korean and U.S. economies; and, not least, for the overall future of our alliance." Ambassador Vershbow described the KORUS FTA as a "very, very good" deal, which, if ratified by lawmakers, would benefit consumers in both Korea and the United States. He pointed out that U.S. exports to Korea totaled \$32.5 billion in 2006, up almost 17 percent from the previous year, and that U.S. farmers are expected to benefit from the KORUS FTA, as agricultural exports would become duty-free immediately.

Ambassador Vershbow explained that the U.S.-ROK alliance remains strong. He noted that cohesion between the two allies has improved in recent months, as U.S. and ROK policies toward North Korea became more closely aligned following North Korea's nuclear test last fall. Vershbow described "Dynamic Korea" as having a strong democracy and an affluent, well-informed society. He also pointed to Korea's increasing stature as a culture and entertainment hub, noting that Korean pop music and movies are now successful throughout Asia, and beginning to make inroads to the US market.

### Veterans Programs

At the request of Ambassador Lee, KEI again arranged events in each city with the local Korean War Veterans Association to acknowledge U.S. veterans of the Korean War. These events included three wreath-laying ceremonies at Korean War memorials, two luncheon events, a breakfast event, and a visit to a veterans' home. At each of these events, Ambassador Lee delivered remarks, thanking the U.S. veterans collectively for their role in enabling the ROK to be what it is today, and presented them each with a small gift. The first veterans program of the tour was held on April 12 in Kennedy Park, Chicago. The wreath-laying ceremony, which was held at the nation's first Korean War Memorial, was attended by a group of veterans and spouses. Despite the cold and windy weather, the event was attended by numerous community representatives, the press corps, and an estimated 30 Korean War veterans, who arranged for a 21-gun salute and the playing of Taps. In addition to the presentations by both Ambassadors, remarks were delivered by Alderwoman Virginia Rugai of Chicago's 19<sup>th</sup> Ward and State Senator Edward Maloney of the 18<sup>th</sup> District.

The next wreath laying ceremony was held on April 14 in Portland, Oregon. Having previously visited many of the Korean War memorials throughout the United States, the magnificence of the Korean War Memorial in Wilsonville,

Oregon was well-captured in Ambassador Lee's laudatory remarks. It is worth noting that funding for the 94 foot long granite memorial was provided in large part by the local Korean-American community and corporate Korean sponsorship. The ceremony was attended by a large audience of Korean War veterans, community leaders, and members of the Korean-American community. Introductory remarks were provided by Arlene Loble, City Manager of Wilsonville, and Val Conley, Veterans' Services Division Administrator, Oregon Department of Veterans. The ceremony was followed by a luncheon hosted by Ambassador Lee.

The following day, Ambassador Lee visited with Korean War veterans at the Colorado State Veterans Home at Fitzsimmons. Following remarks by Colorado State Lt. Governor Barbara O'Brien, Ambassador Lee presented brief remarks, before acknowledging each of the veterans in attendance individually. Equally significant veterans' events were arranged in Houston and New Orleans. A breakfast program in Houston was hosted by Ambassador Lee to honor Korean War veterans there. Also, at Ambassador Lee's request, Ambassadors Vershbow and Pritchard presented a wreath at the Korean War Memorial in New Orleans, and KEI President Pritchard represented Ambassador Lee at a meeting with local Korean War Veterans following an evening program at the National World War II Museum.