

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

March 11, 2020

The Honorable Mike Pompeo
Secretary
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20520

The Honorable Mark T. Esper
Secretary
U.S. Department of Defense
1000 Defense Pentagon
Washington, D.C. 20301

Dear Secretaries Pompeo and Esper,

We write to you as strong supporters of the relationship between the United States and the Republic of Korea. As you know, our two countries are each confronting a number of shared external and internal threats which underscore the importance of our mutual, enduring ties.

One of those threats our two nations are grappling with is coronavirus. In South Korea, more than 7,000 individuals have been infected. In response, the South Korean government mobilized to contain and combat the outbreak, ramping up its diagnostic capability, and has tested nearly 200,000 individuals to date.

The Korean government should be commended for its response, but coronavirus still poses a major threat to the country. In particular, the outbreak has centered on the city of Daegu in the southwest of the country. The Daegu area hosts thousands of American troops, their families, and Korean nationals employed on our bases in the area.

Korean nationals working on U.S. installations are critical enablers of U.S. warfighting readiness on the peninsula and support nearly all aspects of U.S. operations in the Republic of Korea. Without them, our ability to defend the peninsula and American troops and their families from North Korean aggression will be greatly diminished.

We understand that the United States is in the midst of tough negotiations with the Republic of Korea on a new Special Measures Agreement (SMA). The SMA has traditionally covered costs related to logistics, construction, and the 9,000 Korean nationals working on U.S. installations in Korea. Without an agreed-upon-SMA, most Korean nationals working with our military will be furloughed.

We believe that this will pose a major risk to our troops and their families, particularly at a time when the Korean government, working with its partners at U.S. Forces Korea, are trying to keep our families and servicemembers safe from coronavirus. We also remain concerned that North Korea will use coronavirus outbreak to increase its provocations against the U.S. and Republic of Korea.

For that reason, we respectfully request that the administration seek alternative, creative ways to ensure that Korean national salaries subject to the SMA are financed through other means,

including the extension of the current SMA only for Korean salaries until a new deal is reached. Allowing the furlough of 9000 supporting Korea nationals working with our military would have a devastating effect on our military readiness in the region.

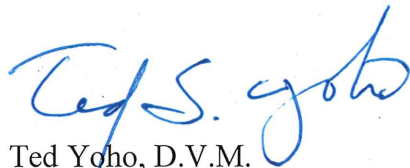
We each support our allies paying more but at this critical juncture, when both the United States and Republic of Korea are confronting a shared internal threat- coronavirus- and a shared external threat- North Korea- we should think carefully about actions that increase our risk to these threats.

Thank you for your consideration and support for the U.S. – Republic of Korea alliance.

Sincerely,



Ami Bera, M.D.
Chairman,
Subcommittee on Asia, the Pacific and Nonproliferation
House Foreign Affairs Committee



Ted Yoho, D.V.M.
Ranking Member,
Subcommittee on Asia, the Pacific and Nonproliferation
House Foreign Affairs Committee