

South Korea trade deal near

Pact expected to be in place for Obama's November visit

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Detroit —The long-awaited trade agreement with South Korea should be finalized in time for President Barack Obama's visit to the G-20 summit in Seoul, South Korea in early November, Commerce Secretary Gary Locke said Tuesday.

Locke was on hand to address the 2010 International District Export Council Conference about the Obama administration's efforts to promote economic growth and job creation and bolster the U.S. economic recovery. In February, the president set a goal of doubling U.S. exports in five years, and exports are up 18 percent this year, Locke said.

But Locke garnered applause and even some whistles from the audience of trade and [business](#) executives when he promised to push three stalled trade pacts.

"The administration is absolutely committed to getting the additional pending free trade agreements finalized with Korea, Columbia and Panama," Locke said, warning that Canada and the European Union already have agreements in place.

"It's not like we can dislodge them once they've built those business relationships," he added. "So the sooner, the better."

Despite the lack of a trade deal, Michigan exports to South Korea hit \$436 million as of August, according to the U.S. Census Bureau, up 42 percent and making Korea the state's eighth largest foreign market.

The pending Korean trade agreement, proposed in 2007, has been stalled over demands to give U.S. automakers more access to the Korean market. Even if finalized in the next few weeks, the agreement needs to be ratified by Congress before this session ends on Jan. 3 to take effect.

Auto tariffs have been a stumbling block, with labor lobbyists asking that high U.S. tariffs on pickup imports remain until the U.S. auto market improves, but still seeking to have Korean tariffs and other barriers against U.S. vehicles lifted. Negotiators also are wrangling over rules on beef imports, with U.S. Trade Representative Ron Kirk heading the talks.

"Ambassador Kirk has a tough job ahead of him," Locke said. "But the president wants to announce a finalized free trade agreement when he goes to the G-20 meeting."

Kirk met with South Korean Trade Minister Kim Jong-Hoon on Tuesday.

The G-20 summit is a meeting of [finance](#) ministers and central bankers from 20 leading nations that serves as a forum on international economic development.

After addressing the trade conference, Locke also met with U.S. Rep. Gary Peters, D-Bloomfield Township, and small [business owners](#) at a meeting hosted by the Detroit Regional Chamber of Commerce. The discussion focused on the new Small Business Jobs and Credit Act, which seeks to provide credit access and tax breaks for small businesses.

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