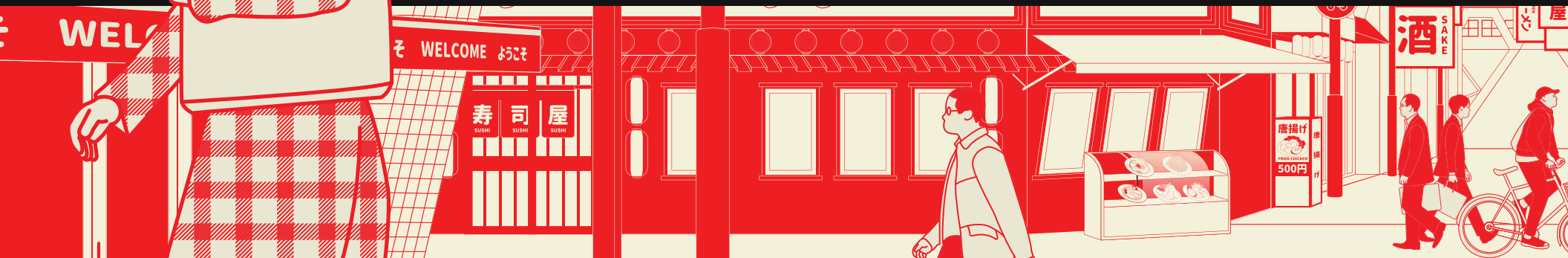




JAPANESE AMERICAN LEADERSHIP DELEGATION

21st Japanese American Leadership Delegation



21st Japanese American Leadership Delegation

In the Year of the Dragon, on a misty early morning at Meiji-Jingu, we walked its historic grounds. Guided by the site's significance, we sensed the profound honor of being part of the 21st Japanese American Leadership Delegation.

The JALD program provided us with a unique perspective on broader US-Japan relations from a diplomatic standpoint. From the January orientation in Los Angeles to the conclusion of the JALD trip in March, it was a brief and spectacular moment in our lives. With ten incredible individuals who embraced and celebrated our shared Japanese ancestry and diverse Japanese American experiences, this journey became a catalyst for meaningful exchanges and actionable pursuits.

The late Irene Hirano Inouye, co-founder and visionary of the U.S.-Japan Council, helped create the JALD program, which has provided extraordinary access to the highest levels of leadership to 227 Japanese Americans thus far. We extend our deepest gratitude to the Japanese government for granting us the opportunity to visit and understand Japan through the eyes of its leaders in government, business, and culture, and to share our experiences and knowledge from our respective fields.





**Naomi Ostwald
Kawamura**
Seattle, Washington



**Susan Miyagi
McCormac**
New York, New York



Derek Kenmotsu
San Mateo,
California



**Tomoko Hosaka
Mullaney**
Washington, DC



George Tanaka
Los Angeles,
California



Rob Ohno
Ponte Vedra Beach,
Florida



Darin Mano
Salt Lake City, Utah



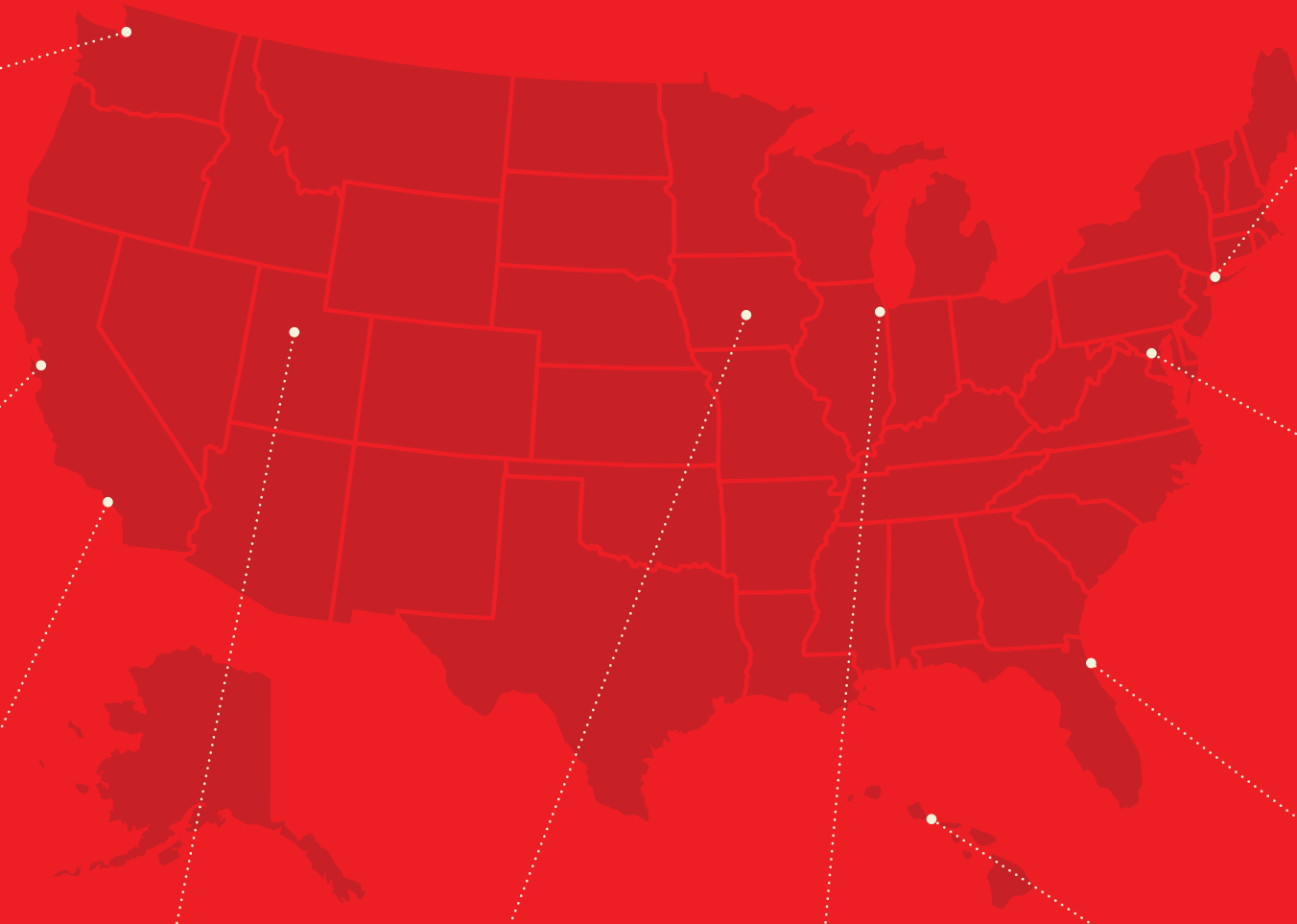
David Yoshimura
Des Moines, Iowa



Anna Ninoyu
Chicago, Illinois



Yoh Kawanami
Honolulu, Hawaii



SUNDAY
MARCH

3

Nara

Exploring Nara

By Tomoko Hosaka Mullaney

On Day 1 of our trip, we shook off the jet lag and immersed ourselves in culture with an excursion to Nara—a city with some of the most important historical sites and treasures in Japan.

We boarded a train from Osaka and arrived in less than an hour. It was as if we had stepped into another world. Compared to the urban bustle of Osaka, Nara calmed the senses and quieted the soul. We were blessed with perfect weather that day.

Nara served as Japan's first permanent capital from 710 to 784. During this time, known as the "Nara Period," the city prospered as a cultural and political epicenter of the country. It enthusiastically imported ideas and technology from China, modeling itself after the capital of the Tang Dynasty. It was also a period that saw the growing influence and power of Buddhism, which Emperor Shomu promoted. He ordered the construction of large Buddhist temples and other religious buildings and amassed extensive collections of Buddhist arts and artifacts from China, Korea, and beyond. During our six hours in Nara, we saw some of the magnificent art and architecture that remain to this day, along with other parts of the city that make it a popular tourist destination.



Nara served as Japan's first permanent capital from 710 to 784. During this time, known as the "Nara Period," the city prospered as a cultural and political epicenter of the country.

SUNDAY
MARCH

3

Nara



DEER ENCOUNTERS

Our first stop was Nara Park, home to the city's famous, freely roaming deer. More than 1,000 deer live in the park, and they are revered as holy animals in Nara. Visitors can purchase "shika senbei" – special crackers made of wheat flour and rice bran – to feed to the deer. They are tame and will approach humans for food. They will also pose for selfies. But, as some of us discovered, they can get aggressive if they think you have hidden senbei in your hand!

TODAIJI

Walking farther into Nara Park, we headed to Todaiji, one of Japan's most famous temples. The temple was commissioned by Emperor Shomu during the Nara Period as a symbol of peace during a turbulent period that included a smallpox epidemic, crop failures, and rebellions. We approached Todaiji by walking through Nandaimon (Great South Gate), which is flanked by two large, fierce-looking statues. Known as the "Nio" guardians of Todaiji, they were carved by the famous sculptors Unkei and Keikei around the 12th century. The focal point of Todaiji is the Daibutsuden (Great Buddha Hall), one of the largest wooden structures in the world. Inside is the massive Daibutsu (Great Buddha), a 49-foot

bronze statue of a seated Buddha with Bodhisattvas on each side. It was an awe-inspiring, deeply spiritual sight that left many of us breathless.

NARAMACHI

We spent the remainder of the afternoon in Naramachi, a pleasant walk from Todaiji. Naramachi is a charming neighborhood lined with traditional merchant houses. Its narrow streets are now home to trendy cafes, art galleries, and craft shops. We enjoyed lunch at Tofuan-kondo, located in a 180-year-old building with an interior garden. The restaurant uses 100% domestic soybeans, which are incorporated into each course. Our delicious lunch set included dishes like dengaku tofu, deep-fried tofu, yuba, and oboro tofu.

We also visited Yagi Shuzo, a small sake brewery in operation since 1877. Shimizu-cho near Nara Park is renowned for its clear water and has thus been a center of sake-making for centuries. At Yagi Shuzo, this water is still drawn from a deep well inside the brewery. Its best-selling "Torotoro No Umeshu," which uses local ume plums, has received international accolades. Needless to say, Yagi Shuzo was a popular spot to pick up omiyage for our family and friends back home.

MONDAY
MARCH

4

Osaka

Osaka Expo Briefing

By Naomi Ostwald Kawamura

Following our trip to Osaka Castle, the JALD delegates met with local organizers of the upcoming World Expo 2025.

The World's Fair is currently slated to open in Osaka on April 13, 2025 and close later in October. Sachiko Yoshimura, Director General Extraordinary of Public Relations and Promotion Bureau, presented the current progress and activities surrounding the event, delving into various facets of the event's planning and execution. Its theme, "Designing Future Society for Our Lives," will involve the participation of more than 150 countries and focus on solutions for sustainable development that support solving social challenges, education, and exploring emerging technologies. Yoshimura shared that the United States will participate under the theme "Imagine What We Can Create Together?" Yoshimura also introduced the official red and blue Expo 2025 mascot, "Myaku Myaku," an image that would become a familiar sight at train stations and other locations throughout our travels. The future Expo site, situated on Yumeshima Island in Osaka Bay, is currently undergoing construction.

Delegates were actively engaged in the briefing, posing insightful questions related to various aspects of the Expo's planning and execution. During the open Q&A portion of the briefing, delegate Darin Mano asked about the engagement of different levels of government in



Delegates were actively engaged in the briefing, posing insightful questions related to various aspects of the Expo's planning and execution.

MONDAY
MARCH

4

Osaka



supporting the Expo. Close to 700 people from the national government, local governments, and private industries are involved in executing this project. Further discussions revolved around the public reception of the project, including strategies to ensure a positive public perception and engagement, and public transportation to the site, with plans for efficient and sustainable transportation options. The dialogue underscored the multifaceted nature inherent in orchestrating a global event of this magnitude. As the Expo itself is temporal by nature, delegate Yoh Kawanami made a noteworthy suggestion: He proposed that the organizers consider donating the

timber used in its construction to support post-wildfire rebuilding efforts in Maui. This idea resonated with the themes of sustainability and global partnerships championed by the World Expo. As the meeting concluded, Delegate Susan Miyagi McCormac expressed gratitude to the Expo staff whom we met, and the delegates presented gifts to our hosts.

MONDAY
MARCH

4

Osaka

居酒屋 IZAKAYA

CASUAL
DINING

TOP

和菓子
JAPAN
TRADITIONAL
SWEETS

桜餅
SAKURAMOCHI

だんご
DANGO

最中
MONAKA

まんじゅう
MANJU

せんべい
SENBELI

大福
DAIFUKU

居酒屋 IZAKAYA

50M 免税
DUTY FREE

SUSHI
SUSHI
SUSHI

Lunch with Ambassador Himeno

By Derek Kenmotsu

We convened with Tsutomu Himeno, the Ambassador in charge of the Kansai Region for Japan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA), for a memorable luncheon experience at an exquisite kaiseki cuisine restaurant in Osaka.

U.S. Consul General Jason Cubas of the Consulate General Osaka-Kobe joined the occasion, providing insights on his role in the region and the collaborative efforts he shares with Ambassador Himeno. Delegate George Tanaka facilitated the conversation for our group to discuss the distinct characteristics of the Kansai region.

Japan's MOFA strategically assigns two regionally focused ambassadors within the country: one for Okinawa Prefecture and another for the vibrant Kansai region. Fondly referred to as "Tom," Ambassador Himeno warmly welcomed the delegation, explaining the rationale behind MOFA's ambassadorial presence in Kansai. While the necessity for a senior foreign affairs official in Okinawa is evident, owing to its unique dynamics with local residents and the U.S. military, the purpose behind appointing an Ambassador to the Kansai region may seem less apparent. Ambassador Himeno shared that Kansai stands out as one of Japan's most internationally diverse regions, necessitating a strategic focus on enhancing its global presence and fostering international commerce.



Delegate George Tanaka facilitated the conversation for our group to discuss the distinct characteristics of the Kansai region.

MONDAY
MARCH

4

Osaka

居酒屋 IZAKAYA

CASUAL
DINING

和菓子
JAPAN
TRADITIONAL
SWEETS

桜餅
SAKURAMOCHI

だんご
DANGO

最中
MONAKA

まんじゅ
MANJU

大福
DAIFUKU

せんべい
SENBELI

居酒屋 IZAKAYA

50M 免税
DUTY FREE

SUSHI
SUSHI
SUSHI



Against the backdrop of Osaka's rich cultural tapestry, Derek Kenmotsu asked about the role of the ethnic Zainichi Korean population, deeply rooted in Japan for generations, in the evolving dynamics between South Korea and Japan. Ambassador Himeno noted that while the Zainichi Korean diaspora in Osaka has largely integrated into Japanese society, they possess the potential to advocate for strengthening Japan-South Korea relations, akin to the pivotal role Japanese Americans have played in bolstering U.S.-Japan ties.

Both Ambassador Himeno and Consul General Cubas illuminated their robust partnership aimed at fortifying the bonds between the United States and Japan. Central

to their collaborative efforts is the shared aspiration to ensure that Expo 2025 in Osaka catalyzes positive outcomes both regionally and bilaterally. Much like the burgeoning startup ecosystem in Osaka, Expo 2025 is poised to spotlight innovation geared toward enhancing everyday life, with a special emphasis on next-generation healthcare and mobility solutions.

At the end of the luncheon, Ambassador Himeno expressed his anticipation for attending the JALD symposium later in the day, underscoring his enthusiasm for further engagement and collaboration with the delegation.



TUESDAY
MARCH

5

Tokyo

Osaka Symposium Report

By Naomi Ostwald Kawamura

The Japanese American Leadership Symposium, organized by the U.S.–Japan Council and the Japan Foundation and supported by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, took place on March 4, 2024.

The symposium was themed “Cultures, Sports, and Community: Harnessing Global Experiences for Local Economic Revitalization” and was held at the Osaka Conference Center.

Setting the tone for the event, the opening remarks were delivered by Hiroyuki Kojima of the Japan Foundation, Suzanne Basalla of the U.S.–Japan Council, and Ambassador Tsutomu Himeno, who each articulated the importance of strengthening Japanese and Japanese American relations. This was followed by keynote speaker Munehiko Harada, Chairman of Japan Sport Tourism Alliance (JSTA) and Professor, Faculty of Sport Sciences at Waseda University, who explored how sports tourism can attract people to places without previous demand.

Following the keynote address, the symposium transitioned to a panel with the JALD delegates. Moderator Tomoko Hosaka Mullaney invited the four panelists to the stage, they each gave self-introductions. The panelists included Rob Ohno, Darin Mano, Anna Ninoyu and Susan

Miyagi McCormac. To begin, Rob Ohno briefly shared his work with the ANNIKA Foundation, where a local event in Jacksonville, Florida, eventually became a national event. Mr. Ohno emphasized the importance of community and government support to ensure success. Next, Darin Mano discussed how sports has not only expanded the economy in Salt Lake City, but the expansion of sports might help revitalize heritage neighborhoods. Panelist Anna Ninoyu reminded audience members of the impact of Japan’s participation in the Chicago World Expo in 1893. Connecting this history to the Osaka World Expo in 2025, Ms. Ninoyu also agreed with Professor Harada on the importance of sports for a city like Chicago. And Ms. Ninoyu also extended to educational tourism by mentioning her mission to bring her students to Nara to learn the architecture, building, and restoration of a Buddhist temple. Last but not least, panelist Susan Miyagi McCormac presented how food and manga also play an essential part of local economic revitalization for cities like New York City. Ms. McCormac shared that there are many Japanese restaurants including some with Michelin stars in town that are part of the community and culture of New York. The booming popularity in manga and anime characters has connected a diverse background of people to unite in their interest.

The symposium was themed “Cultures, Sports, and Community: Harnessing Global Experiences for Local Economic Revitalization”

TUESDAY
MARCH

5

Tokyo



Each panelist brought forth unique perspectives and valuable insights drawn from their respective fields, enriching the dialogue. As the symposium drew to a close, audience members asked questions that related to community development, cultural appropriation regarding wearing a kimono, and a very difficult question about “what part of Japan should change.” The panelists did a great job answering each of the questions to the best of their abilities and as transparently as possible.

A reception followed where all the JALD delegates introduced themselves and had a wonderful time networking with the attendees of the symposium.



TUESDAY
MARCH

5

Tokyo

JALD U.S. Embassy Meeting

By Darin Mano

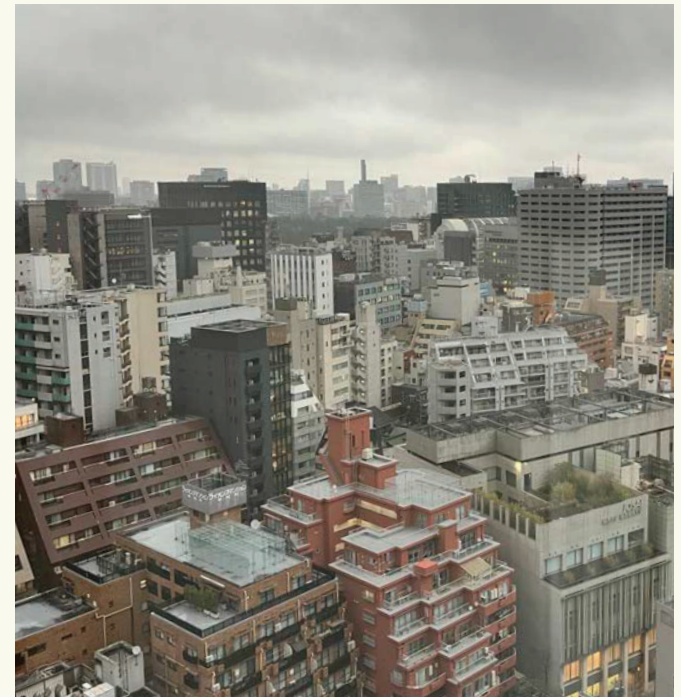
On March 5, 2024, the JALD delegates met with five U.S. Foreign Service Officers at the United States Embassy in Tokyo.

Rob Ohno introduced the delegation and the purpose of the trip, after which each officer gave a quick briefing on their respective areas of focus. This meeting provided valuable insights into how the U.S. government views its relationship with Japan and its efforts to strengthen these ties.

Evan Felsing, Counselor for Economic and Scientific Affairs, opened the briefing by emphasizing that U.S.-Japan relations are at an all-time high. He gave an overview touching on positive aspects such as national defense efforts, the stock market, inflation, wages, and bilateral foreign investment. Mr. Felsing also highlighted challenges such as Japan's aging population and high public debt.

Next, we heard from Mark Deiker, Counselor for Political Affairs. He offered insights into the state of the Japanese government, including the political dynamics surrounding the Prime Minister. He also discussed how Japanese domestic politics affect the U.S. and U.S.-Japan relations. Mr. Deiker emphasized the importance of trilateral collaboration between the U.S., Japan, and South Korea in countering potential regional threats.

Gregory Taevs, Deputy Senior Commercial Officer, spoke next, outlining efforts to increase trade and investment between the two nations. He highlighted key sectors like tourism, education, aerospace, defense, and technology, as well as initiatives such as the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework (IPEF) and the SelectUSA program.



TUESDAY
MARCH

5

Tokyo

TOKYO



Shannon Dorsey, Cultural Affairs Officer, discussed educational programs and the decline in Japanese students studying in the U.S. She also shared insights into preparations for Prime Minister Kishida's upcoming official visit to Washington, D.C., and North Carolina. Ms. Dorsey emphasized the cultural assets that strengthen U.S.-Japan relations, such as Shohei Ohtani, the Oscars, and the Expo 2025 in Osaka.

Public Diplomacy Officer Sarah Belousov focused on youth programs, including the Trilateral Youth Summit in July. Later that evening, she spent time with the delegation at a reception at Ambassador Rahm Emanuel's residence.

Both the embassy meeting and the reception provided delegates with valuable opportunities to ask questions about specific points of interest, such as startup initiatives, women's rights and gender equality, youth, and culture. Overall, the meeting underscored the strong, multifaceted relationship between the U.S. and Japan, offering delegates a comprehensive understanding of the diplomatic efforts in place.

Both the embassy meeting and the reception provided delegates with valuable opportunities to ask questions about specific points of interest, such as startup initiatives, women's rights and gender equality, youth, and culture.

TUESDAY
MARCH

5

Tokyo



Meeting with the Japan-U.S. Parliamentary Friendship League

By Rob Ohno

We met with approximately forty-eight members of the Japan-U.S. Parliamentary Friendship League (PFL), including PFL President Hirofumi Nakasone and Akihisa Nagashima, a long-time member of the House of Representatives. This turnout was said to be the largest ever to meet with a JALD class.

After a group photo was taken to open the meeting, Mr. Nagashima welcomed everyone. Then, Mr. Nakasone expressed his deep respect for the USJC, Irene Hirano Inouye, and Suzanne Basalla. He reiterated that people-

to-people relationships have greatly strengthened U.S.-Japan relations over the years. Ms. Akiko Santo stated that relations have never been stronger between the two countries and looked forward to a discussion of any of the challenges. However, due to COVID, he believes that the exchanges have decreased and expressed his sincere appreciation for JALD's visit. Suzanne provided opening remarks for the JALD class, expressing her gratitude for the warm welcome, thanking the Parliamentary members for their service, and stating her encouragement of the new Japan-California alliance and the support to Hawaii for the recent fires.



TUESDAY
MARCH

5

Tokyo



Mr. Nagashima introduced delegate Darin Mano, who expressed gratitude for the great turnout. Darin explained his architectural profession and why he pursued the City Council of Salt Lake City. He continued that the City Council does not have much diversity, and as an openly gay person, he wants to fight for the rights of all groups. He also supports affordable housing and wanted to know what Japan was doing in this area. He then reiterated that the JALD class is committed to doing its part to strengthen U.S.-Japan relations.

A variety of topics were discussed between the two groups with most questions coming from the Parliamentary members who were inquiring about U.S. topics. Items included how young Japanese Americans are doing in the U.S. these days, how the U.S. is coping

with the divide that is occurring in the country over various issues, the state of literature in the U.S., how the U.S. uses sports to help overcome issues, how the development of artificial intelligence is impacting the U.S. military, and how the U.S. Presidential election could impact relations with North Korea.

Mr. Nakasone made closing remarks and expressed his thanks for the JALD class visit, as well as his deepest appreciation to Suzanne and the U.S.-Japan Council for their support of the recent earthquake in Japan. He also wished Suzanne the best in her new endeavor. The meeting concluded with several Parliamentary members and JALD class members exchanging greetings, thanks, and best wishes.

A variety of topics were discussed between the two groups with most questions coming from the Parliamentary members who were inquiring about U.S. topics.



Meeting with Shibuya Mayor Ken Hasebe

By Tomoko Hosaka Mullaney

When Shibuya Mayor Ken Hasebe entered the room, what stuck out immediately was his unconventional choice of footwear for work—limited-edition, leather New Balance sneakers.

He was clearly not a typical Japanese politician. The JALD delegation, led by Anna Ninoyu, was immediately eager to hear from him.

Mayor Hasebe, 52, is serving his third term as mayor of Shibuya City, one of Tokyo's 23 wards known as Japan's epicenter of youth culture and entertainment. It is home to some of Tokyo's most iconic attractions – the Shibuya scramble crossing, the statue of Hachiko the dog, Meiji Jingu, the Harajuku neighborhood, and Yoyogi Park. Thanks to Mayor Hasebe, it has also become a city that embraces diversity and sees itself as a pillar of strength for the future. Its open-mindedness and willingness to drive change for the rest of Japan has become a hallmark of Shibuya's identity.

In 2015, Shibuya made headlines when it became the first municipality in Japan to recognize same-sex unions, offering partnership certificates with some of the rights of married heterosexual couples. For example, same-sex partners registered with the ward office have visitation rights in hospitals and can co-sign tenancy agreements. Then a member of the Shibuya Ward Assembly, Mayor Hasebe was one of the key officials who supported the historic ordinance. Since then, more than 200 municipalities have followed suit, including the Tokyo Metropolitan Government in 2022. Although same-sex





marriage remains illegal in Japan, the momentum for marriage equality is strengthening, led by local leaders like Mayor Hasebe.

Born and raised in Shibuya, the mayor also described his efforts to shape the development of the ward by transforming the city into a global startup hub. Although Shibuya is already home to the most startups in Japan, Mayor Hasebe wants to attract more entrepreneurs to address Japan's most pressing issues, such as its super aging society and disaster prevention. With this goal in mind, the Shibuya City Office has established a startup support program, which functions like a concierge for new businesses. It provides non-Japanese entrepreneurs with extensive advice and resources to build their companies in Shibuya.

Shibuya has evolved dramatically since it was first established as a ward in 1932. From its earliest days, however, it has been a place of fresh ideas and an international outlook. Mayor Hasebe explained the historical roots of Shibuya's mindset. After World War II, the Yoyogi Park area was the site of a large housing compound for U.S. military personnel. It remained in operation until 1964, when the land returned to Japanese control.

In 2016, Mayor Hasebe released a new "Shibuya City Basic Concept," laying out his vision for the future: "Shibuya – turning difference into strength." The goal? To elevate Shibuya into a mature international city, "on par with London, Paris, and New York."

In 2016, Mayor Hasebe released a new "Shibuya City Basic Concept," laying out his vision for the future: "Shibuya – turning difference into strength."





Foreign Minister Yoko Kamikawa

By George Tanaka

Foreign Minister Yoko Kamikawa warmly greeted us.

Recalling attending the November 2023 WPS Innovation Symposium in San Francisco where she met with various Japanese American leaders, including Suzanne Basalla, who facilitated a workshop, and delegate Derek Kenmotsu, who was one of the panelists. She stated whenever she travels to other countries, she tries to host similar WPS workshops.

The FM Kamikawa believes that the trust and respect Japanese Americans have earned both during and after World War II through their hard work and efforts have laid the foundation for strong bilateral relations between Japan and the U.S. She added that she is proud of the accomplishments of Japanese Americans, noting that she was aware of the role that delegate Yoh Kawanami, the U.S.-Japan Council, and the JA community in Hawai'i played in coordinating Maui wildfire relief efforts and the upcoming Maui high school students' visit to Higashi Matsushima. She appreciated this and asked for our continued support.

As a government, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA) is also committed to supporting the active community building of the JA community to enhance the mutual trust between our two countries, the FM Kamikawa



said. Emphasizing the importance of engaging youth, she reflected on a joint statement issued by Prime Minister Kishida and President Biden on this matter. She encourages the next generation of Japanese Americans, including high schoolers, to participate in future U.S.-Japan cooperation and to experience Japan in person.

The FM Kamikawa then allowed us to share some insights for continuing to build upon the U.S.-Japan relationship. Ms. Basalla thanked FM Kamikawa on behalf of USJC for the support provided to the organization and the JA community. She emphasized that MoFA invests in us, encourages us, and trusts us for several important areas of the U.S.-Japan relationship.

Mr. Kenmotsu shared our observations during our time so far in Japan: about the youth, ways to build upon the WPS, and some innovative recycling ideas coming from the World Expo. Delegate Tomoko Mullaney inquired about Japan's focus and priorities for Asian economic securities.

The FM Kamikawa appreciated our comments and was glad to hear that we were having fruitful experiences. She encouraged us to continue discussing our common challenges and said that MoFA will give us full support. Regarding economic security, there has been a lot of discussions on how to make sustainable supply chains a global agenda, as one incident will affect other parts of the world. Since foreign policy and economic security are interconnected, FM Kamikawa stressed the importance of augmenting domestic capacity while having better coordination among like-minded countries. One example she shared was the diplomacy efforts of 2+2 (economic security) on the defense side as well as the economic side. The interactions are getting deeper, so her focus will be to strengthen these efforts.



Briefing by Cabinet PR Secretary Shikata

By Derek Kenmotsu

Our meeting with Mr. Noriyuki Shikata, Cabinet Secretary for Public Affairs, which was facilitated by George Tanaka, outlined the priorities of the Kishida Administration and discussed the role of Japanese Americans in strengthening U.S.–Japan relations.

Mr. Shikata began by addressing the aftermath of the 2024 Noto Peninsula Earthquake, highlighting the administration’s swift response in mobilizing support and resources to aid the affected regions. This demonstration of effective crisis management also underscored Japan’s commitment to robust public safety and infrastructure resilience, themes central to the Kishida Administration’s policy objectives.

Shifting focus to the broader agenda, Mr. Shikata elaborated on the “New Form of Capitalism” being championed by Prime Minister Kishida. This initiative aims to balance economic growth with social equity, leveraging Japan’s substantial household financial assets to fuel investment in innovative sectors and technologies. The approach is intended to stimulate both domestic economic dynamism and contribute to global economic stability.

An equally critical component of the administration’s strategy is the Green Transformation (GX). This ambitious policy framework is designed to accelerate Japan’s transition to a carbon-neutral economy by 2050. Mr. Shikata detailed the plans to increase investments in





renewable energy, energy-efficient technologies, and infrastructure, which not only address environmental concerns but also aim to position Japan as a leader in global green technology markets.

On the international front, Mr. Shikata discussed Japan's evolving defense and foreign policy, particularly emphasizing the strategic doctrine of a "Free and Open Indo-Pacific." This policy seeks to ensure regional stability and prosperity through open and free maritime routes and robust economic partnerships, reflecting Japan's proactive stance in shaping a balanced regional power dynamic.

Mr. Shikata expressed the vital importance of the Japanese American community in these endeavors. He highlighted the role of Japanese Americans as bridges in the U.S.-Japan relationship, promoting mutual understanding and cooperation between the two nations. This partnership is viewed as essential not only for tackling bilateral issues but also for addressing global challenges through shared initiatives and leadership.

Overall, the briefing provided a comprehensive overview of the Kishida Administration's priorities, clearly articulating Japan's strategic directions both at home and on the international stage.

"This partnership is viewed as essential not only for tackling bilateral issues but also for addressing global challenges through shared initiatives and leadership."

THURSDAY
MARCH

7

Tokyo

Keidanren Meeting

By Derek Kenmotsu

The discussions between JALD and Keidanren reaffirmed the mutual benefits of a strong U.S.-Japan partnership.

JALD 2024 met with Keidanren (Japan Business Federation), a key player in Japan's business community, to discuss the enduring economic ties and collaborative potential between the U.S. and Japan.

Delegates Tomoko Hosaka Mullaney and George Tanaka led discussions with the Keidanren participants who represent Japanese corporations such as Nippon Steel, Marubeni Corporation, Mitsubishi Heavy Industries, Mitsui Sumitomo Insurance Co. Ltd., Nomura Holdings Inc., Sumitomo Mitsui Banking Corporation, and Hitachi Zosen Corporation.

The primary focus of the meeting was on the critical importance of U.S.-Japan economic relations. The discussions underscored how these ties have not only bolstered economic resilience but have also been fundamental in addressing global challenges through cooperative leadership. This relationship is seen as a cornerstone for sustaining a free and open international economic order, as highlighted by the strong trade and investment bonds between the two nations.

The dialogue also addressed pressing challenges. One such issue discussed was the noticeable decrease in interest among Japanese youth in studying and working in the U.S. This trend poses a potential threat to the vitality of cultural and professional exchanges that have historically enriched both societies. Furthermore, the discussions touched on the demographic challenges of an aging population in Japan, questioning the sustainability of economic resilience in the face of a shrinking workforce.

The impending U.S. presidential election was another critical topic, given its potential implications on trade policies affecting U.S.-Japan relations. The participants expressed concerns over the need for stability and predictability in trade regulations that could impact the extensive economic interdependencies between the two countries.

The discussions between JALD and Keidanren reaffirmed the mutual benefits of a strong U.S.-Japan partnership. Both parties acknowledged the need for ongoing dialogue and cooperation to navigate the complexities of global economic landscapes and demographic shifts, ensuring the relationship not only endures but thrives in the face of future challenges.

THURSDAY
MARCH
7
 Tokyo



THURSDAY
MARCH

7

Tokyo

PM Kishida Meeting Report

By David Yoshimura

After an informative and productive morning meeting with Keidanren, the Delegation returned to the Prime Minister's office for a meeting with Prime Minister Fumio Kishida.

As we once again entered the stately foyer, we were greeted with the sight of a very active press pool, including reporters, photographers, and videographers, buzzing to capture our and the Prime Minister's arrivals. We were ushered into a formal meeting room along the western edge of the facility, where a podium awaited among a few rows of seats reserved for the Delegation and for the Prime Minister and his staff. There, we were joined by Kathy Matsui, the co-chair of the Board of Directors of the U.S.-Japan Council. We found our places amongst the assigned seats and prepared for the Prime Minister's arrival.

PM Kishida soon arrived with a smile and a few short words of welcome before joining us at the far end of the meeting room for official portraits. The press pool also activated to capture the moment. After a flurry of camera shutters and video sweeps, the press were excused from the room, and the doors were closed behind them, giving us the opportunity to engage in a more intimate meeting with the Prime Minister and his staff. Once we had all taken our seats, the Prime Minister took to the podium.

PM Kishida recounted his own affinity for the United States and its people. While visiting Los Angeles in 2013 as Japan's Foreign Minister, he interacted with people from many local Japanese American organizations, including the Japanese American National Museum. He developed



THURSDAY
MARCH

7

Tokyo

respect for the Japanese Americans who persevered after enduring years of hardship during and immediately following World War II. His hometown of Hiroshima, he remarked, had the largest number of prewar immigrants to the U.S. than any other prefecture in Japan. He offered his thanks to us for our efforts and leadership, both with respect to the Delegation itself and our work in our communities and throughout the United States. He noted that he would soon visit the United States and that continued improvement of the bilateral relationship between the U.S. and Japan is paramount to both nations. He prompted and encouraged us to continue our efforts to realize that shared goal.

After PM Kishida concluded his remarks, Ms. Basalla and Ms. Matsui each assumed the podium for a few moments to thank PM Kishida and his staff for their ongoing support of USJC and their hospitality toward the Delegation. Then, it was time for the Delegation to speak directly to the Prime Minister.

Naomi Kawamura stood first and spoke on behalf of the Delegation about our diverse and varied life experiences as Japanese Americans in all parts of the United States, in a wide range of professions and leadership roles, and with unique family histories and ties to Japan. She spoke of the vital work of her organization, Densho, which seeks out, documents, and preserves the stories of Japanese Americans of all generations and backgrounds. This is personally important for Ms. Kawamura, as her father is a Hibakusha from Hiroshima, which, as PM Kishida mentioned, is also his family's hometown. She spoke of the importance of the delegates' shared heritage and our sense of community.

We left the meeting with a profound sense of the importance of the work in our communities to continue building the bridge between our two nations.



THURSDAY
MARCH

7

Tokyo



Yoh Kawanami spoke next. He discussed the recent wildfires that impacted his home state of Hawai'i and the spirit of persistence through tragedy that Japan shares and represents. He spoke from deep personal conviction and thanked the Prime Minister for Japan's support for the young people of Maui through the Kibou for Maui project, which Mr. Kawanami, as a member of USJC's Board of Directors, helped to spearhead. Through this initiative, Japan will host visiting young people from Maui to inspire them to continue the hard work of rebuilding their communities in the face of natural disaster.

As the meeting ended, PM Kishida thanked us again for our time and our efforts before returning to his work. We left the meeting with a profound sense of the importance of the work in our communities to continue building the bridge between our two nations. With gratitude and reflection, we left the Prime Minister's office and headed toward the Imperial Palace grounds.



THURSDAY
MARCH

7

Tokyo

Conversation with H.I.H. Princess Takamado

By Anna Ninoyu

In a world characterized by rapid technological advancement and digital communication, the art of conversation is a skill that can be overlooked.

However, it is precisely this art form that was exemplified with grace and eloquence during our meeting with Her Royal Highness Princess Takamado at her residence on the grounds of the Akasaka Palace in Tokyo.

As we gathered to await her, there was excitement in the anticipation, not merely for the formalities and ritual of the occasion, but for the opportunity to engage in a conversation with a member of the Imperial Family. The room was well-lit, and one could tell that the venerable walls surrounding the room would have no shortage of stories about countless momentous conversations.

The setting was both reverent and warm as Princess Takamado welcomed our delegation with open arms. Tomoko Hosaka Mullaney and Suzanne Basalla introduced our members while we were received with green tea and confectionary on delicate lacquerware. What unfolded was a masterclass in diplomatic discourse: She shared the depth of her insight through her thoughtful questions, genuine interest, and levity. She guided the discussion with intent and ease, creating an atmosphere where ideas could flow freely and insights could be shared.



THURSDAY
MARCH

7

Tokyo



The Princess shared with us her deep involvement in charitable organizations focused on sports and cultural exchange. She expressed enjoyment in playing gateball but finds it particularly challenging. She shared her fond memories of various American cities, recalling her brief visit to Anchorage during a layover and enjoying local Chicago cuisine with her late husband in 1992 during a visit to mark the opening of the renovated Japanese, Chinese, and Korean galleries at the Art Institute of Chicago.

From our side, curiosity for the Imperial Family life added flavor to the conversation, and Princess Takamado was more than willing to share her thoughts with laughter and wit. But perhaps most important, her personality is characterized by warmth, empathy, and respect. She proclaimed that regardless of our degree

of Japanese ancestry, we are all Japanese, giving us a sense of harmony that transcends past beliefs and opens the road to inclusivity. In her presence, there was only room for genuine human connection.

As our meeting drew to a close, it is clear the experience left a lasting impression on us. We departed with a renewed appreciation for the power of conversation to bridge differences and foster understanding. We found a gracious host and a true ambassador for the art of meaningful dialogue. Princess Takamado serves as a beacon of hope and is a firm believer in soft power diplomacy. Her commitment to cultural diversity and the power of sports reminds us that, in the end, it is our shared humanity that binds us together and we can build a brighter future for all through respectful dialogue.

THURSDAY
MARCH

7

Tokyo

出口
EXIT →

C1
C2
C3
D1
D2
D3
E1
E2
E3



Dinner with Taro Kono and Friends

By Naomi Kawamura

On the evening of March 7, 2024, we arrived at Kato's Dining and Bar, a Japanese restaurant located at the New Otani Hotel in Chiyoda-ku.

The Delegation was joined by Minister Taro Kono, Japan's current Minister for Digital Transformation and long-standing supporter of the U.S.-Japan Council. Additional members of the House of Representatives also attended, including Minister Toshiko Abe, State Minister of

Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, and Keiichiro Asao of the House of Councillors. Each brought with them their own unique perspectives and expertise to the table. Delegate Susan Miyagi McCormac provided a gracious welcome and an introduction on behalf of the entire Delegation. This was followed by Minister Kono who provided a few remarks, emphasizing his support of the JALD program and his genuine dedication to strengthening bilateral ties between the United States and Japan. Kono's unwavering commitment to the JALD program is such that his meeting with the JALD Delegates has become a tradition.

As the evening unfolded, we were served a beautiful kaiseki meal. The setting of the private room allowed Delegates to have opportunities to engage directly with officials who held genuine interest in speaking with them.

THURSDAY
MARCH

7

Tokyo

Our discussions were diverse and meaningful, ranging from policy matters and societal challenges to personal anecdotes. Through these discussions, we observed our hosts exhibit a genuine and studious interest in our perspectives on the cultural, political, and economic issues of the day.

Minister Kono shared anecdotes from past visits with the delegation, including memories of the late Irene Hirano Inoue, co-founder of the U.S.-Japan Council. He also shared some of his memories and impressions of the United States during his many visits there. Kono, Abe, and Asao also graciously rotated their seats throughout the evening to meet and speak with each of the individual JALD Delegates. Each of the Diet members had unique and deep connections with the U.S. and were happy to share their experiences with us throughout the evening.

While Minister Kono had to leave after the last course, Karen Makishima and Eri Arfiya, both members of the House of Representatives, joined us after dinner to participate in the JALD program's karaoke tradition, further fostering camaraderie within the group. We sang hits in English and Japanese to celebrate our newfound friendships.

Our discussions were diverse and meaningful, ranging from policy matters and societal challenges to personal anecdotes.





FRIDAY
MARCH

8

Tokyo

Breakfast meeting with Keizai Doyukai

By Yoh Kawanami

There was a collective gasp in the room when Mr. Yoshimura explained that out of 3,100 counties, only four counties may be the deciding factor in the upcoming election.

The JALD delegation was treated to a special breakfast at the March 8, 2024 meeting with Keizai Doyukai (Japan Association of Corporate Executives).

A total of ten executives (seven men and three women) took time out of their busy schedules to meet with the Delegation. The executives ranged from engineering to pharmaceutical to banking to entrepreneurship. The entire discussion was held in English with no translation.

From the Delegation, David Yoshimura gave the opening remarks and a full presentation on the topics that Keizai Doyukai had requested for a discussion on changing demographics in the workforce and U.S. political trends, including the U.S.-Japan relationship.

With the aging society where one third of the population will be 65 years or older, relying on the younger generation, women in the workforce, and artificial intelligence (AI) to play a critical role in the country's survival. An obvious indicator of how hard it is to work in Japan is the language barrier. A better curriculum on both sides—Japanese learning English and foreigners learning Japanese—is required.

Another discussion regarding working in Japan was based on real-life housing discrimination that one of the Delegates experienced. The landowner would not rent to a foreigner, making it difficult to find a place to live when they are trying to work in Japan.

Mr. Yoshimura gave an overview of the political trend and system of the U.S. and how individual states have different points of emphasis. As a key example, Yoshimura covered the political trend of his home state of Iowa and how Iowa became the first state to decide presidential campaigns, thereby receiving substantial campaigning. Mr. Yoshimura then discussed the upcoming election in detail, explaining how the United States' typically purple area is now distinctively separated into red and blue rather than mixing in their position. This is perhaps due to one side feeling more negative about the other party rather than feeling positive about their own. There was a collective gasp in the room when Mr. Yoshimura explained that out of 3,100 counties, only four counties may be the deciding factor in the upcoming election.

Mr. Yoshimura talked about how people within United States are polarized in their opinion of their believes; however, he also explained that such polarization has not necessarily impacted the U.S.-Japan relationship regardless of which party is ruling the U.S. at that time.



Americans from both parties have a highly favorable view of Japan. Similarly, Japan's standing with the American public is strong.

Keizai Doyukai was deeply appreciative of the discussion of aging workforce and the detailed background of U.S. government not only at the national level but also diving into the county/local level. Mr. Yoshimura connected both topics by emphasizing that U.S.-Japan relationship needs to be stay strong regardless of who wins the election and that the JALD Delegation is committed to supporting that pathway.





FRIDAY
MARCH

8

Tokyo



JALD Meeting with DCM Greene

By Darin Mano

On March 8, 2024, the Delegation returned to the U.S. Embassy to meet with Deputy Chief of Mission Ray Greene.

DCM Greene is currently on his fourth assignment in Japan for the U.S. Foreign Service. This meeting was rescheduled by Suzanne Basalla after DCM Greene needed to cancel his attendance at the Embassy meeting earlier in the week. Having this meeting toward the end of the trip turned out to be positive. It allowed the Delegation to talk with DCM Greene on a higher level based on the previous briefing from the foreign service officers and the various experiences and meetings we had been a part of in the interim.

DCM Greene started with a brief introduction touching on defense, space, economics, and people-to-people connections. However, he reserved the majority of the meeting for opportunities for us to ask questions and engage in discussions related to our specific interests. Delegates asked about a variety of topics including Sub-

National Diplomacy, Sister Cities Programs, and U.S. military bases in Okinawa. Some delegates were also interested in discussing the U.S.-Japan relationships in the context of other Asian countries including North Korea, China, the Philippines, and Taiwan.

This meeting ended on a personal note when DCM Greene and Ms. Basalla reminisced about their time working together during a previous assignment in the Embassy. Delegate Rob Ohno, who led this meeting, asked DCM Greene to share a memory of Ms. Basalla, and DCM Greene told a funny story involving a short taxi ride between the Embassy and the Okura Hotel. It brought a nice personal touch to the meeting and gave the Delegates a peek into the long history of efforts to strengthen U.S.-Japan relations by the U.S. Embassy officials.

Delegates asked about a variety of topics including Sub-National Diplomacy, Sister Cities Programs, and U.S. military bases in Okinawa.

FRIDAY
MARCH

8

Tokyo



Lunch with Japan Foundation Leaders

By David Yoshimura

Following its meeting at the U.S. Embassy, the Delegation arrived at the historic International House of Japan.

In a cozy meeting room facing the International House's beautiful garden, we divided into small groups at several lunch tables and were joined by many high-ranking Japan Foundation personnel. Throughout the lunch, we engaged in many small-group and one-to-one discussions with our Japan Foundation colleagues about their projects and initiatives and our experiences throughout our delegation week. Due in part to the intimate setting, this lunch presented a unique opportunity for us to brainstorm with our hosts about how to utilize our experiences and relationships to continue building and fostering the U.S.-Japan relationship.

As the meal wound down, we drew the open conversation to a close and brought the whole group back together for prepared remarks from Japan Foundation leaders to discuss the Foundation's mission of building friendships between Japan and the U.S. through cultural and language education and exchange programs. We heard about the Foundation's extensive efforts and programming throughout the United States, as well as other affiliate organizations with shared members and goals, including CULCON and the U.S.-Japan Conference on Cultural and Educational Interchange. The Foundation leaders set out their increased focus on subnational diplomacy, by which individuals in the U.S. and Japan build the relationship and affinity of the two countries through private person-to-person interactions rather than relying solely on government actors. They encouraged us to leverage our leadership positions and

FRIDAY
MARCH

8

Tokyo



skills to engage in subnational diplomacy in our own communities and industries.

Following the prepared remarks from the Japan Foundation leadership, Yoh Kawanami spoke on behalf of the delegation to thank them for their hospitality, advice, and friendship. As the week-long delegation was beginning to wind down, he summarized our experiences over the course of the week; described the meaning, importance, and impact of these experiences to our developing senses of Japanese American identity; and thanked our Japan Foundation hosts for all they had done to make the experience possible.

Lastly, we were grateful to hear impromptu remarks from Masaharu Kohno, who was instrumental in establishing the very first Japanese American Leadership Delegation back in 2000. We were deeply moved as he recounted the work that went into that first delegation and the hopes and dreams of those in Japan who sought to build the foundation of the bridge we had crossed to participate in the delegation over two decades later in 2024.

We gathered in the International House's garden for a group photograph to commemorate our meeting, thanked our hosts one final time, and departed with a heightened motivation to continue our important work of person-to-person diplomacy on our return to the U.S.





FRIDAY
MARCH

8

Tokyo



Cambridge Innovation Center Tokyo Tour

By George Tanaka

On our final day of the program, we visited the most active start-up event space in Japan, the Cambridge Innovation Center (CIC) Tokyo branch and met with their Director, Masaru Nagura.

Director Nagura is a highly qualified individual with a nuclear fusion engineering background and extensive public and private sector experience on start-ups and entrepreneurship.

CIC founded in 1999, is a hub for innovation and start-ups. It facilitates office space and builds communities and an ecosystem, providing the best environment for entrepreneurs to grow. Founded in Cambridge, MA, they have locations in the east coast US, two sites in Europe, and its Tokyo location, with Fukuoka to follow next year. They hope to have additional locations in Asia soon.

CIC Tokyo is Japan's largest innovation center, occupying 6,000 sq meters on two floors (hoping to grow to 10,000 sq meters soon). They are renowned for their visits from dignitaries like Prime Minister Kishida declaring the 'start-up generation' and other officials like the Governor of the Tokyo Metropolitan government keen on promoting start-ups. CIC is a prime location for the start-up ecosystem in Japan or to Japan from the US.

Density matters for start-up innovation. They have over 280 companies physically located there. Their model is to have all the stakeholders together in one place, from the start-up companies, researchers from academia, venture capital firms, large companies, and global connectors—such as professional firms: lawyers, accounting firms, patent attorneys, and government agencies—as well as local city, municipalities, and national agencies.

FRIDAY
MARCH

8

Tokyo

Building active communities is an important model for CIC. From welcome parties and social events to professional seminars and pitch events, to build communities and attract more people outside of the members of the physical space. Focus topics include energy and environment, life science, education, smart city, acceleration programs and more.

The physical space runs from offices that house one desk to 60 desks. To account for businesses that operate globally, their facility includes all the amenities to operate around the clock (shower rooms, nap rooms, dining, etc), with gender diversity in mind.

After sharing with us examples of start-up successes, we followed up with an informative & lively Q&A session where we clarified the revenue source for CIC being primarily rental income and the logistics of their events with over 50k registrants/yr for events including virtual outside guests. We also discussed the challenges of start-ups in Japan trying to scale up. There are still many challenges, including fundraising, Corporate Venture Capital (CVC's) not investing in the traditional start-ups and attracting a labor force who are generally drawn to large companies. CIC remains dedicated to addressing these challenges, helping start-ups shift their focus from local opportunities to the broader potential of a global market.





Reflections



Naomi Ostwald Kawamura

Seattle, Washington

When our delegation first arrived at the Meiji Jingu, we were warmly greeted at the shrine by a Shinto priest. After introductions, together, we walked towards the Torii gate, a traditional gate found at the entrance of Shinto shrines. The priest guided us through, framing our passage as crossing from the secular into the sacred. This transition from bustling Tokyo to the serenity of the forested park served as a powerful reminder of the interconnectedness of seemingly different worlds and a metaphor for our trip. Throughout the week, my fellow delegates and I crossed between and across different worlds, perspectives, and worldviews.

As a Japanese American, I've long had a complicated relationship with my Japanese heritage. Like many children of immigrants, I often found myself grappling with the expectations of different cultures, a constant negotiation of identity and belonging. As a Japanese American, these complexities were further compounded by the historical and cultural legacies that have shaped both countries. Yet, amidst the quiet contemplation of our walk that morning, I felt a profound sense of interconnectedness—not just between myself, my surroundings, and Japan but also with my fellow Japanese American delegate. Throughout our trip, we listened to each other's stories, supported one another, and celebrated our individual and collective wins. We had opportunities to meet with Prime Minister Kishida, a member of the Imperial Family. While these once-in-a-lifetime experiences that we shared throughout our travels were profound and memorable, the sense of community that was cultivated amongst fellow delegates enhanced the richness of the JALD program. We shared in the



ways that we similarly wrestled with issues of heritage, belonging, and identity. Many of us have developed friendships that will last a lifetime. And through this program, I also know that many of us feel further engaged to proactively engage with and interrogate our relationship and connection to Japan.

And like the Torii gate that marked our passage, our journey as Japanese American delegates was both a physical and metaphorical transition—a crossing from the familiar into the unknown, guided by a shared commitment to bridging divides and honoring diverse perspectives. My time in Japan has reminded me that we share core pillars that root all of us—Japanese and Japanese American—pillars not necessarily rooted in similar backgrounds, upbringings, or histories but instead anchored in the shared commitment we have to be in community and connected with one another. As we settle back into our lives at home, may we continue to carry these experiences with us as distinctly Japanese American people, embodying the spirit of connectivity, and fostering understanding wherever our paths may lead.



Derek Kenmotsu

San Mateo, California

During my journey to Japan as a member of the 2024 Japanese American Leadership Delegation (JALD), I found myself experiencing a profound shift in my perception of identity and belonging. Despite having visited Japan numerous times and even living in Okinawa for an extended period, it wasn't until this trip that I truly felt a deep personal connection to the country of my ancestors.

Growing up as a fourth-generation Japanese American in the San Francisco Bay Area, I was immersed in Japanese culture through various avenues such as the Jodo Shinshu Buddhist temple, Japanese language instruction, and Japanese American sports leagues. However, I always felt my distinctively Japanese American identity, somewhat removed from the roots of my heritage in Japan.

My perspective began to change during our visit to Meiji Jingu, a Shinto shrine in Shibuya, where we were guided by Shinto priest Moriyasu Ito. As we strolled through the serene forest surroundings in the gentle rain, Priest Ito's warm demeanor and insightful explanations illuminated the essence of Shinto as a spiritual way of life rooted in reverence for the natural world. I realized that Shinto was not exclusive to native Japanese individuals but welcomed anyone who resonated with its principles, prompting me to broaden my spiritual horizons.

A pivotal moment came during our meeting with Prime Minister Kishida, who acknowledged my ancestral ties with Hiroshima, his family's place of origin. His recognition of the contributions of Japanese Americans to strengthening U.S.-Japan relations reaffirmed our shared commitment to freedom and the rule of law, instilling in me a profound sense of purpose as a Japanese American leader.



Another highlight was our conversation with Princess Takamado, a member of the Japanese royal family, who spoke passionately about her duty to the Japanese people, defining them not solely by nationality but by shared lineage. Her inclusive vision of Japanese identity, expressed with sincerity as she looked each of us in the eye, resonated deeply with me, bridging the gap between my heritage and my sense of belonging in Japan.

These encounters, each unique yet interconnected, have profoundly shaped my understanding of my identity as a Japanese American. Through moments of reflection and connection with Japan's rich cultural heritage, I have come to embrace a newfound sense of belonging and purpose, rooted in both my Japanese ancestry and my role as a leader in the Japanese American community. Moving forward, I carry with me a deeper appreciation for the bonds that unite us across borders and a renewed commitment to fostering understanding and collaboration between our two nations.



George Tanaka

Los Angeles, California

Back in the early 2000s, I was fortunate enough to join a small meeting of Japanese Americans (JA's) convened by the late Senator Daniel Inouye. The topic of the meeting was to discuss the declining representation of JA's in Washington D.C. In particular, a statistic the Senator shared stuck with me; the United States is a melting pot made up of individuals from many nationalities, and each of these nationalities has a strong representation in the U.S. capitol, all except one, the Japanese Americans. This is despite having many registered JA non-profit organizations, ranging from cultural groups to the arts, to historical preservation & education. Over the years, I've personally experienced many of these JA organizations, but I could never understand why there wasn't sufficient representation in our nation's capital.

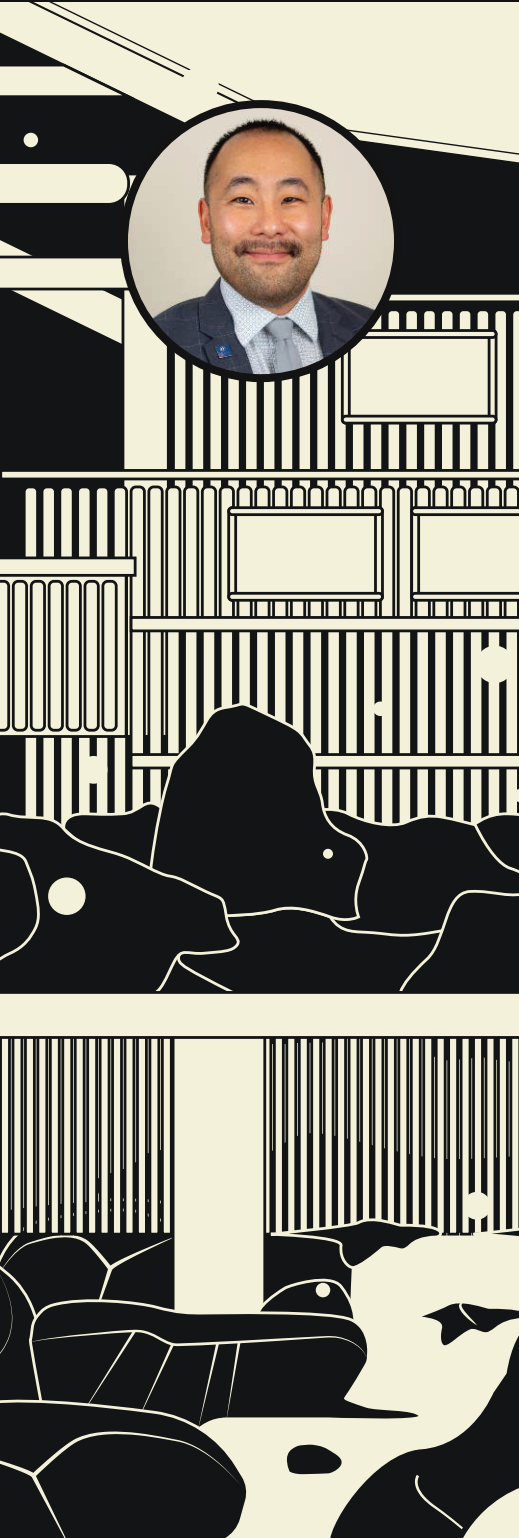
Born in Japan, I live permanently in the U.S. and call myself Japanese "shin-issei." Only recently having become a U.S. citizen, I thought I knew a lot about Japan. What I discovered was that although my upbringing gave me some cultural understanding of Japanese society, I really did not know much about Japan and the Japanese people. I learned a lot during this JALD program.

The most refreshing discovery was that Japan wants to improve U.S. Japan relations through the strength & ties with the JA community. There appears to be a lot of outreaches to the U.S, through various governmental and NGO agencies, but increased coordination of efforts could amplify results. Despite these types of efforts, unfortunately many youth in Japan appear to be losing interest or even hope in these globalization initiatives. The aging population also seems to exasperate any growth. In order to assist in further deepening and strengthening



U.S. Japan relations, I believe shin-issei's could add more value to the U.S. - Japan relationship. Like myself, many shin-issei's probably feel they already know a lot about Japan, without realizing their value. Like myself, perhaps many shin-issei's identify more as Japanese, then American, when in fact, our vast understanding of U.S. culture, being an American outweigh our value in strengthening the U.S. Japan relations, then being Japanese. A broader network of shin-issei's should be developed to discuss these challenges and the USJC has taken the first steps to make this happen. I plan to become more engaged with my shin-issei partners at the USJC to better understand my own self identity.

I was also impressed by the fact, the Japanese government knew so much about the JA's, perhaps more than the U.S. government. I was proud to hear President Biden mentioned the history of the JA's and their contributions in his speech with PM Kishida. It starts at the top, but we must do our part to hear those types of sentiments echoed across all levels. On my part, I plan to engage in sub-national diplomacy. Perhaps I too will play a small role in addressing the concerns of representation in our nation's capital that Senator Inouye shared with us, as an American of Japanese descent to help further strengthen and improve U.S. Japan relations.



Darin Mano

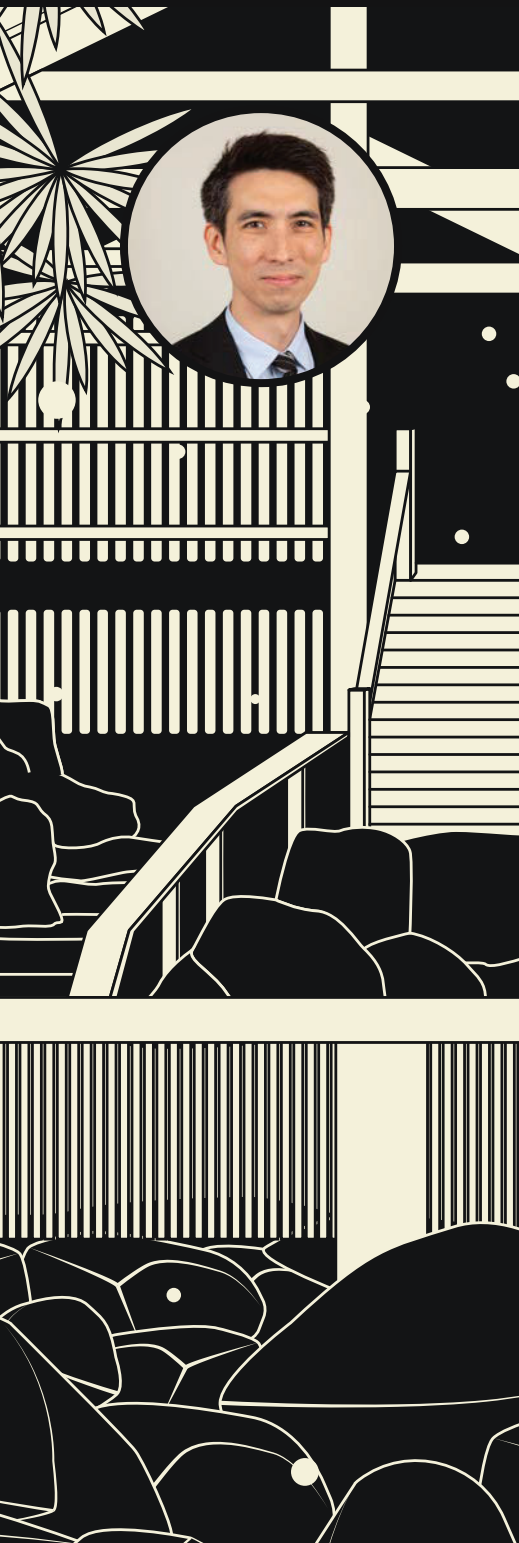
Salt Lake City, Utah

Being part of the 2024 Japanese American Leadership Delegation trip was profoundly impactful. My initial visit to Japan dates back to 2003, when I served as a church missionary. My relationship with Japan has been deeply intertwined with my religious beliefs. However, as I distanced myself from that religion over the past decade, my connection to Japan also waned. This delegation experience allowed me to reclaim my relationship with Japan and redefine my identity as a Japanese American.

My personal relationship between Japan and spirituality is perhaps why our visit to Meiji Jingu was especially meaningful. The soft morning light and gentle rain enhanced our walk along the gravel path through the Torii Gates toward the main shrine. We learned that the design of the place was intended to signify leaving a secular world behind and entering a sacred space. It certainly felt that way for us. The priest's explanation of "Kami," or "God," in the Shinto tradition rekindled my spiritual connection to Japan, but in a way that more fully aligns with my current values.

Speaking before the Japan-U.S. Parliamentary Friendship League was another significant moment. I shared my experience as an openly gay elected official of color in the United States, which was both daunting and empowering. Afterward, a man approached me, saying he and his husband were proud to know of an openly gay Japanese American politician. Connecting with him later in the week provided insights into how Japanese officials approach LGBTQ+ rights. Engaging with fellow public servants who shape Japanese policy was an incredible opportunity. However, the personal connections I made during this trip are the moments are unforgettable.

This delegation experience came at a pivotal time in my life. Roughly 12 years into my career, I find myself at a crossroads. I've worked in business, academia, and the public sector. As I look to the future, I'm eager to see how membership and participation in the U.S.-Japan Council will shape my career and life. I am deeply grateful to MOFA for selecting me for this year's delegation, and I look forward to strengthening my connections within the Japanese American community and beyond.



David Yoshimura

Des Moines, Iowa

It was an incredible honor to join this delegation of talented Japanese American leaders on a reformative journey of self-identity and international partnership. As a fourth-generation Japanese American born and raised in a small town in rural Iowa, opportunities to build and strengthen relationships with Japan and with my fellow Japanese Americans were rare. The chance to participate in the JALD program—and the warm welcome I received when first meeting my fellow delegates—was a dream come true.

But what I found during our time in Japan was even more affirming. The agricultural heartland of the American Midwest, including Iowa, is far from an afterthought in the U.S.-Japan bilateral relationship. I was pleased to meet Japanese leaders, from members of the National Diet to senior business executives of some of Japan's prominent industry leaders, whose personal journeys had taken them to Iowa and who carried fond memories of their time in my home state. As we proceeded from meeting to meeting, I came to understand more and more the importance that Japanese leaders ascribe to their relations with all industries and geographies in the United States, not just the city centers on the American coasts. When I returned to Iowa, I was thrilled to be able to report on Japan's heartfelt desire to further its relationship to even our most rural communities.

Equally important were the ties that bound our delegation together. Together, the ten of us reflected a broad array of life experiences, professional backgrounds, and senses of self-identity as Japanese Americans. Our shared journey in Japan was a whirlwind of experiences: thought-provoking and high-stakes meetings with government



and business leaders, contemplative moments spent basking in some of Japan's historic cultural landmarks, and fevered writing and rewriting of keynote remarks. We walked the neighborhoods of Nara to find a beautiful sake microbrewery tucked away in the corner of a historic residential neighborhood; took in the quiet, singular beauty of Meiji shrine, a refuge from the city bustle in the heart of Tokyo; and marveled at the stately air of modernity in the entryway of the Prime Minister's office. Through these and many other unique but shared experiences, we formed unbreakable bonds that we will carry throughout our lives.

I'm eternally grateful to Japan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, its Consulate General for the Midwest region, and the U.S.-Japan Council for the opportunity to join this esteemed delegation. I can't wait to see what's next for our delegate class and for the future of the U.S.-Japan relationship.



Anna Ninoyu

Chicago, Illinois

のをさずんば、のいかんがん。

Planting seeds in the spring ensures a bountiful fall harvest.

The JALD experience reminded me of this expression when I visited Toji Temple in Kyoto with my family in 2023 and of a fundamental truth: Just as a farmer carefully plants and tends to their crops, goals are to be approached with thoughtful planning and foresight. The connections and insights gained from the week-long engagements and the time spent with my fellow delegates have inspired me to be a catalyst for change and collaboration, emphasizing the importance of strategic thinking and being proactive to strengthen U.S. and Japan relations more than ever.

During our meeting with Prime Minister Fumio Kishida, his message to us underscored the unique position of our delegation and highlighted the critical role of Japanese-Americans. I was moved by his words and my cohorts' remarks that our commitment to our allyship is as deep as our shared ancestry where our differences are opportunities to learn from each other.

Similarly, our meeting with Shibuya City Mayor Ken Hasabe was a testament to the significance of doing the right thing. Mayor Hasabe's courageous stance, despite challenges from higher levels of government, trailblazed social and economic progress on LGBTQ recognition, encouraging women in the workforce and creating a pipeline for Japanese and foreign entrepreneurs to start and grow their businesses in Japan.

This journey highlighted the importance of reading the environment, adapting to change, and seizing opportunities as they arise. As I express my gratitude to the diverse and talented delegates with whom I had the



privilege to share this journey, I am reminded of the wealth of knowledge and experience we collectively possess. Our delegation represents the energy, capability, and diversity that make our program so enriching and enlightening. As a second-generation Japanese-American, this was an experience of a lifetime that reawakened my curiosity about my family history and to reevaluate how I can continue to make an impact as an architect, woman entrepreneur, educator and now JALD '24.



Yoh Kawanami

Honolulu, Hawaii

Every Japanese American, no matter what their background, seems to know what sansei or yonsei means. I don't feel like there is such a classification in the native tongue in any other Asian culture. In fact there are new phrases such as shin-issei and shin-nissei to further differentiate the "types" of Japanese Americans that we are. So many ways to classify, yet I also notice a trend where many of us "don't know where we belong." Are we Japanese? Are we Americans?

JALD for the last 20-plus years, has been the critical program to answer this question for the Japanese American leaders. And the answer is simple: we're both. Princess Takamado put it very simply, "even just a tiny bit of Japanese blood in you, you're Japanese." And Miyamoto-san from MOFA defined himself as "I'm Japanese that is very American." Two very different countries, but with the respect it has for each other, it should be possible to look for the interests of both.

Thankfully, every leader, whether from the U.S. or Japan that we met emphasized how important the US-Japan relationship is. The 21st JALD delegates clearly heard this message that the Japanese American has and will continue to play an important role in strengthening this relationship. And we're not alone in this quest to strengthen the U.S.-Japan relationship. The countries have always shown their support to each other whenever a crisis hits. I am forever grateful that I had an opportunity to directly thank Prime Minister Kishida for the Japanese government's support of the recovery of Maui.



Throughout the journey of JALD, one other phrase was commonly mentioned, and that was the "people to people" connection. While I was preparing for many things, one thing I was not ready for was reuniting with not one but two childhood friends from 30 years ago at MOFA and JR. They are both highly successful individuals who are doing their part to strengthen the U.S.-Japan relationship. I am so grateful for the reconnection and that I know I have two more very strong connections and, of course, they can count on me too.

The JALD journey truly starts with the delegation. Spending quality time with such diverse and amazing people puts an exclamation point on an already special moment. The genuine care and kindness the group gave each other can not be put into words.

Mahalo nui to my fellow delegates, truly appreciate all of you.



Rob Ohno

Ponte Vedra Beach, Florida

I am still fully processing everything we experienced during the JALD trip. It was an incredibly special and meaningful trip, to say the least. I am very grateful to have been a part of it.

Ambassador Kohno's remarks at the Japan Foundation luncheon really hit me regarding why JALD started and what the initial intent of the program was. He told me separately that they were hoping to engage a network of one hundred Japanese Americans over time. Now the program is in its 20th year or so, which is amazing.

The trip also made me reflect on a question that was posed to us during the Orientation mtgs in LA in late January:

"What does it mean to be Japanese American or a Japanese American leader?"

On a walk to the Imperial Palace in Tokyo during the last morning, my thoughts became a bit clearer on the question. I had pondered it for several weeks. In short, after JALD, my perspective changed greatly.

Before JALD my perspective on this question was more inward. It meant to work hard, strive for excellence, and respect others. It meant to represent my heritage in a positive way. On the negative side, as a Japanese American, I had felt that I did not "look" American. But I felt that I did not "act" Japanese, either. So, at times I felt caught in the middle or in "no man's land."

After JALD, my perspective on the question became much larger in scope. The Japanese government, Royalty, business leaders, as well as the US Embassy, made me feel valued as a Japanese American. They made me feel proud of my heritage. They made me feel needed. They made me feel more connected to other Japanese Americans.



So now, as a Japanese American leader, I feel like I am an "enabler." I feel like I can be a "connector." I feel like I can be a "changer" and make a difference in advancing US-Japan relations and cultural understandings in some way.

I am motivated to make a difference and look forward to what the future holds.

On a separate note, I wanted to make a comment about the JALD delegates. We were a very diverse group—representing different parts of the U.S., various industries, and different upbringings as Japanese Americans. However, I was so impressed how well everyone got along. We all supported one another. We respected each other's differences. And it was so refreshing to observe so many random acts of kindness between members of the group. It was inspiring to see. The experience was special in many ways. I am truly grateful.



Tomoko Hosaka Mullaney

Washington, DC

In the weeks since I returned home from our JALD week, the predominant emotion I have felt is overwhelming gratitude. I keep asking myself, “How is it that I was chosen to be part of this amazing group of leaders?”

First, I am grateful for my fellow JALD 2024 delegates. We all came from different parts of the country, from different professions and backgrounds, yet we connected quickly and deeply. We laughed together, we cried together, and we supported each other throughout the week. I didn’t quite believe it when members of past JALD classes said their group became family. But it was true. I know the bonds that we created during one week in March 2024 will endure for a lifetime.

I am thankful to Japan’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the U.S.-Japan Council for their support of JALD. The financial and logistical resources to maintain the program are substantial. But I am certain that the investment in our class will pay dividends in the years and decades to come. We are now doubly committed to contributing to the U.S.-Japan relationship in our own unique ways, whether via culture, sports, and the arts or through business and government.

I am also thankful to all the people and groups in Japan who spent time with our delegation and listened to what we, as Japanese Americans, had to say. You will see in the pages of this report all the dignitaries we had the honor of meeting. It was a truly once-in-a-lifetime itinerary. I was particularly moved by our engagement with Her Imperial Highness Princess Takamado, who spoke intimately to us for 90 minutes in a small circle in her residence. We were all moved by her warmth, candor, and humor.



Finally, I am proud to be part of the Japanese American community. As my fellow delegates know, I have not always felt like I was part of the community. I was born in Japan but moved to California when I was three years old. So I always referred to myself as a 1.5-sei. Not quite Japanese. Not quite Japanese American. The World War II incarceration was not part of my family’s history. We didn’t attend the local Buddhist church. I didn’t play youth basketball. Even as an adult—as the definition of ‘Japanese American’ was becoming more inclusive—I certainly didn’t think JALD was for me. I only applied because a USJC friend encouraged me to try. I’m so very glad I listened. Being part of JALD was a transformational experience. It shifted my personal identity as a Japanese American and clarified the lens through which I live and work. And for that, I am grateful.

Susan Miyagi McCormac

New York, New York

Although I'm half-Japanese and half-white American, I had a 100% white American childhood in a small town in North Carolina, one that didn't involve any Japanese customs, traditions, or even the language. After I moved to New York City in my early 30s, I immersed myself in Japanese culture, eventually becoming an active leader in the Japanese American community.

The 2024 JALD program is the pinnacle of my journey to discovering the Japanese side of my identity. Our ten-person delegation, which included impressive Japanese Americans from across the country who have achieved excellence in a variety of fields, had unprecedented access to leaders in government and business. With these leaders we shared our experiences as Japanese Americans as it pertains to our jobs and our volunteer work, and we discussed our commitment to bridge the gap between the U.S. and Japan.

There are numerous highlights from the intense week we spent in Osaka and Tokyo. While we were whisked from meetings to lunches, tours, and dinners in rapid fashion, I learned a great deal about the inner workings of the Japanese government and major business as well as how important maintaining a strong relationship with the U.S. is.

Personally, three encounters in particular stand out: meeting Shimajiri Aiko, a member of the House of Councillors who is from my mother's home prefecture of Okinawa; answering questions from Aoshima Kenta, another member of the House of Councillors and a former baseball player who wanted to know how sports in the U.S.—and particularly in New York—uplifted Americans in



the immediate aftermath of the 9/11 terrorist attacks; and sharing a meal with Kono Taro, who has graciously met every delegation in the program's 21-year history. Having an audience with Prime Minister Fumio Kishida, Foreign Minister Yoko Kamikawa, and Shibuya Mayor Ken Hasebe is also a privilege I will never forget.

What struck me most was the bond I formed with my fellow delegates. I learned that they, too, had struggled with their identities as well. We instantly formed an easy friendship and offered support as we gave presentations at each meeting. One lasting aspect of this program is that we are still in touch and supporting each other in our post-JALD endeavors.

I'm grateful to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and USJC for giving me this incredible opportunity. My commitment to the Japanese American community is stronger than ever, and I will treasure my JALD memories for the rest of my life.

