



U.S.-JAPAN
COUNCIL

: Japanese American Leadership Delegation's 2025 Report

CIRCLES OF CULTURAL UNITY: JALD'S PEOPLE-TO-PEOPLE DIPLOMACY

Presented by the 2025 JALD Delegation



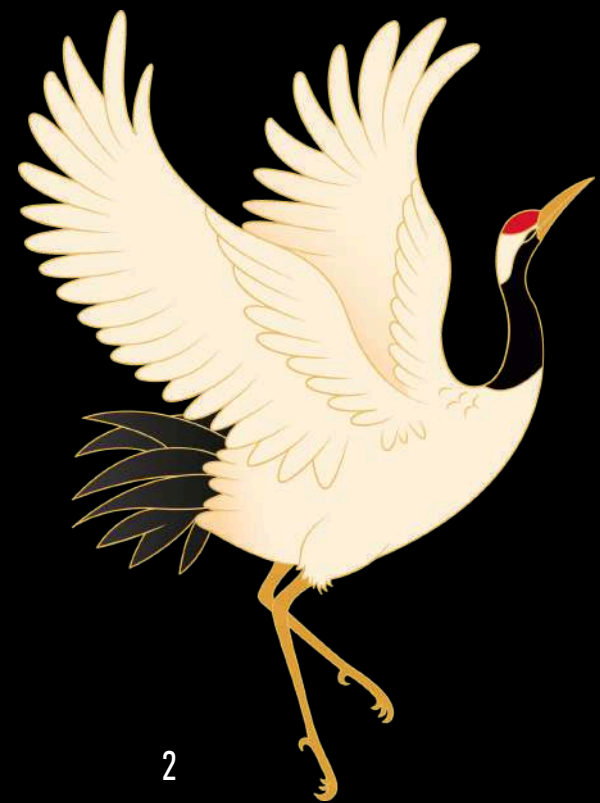
www.usjapancouncil.org



contact@usjapancouncil.org



Washington, DC | Tokyo, Japan



Dedicated to our ancestors,
whose shoulders we stand upon,
and to the next generation,
who we entrust our future to.

CIRCLES OF CULTURAL UNITY

Circles symbolize unity, continuity, and the intertwining of connections that bind communities together. The Japanese American Leadership Delegation (JALD) program embodies this circular meaning through people-to-people diplomacy, creating an unbroken bridge where Japanese American leaders and their Japanese counterparts engage in cultural exchange that weaves together diverse perspectives and shared experiences. This circular journey of connection—from dialogue in Hiroshima and Tokyo to ongoing collaboration back home—has created an ever-expanding circle of 227 delegates since 2000. All alumni of this program are dedicated to strengthening the intertwined cultural fabric between the United States and Japan.



INTRODUCTION

The Japanese American Leadership Delegation (JALD) program provides the opportunity for a select group of Japanese American leaders from across the United States to travel to Japan to engage with Japanese leaders in the business, government, academic, non-profit and cultural sectors. Upon their return, delegates collaborate with JALD alumni, the local consulates, the U.S.-Japan Council, and local and national community organizations to continue strengthening ties between the United States and Japan.

The Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) sponsors this annual program, and the delegates would like to extend our heartfelt appreciation for their support and dedication to this program.



DELEGATES



Ellen Kamei
Mountain View, CA



Jason Miyashita
Tamuning, Guam



Roger Nozaki
Providence, RI



Elisabeth Tamiko Ooka
Bloomfield, NJ



Ann Teranishi
Honolulu, HI



Hanako Wakatsuki-Chong
Portland, OR



Kendee Yamaguchi
Seattle, WA



Akira Yamamoto
Bloomfield Hills, MI

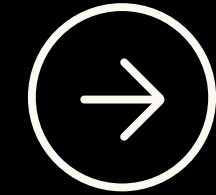


Dawn Yamane Hewett
Washington, DC



Derick Yanehiro
Los Angeles, CA

JALD TRIP OVERVIEW



- March 1** Arrive in Hiroshima, Japan
- March 2** Miyajima sightseeing, spoon making experience, Shukkeien Garden
- March 3** Peace Culture Village, Modern Hiroshima and Overseas Migration Exhibit, Governor Yuzaki, Hiroshima Symposium
- March 4** Mayor of Hiroshima, Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum, Experience Sharing from Hibakusha, shinkansen to Tokyo, Young Bipartisan Members of the Diet
- March 5** Ministry of Economy, Trade & Industry (METI) Cabinet Public Relations Secretary Kobayashi, Japan-U.S. Parliamentary Friendship League, Foreign Minister Iwaya
- March 6** Keidanren, Tokyo Station Shinkansen Control Center, Her Imperial Highness Princess Takamado, Keizai Douyukai
- March 7** Director-General Arima & U.S. Leaders, Chief Cabinet Secretary Hayashi, U.S. Embassy
- March 8** Departure from Tokyo



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



The 2025 Japanese American Leadership Delegation (JALD) embarked on a transformative journey through Hiroshima and Tokyo from March 2-7, experiencing profound cultural exchange and diplomatic engagement.

In Hiroshima, delegates visited Miyajima Island, participated in traditional shamoji-making, and engaged deeply with peace culture through meetings with Governor Yuzaki and Mayor Matsui. The Peace Memorial Museum visit and atomic bomb survivor Ms. Yahata's testimony provided haunting insight into nuclear warfare's human cost, reinforcing urgent peace advocacy needs.

Tokyo activities included high-level meetings with Foreign Minister Iwaya, METI officials, and Cabinet Secretary Hayashi, who emphasized the U.S.-Japan relationship as the world's most important bilateral partnership. Cultural highlights included an exclusive audience with Her Imperial Highness Princess Takamado and business engagements with Keidanren and Keizai Douyukai exploring economic cooperation challenges.

Personal Impacts

This circular journey of connection profoundly transformed participants, deepening their cultural heritage, personal identity, and sense of purpose. Delegates gained renewed commitment to fostering bilateral relations, mentoring future leaders, and promoting cross-cultural understanding, creating lasting personal and professional networks dedicated to peace.

MIYAJIMA ISLAND

The 2025 Japanese American Leadership Delegation began their journey at Miyajima Island, where the sacred Itsukushima torii has stood as a gateway since the 6th century, welcoming countless generations including the ancestors of many delegation members. For Japanese Americans reconnecting with their heritage, this floating shrine represents the enduring spiritual and cultural connections that transcend physical distance and historical separation.

The contemplative ferry approach through morning fog offered delegates moments of reflection on their own family journeys—some tracing roots to Hiroshima Prefecture itself. At Itsukushima Shrine, participants engaged with living traditions that their own families may have carried across the Pacific, now experienced through the lens of contemporary Japanese American identity and leadership.

Sharing momiji-manju and participating in local customs provided authentic cultural reconnection beyond formal programming. For many delegates, these moments represented profound personal homecoming—not as outsiders discovering Japan, but as members of the extended Japanese family returning to ancestral places with new perspectives shaped by the American experience.

This foundational experience exemplified JALD's unique mission of enabling Japanese Americans to engage with Japan as cultural inheritors and bridge-builders. Rather than mere observers, delegates participated as community members with legitimate claims to both Japanese heritage and American leadership, preparing them to serve as authentic intermediaries in strengthening bilateral understanding through shared cultural identity and contemporary cross-cultural expertise.



CULTURAL IMMERSION

At the Miyajima Traditional Crafts Center, delegates reconnected with their heritage as master artisans Mr. and Mrs. Ota shared the art of shamoji-making. In this private class, each delegate made their own shamoji and selected personal stamps featuring Miyajima's symbols—torii, deer, and maple leaves—creating a tangible keepsake of this memorable experience.

The Otas were generous with their time and expertise. These intimate moments allowed delegates to participate in cultural practices as Nikkei rather than curious outsiders, restoring connections that transcend political boundaries. These intimate cultural encounters enable Japanese American leaders to understand Japan, not merely as a political or economic partner, but as a society rich in tradition and human connection.

The subsequent Shukkeien Garden visit carried deep personal resonance, as delegates walked paths where atomic bomb survivors once sought the garden to escape the devastation of the bomb. This centuries-old sanctuary connects contemporary Japanese Americans to both the beauty and trauma of the delegates' ancestral homeland, reinforcing their unique position as bearers of shared historical memory, including trauma.

These experiences affirmed delegates' roles not as diplomatic intermediaries between foreign cultures, but as members of an extended Nikkei diaspora in America, uniquely positioned to strengthen understanding through authentic cultural inheritance and contemporary leadership within both communities.



HIROSHIMA PEACE CULTURE VILLAGE

The delegation visited the Hiroshima Peace Culture Village, cultivating leaders who champion peace through cross-cultural understanding. This multifaceted organization's commitment to peace education—from elementary initiatives to the online Peace Culture Academy for young adults—resonated deeply with the delegates who understand the transformative power of bridging cultures to prevent conflict.

The Peace Cultural Foundation's comprehensive approach, including memorial sites like the Peace Bell advocating nuclear abolition and the Children's Peace Memorial honoring Sadako's legacy, provided the delegates with profound context for their leadership responsibilities. The stark historical reality of August 6, 1945—145,000 lives lost, including 20,000 Korean victims—underscored the urgent need for leaders committed to "Peace Culture" over "War Culture."

The delegation's engagement with hibakusha testimonies and memorial spaces reinforced their unique position as cultural ambassadors. Some Japanese Americans, having experienced both wartime persecution and post-war reconciliation, possess distinctive insights into transforming historical trauma into lasting peace. The global symbolism of one million annual visitors and ten million paper cranes worldwide demonstrates how local peace initiatives can inspire international movements—precisely the kind of leadership impact JALD seeks to cultivate among its participants.





MODERN HIROSHIMA AND OVERSEAS MIGRATION EXHIBIT

The delegation visited the Modern Hiroshima Exhibit, located in the basement of the former Bank of Japan building, which remarkably survived the atomic bombing. One of the exhibits focused on the history of Japanese emigration between 1885 and 1894, during which nearly 29,000 government contract workers—including 11,000 from Hiroshima—immigrated to Hawai'i. These early immigrants, connected to prefectures such as Hiroshima, Yamaguchi, Kumamoto, and Fukuoka, endured grueling labor in sugarcane fields under harsh conditions. Motivated by higher wages and a sense of security, overseas migration surged and was encouraged by the Japanese government. The success of emigration to Hawai'i eventually led to expanded migration to California and the continental United States.

This particular exhibit deeply resonated with many JALD participants, whose families emigrated from these regions and settled in Hawai'i and California. Viewing historical documents from the Japanese government—some bearing the imperial seal—offered a powerful and personal connection to their family histories. Experiencing this chapter of history from the Japanese perspective was profoundly moving. Although the visit was brief, the impact was enormous.



Permanent Exhibition:
Collections of the City of Hiroshima
 History of Modern Hiroshima and Overseas Emigration

**Former Bank of Japan
 Hiroshima Branch**
 Basement Floor 1 Exhibition rooms

Open 10:30 - 16:30 **Admission** Free
Closed Tuesdays, Wednesdays, Thursdays
 New Year's (12/29-1/3)



GOVERNOR YUZAKI

The delegation's private audience with Governor Hidehiko Yuzaki of Hiroshima on March 3rd embodied JALD's core mission of fostering transformative leadership partnerships between Japan and Japanese Americans. Governor Yuzaki's opening emphasis on peace, rather than his business background, demonstrated the profound trust placed in JALD participants as authentic ambassadors of reconciliation and understanding.

Lead speaker Akira Yamamoto's recognition of Hiroshima's "culture of peace" and its youth-driven global outreach resonated with the delegation's own commitment to intergenerational leadership development. The governor's deeply personal message revealed his expectation that these Japanese American leaders would carry Hiroshima's peace legacy forward—a responsibility that aligns perfectly with JALD's purpose of cultivating cultural bridges between nations.

The meeting was a poignant reminder of the shared history between the people of Hiroshima and Japanese Americans. Both communities, bound by their experiences, have a unique opportunity to collaborate on fostering peace. The discussions underscored the importance of continuing this collaboration, with a shared commitment to building a lasting culture of peace for future generations. This meeting emphasized how JALD participants serve as vital connectors in building lasting peace partnerships, demonstrating the program's success in developing leaders who can authentically represent both American and Japanese perspectives in pursuing global peace.



FROM HIROSHIMA TO HOPE SYMPOSIUM

Moderated by Derick Yanehiro, the "From Hiroshima to Hope" symposium at Hiroshima Jogakuin School exemplified JALD's transformative impact on fostering cross-cultural dialogue for global peace. This unprecedented gathering demonstrated how Japanese American leaders uniquely bridge historical trauma and contemporary hope, sharing perspectives that resonate across cultures and generations.

JALD panelists Dawn Yamane Hewett, Ellen Kamei, and Ann Teranishi powerfully articulated the parallel experiences of suffering and resilience that define both Japanese and Japanese American communities. Hewett's connection between Hiroshima's tragedy and Japanese American wartime persecution, including the heroic service of the 442nd Regimental Combat Team, illustrated how shared adversity can forge unbreakable bonds between former enemies who have now forged one of the strongest relationships in the world. Her invocation of Nihon Hidankyo's peace mission resonated with the delegate's commitment to transforming historical pain into purposeful leadership.

Kamei's emphasis on women's empathetic leadership and her definition of peace as action embodied the delegates' approach to cultivating next-generation peacemakers. Teranishi's historical perspective on Honolulu-Hiroshima sister cities connection highlighted the deep people-to-people relationships that JALD continues to strengthen. The students' expressed eagerness to learn about Japanese American experiences, demonstrating how authentic cross-cultural leadership creates ripple effects that expand understanding and inspire future peace advocates across international boundaries.



HIROSHIMA MAYOR MATSUI

At Hiroshima City Hall, Mayor Matsui Kazumi received the Japanese American Leadership Delegation in his second engagement with the program, expressing deep appreciation for JALD's mission since his initial interaction a decade prior.

Mayor Matsui reflected on Hiroshima's historical outmigration patterns that established Japanese communities globally, celebrating the remarkable achievements of Japanese Americans while emphasizing the enduring bonds between Hiroshima and its diaspora. He expressed profound gratitude to American Nikkei and affiliated organizations for their critical support during Hiroshima's post-atomic bombing recovery, highlighting initiatives such as the Children's Library as symbols of international solidarity.

Addressing contemporary global challenges, the Mayor underscored the vital importance of people-to-people relationships in fostering mutual understanding and collaboration. He positioned programs like JALD as essential mechanisms for strengthening international cooperation, particularly during periods of global instability. Mayor Matsui emphasized the urgent need for collective action among "peace-loving people of the world" to advance shared values of peace and cooperation.

The Mayor encouraged delegates to share their Hiroshima experiences broadly, recognizing their potential to inspire greater advocacy for peace. This alignment of past, present, and future encapsulated the essence of the meeting—a dialogue rooted in history, gratitude, and a shared commitment to a brighter, more peaceful world. The interaction served as a testament to the enduring relationships between Hiroshima and its global diaspora, illustrating how cultural exchange and collaboration can pave the way for a harmonious future amidst a complex international landscape. Mayor Matsui's poignant words left a lasting impression, embodying both the resilience of Hiroshima and the transformative potential of shared human experiences.



HIROSHIMA PEACE MEMORIAL MUSEUM & LECTURE

On March 4, 2025, the delegation visited Hiroshima to witness firsthand the profound impact of nuclear warfare. It began with a guided tour of the Peace Memorial Museum led by Director Ishida, followed by an unforgettable lecture from atomic bomb survivor Ms. Yahata, who was just eight years old when the bomb detonated.

The Peace Memorial Museum stands as a testament to the unimaginable suffering caused by the atomic bomb and serves as a solemn reminder of the consequences of war. Inscribed within the museum is a powerful message from the hibakusha, the survivors: "No one else should suffer as we have... let all the souls here rest in peace for we shall not repeat the evil." These words encapsulate Hiroshima's enduring plea for peace. Director Ishida led us through exhibits detailing the devastation of August 6, 1945, the insidious long-term effects of radiation, the anguished voices of those who perished, and the resilience of those who survived. The tour concluded with a sobering reminder of the ongoing nuclear threat and the urgent need for disarmament, reinforced by the testimonies of survivors who dedicate their lives to ensuring history does not repeat itself.

The most harrowing part of the visit came when Ms. Yahata shared her personal account of that fateful morning. What began as an ordinary summer day quickly turned into unimaginable horror. At 8:15 a.m., as she stepped outside to check if an air raid alert had been lifted, the sky exploded into a blinding blue-white light. In an instant, she was hurled through her home by the massive shockwave, losing consciousness.





When she awoke, blood streamed from her head, her body wracked with pain. In the chaos, her mother, fearing further bombings, called out, "Gather here, everyone! We'll all die together." As she wrapped Yahata and her siblings in a futon, she prepared them for death, but what Yahata remembers most is the warmth of her family—a fleeting comfort amid unfathomable terror.

Survival was only the beginning. Fleeing to the mountains, they later returned to scenes of unspeakable horror. Burned and disfigured victims staggered across the landscape, their flesh hanging from their bodies like rags, pleading for water. The dead were hastily cremated in schoolyards, and those who could not find their loved ones were given envelopes filled with unidentified bone fragments. Though Yahata and her family escaped direct burns, they were exposed to the radioactive black rain that followed, later suffering from severe illnesses. She recalled visiting a makeshift medical station where the wounded lay in agony, and where she, as a starving child, mistook the envelopes of ashes for packages of food.

Her story, like those of countless other survivors, is not just one of suffering, but of an unbreakable will to ensure the world never forgets. Her testimony reinforced three undeniable truths. First, the necessity of nuclear abolition is more urgent than ever, as global tensions threaten to repeat history. Second, the suffering caused by the atomic bomb extends far beyond its immediate devastation, with survivors enduring lifelong illnesses and trauma. Finally, war is a force that strips humanity of its innocence, turning all people into both victims and unwilling participants. Standing in Hiroshima, hearing the voices of those who lived through its darkest day, one truth became clear: remembrance is not enough. We must act. The message of Hiroshima is not just a warning—it is a call to ensure that never again will humanity unleash such destruction upon itself.

For JALD participants, this testimony serves as essential education in nuclear warfare's human costs, enabling informed advocacy within Japanese American communities and broader American society. Ms. Yahata's commitment to bearing witness exemplifies hibakusha dedication to preventing nuclear repetition through sustained testimony and education, reinforcing the delegation's mission of fostering cross-cultural understanding and promoting shared peace values.

YOUNG BIPARTISAN MEMBERS OF THE DIET

The Japanese American Leadership Delegation participated in a structured parliamentary engagement facilitated by Former Ministers of Digital Transformation Taro Kono and Karen Makishima, featuring dinner dialogue with emerging Japanese political leaders including Minister of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, Toshiko Abe; Minister of Justice, Keisuke Suzuki; Parliamentary Vice-Minister of Cabinet Office, Daisuke Nishino; and Parliamentary Secretary of Foreign Affairs, Arfiya Eri.

The evening's format, utilizing traditional round dining arrangements, enabled intimate cross-cultural exchange between JALD participants and Japanese parliamentarians. These facilitated conversations provided essential opportunities for bilateral policy dialogue, mutual understanding of contemporary political perspectives, and development of professional networks spanning Japanese American political and civic leadership.

This engagement exemplifies JALD's core mission of building substantive relationships between Japanese American leaders and their Japanese counterparts. Through direct interaction with Japan's next generation of political leadership, delegation participants gained invaluable insights into Japanese domestic priorities, foreign policy perspectives, and approaches to bilateral cooperation.

The evening concluded with cultural exchange through karaoke, continuing Taro Kono's tradition of hosting JALD cohorts in this capacity. This informal component reinforced personal connections established during formal dialogue, demonstrating how cultural activities complement diplomatic engagement in strengthening U.S.-Japan relations. Such parliamentary exchanges enable JALD participants to serve as informed intermediaries between U.S.-Japan political communities, advancing the program's objectives of enhancing mutual understanding and cooperation across governmental, business, and civic sectors.



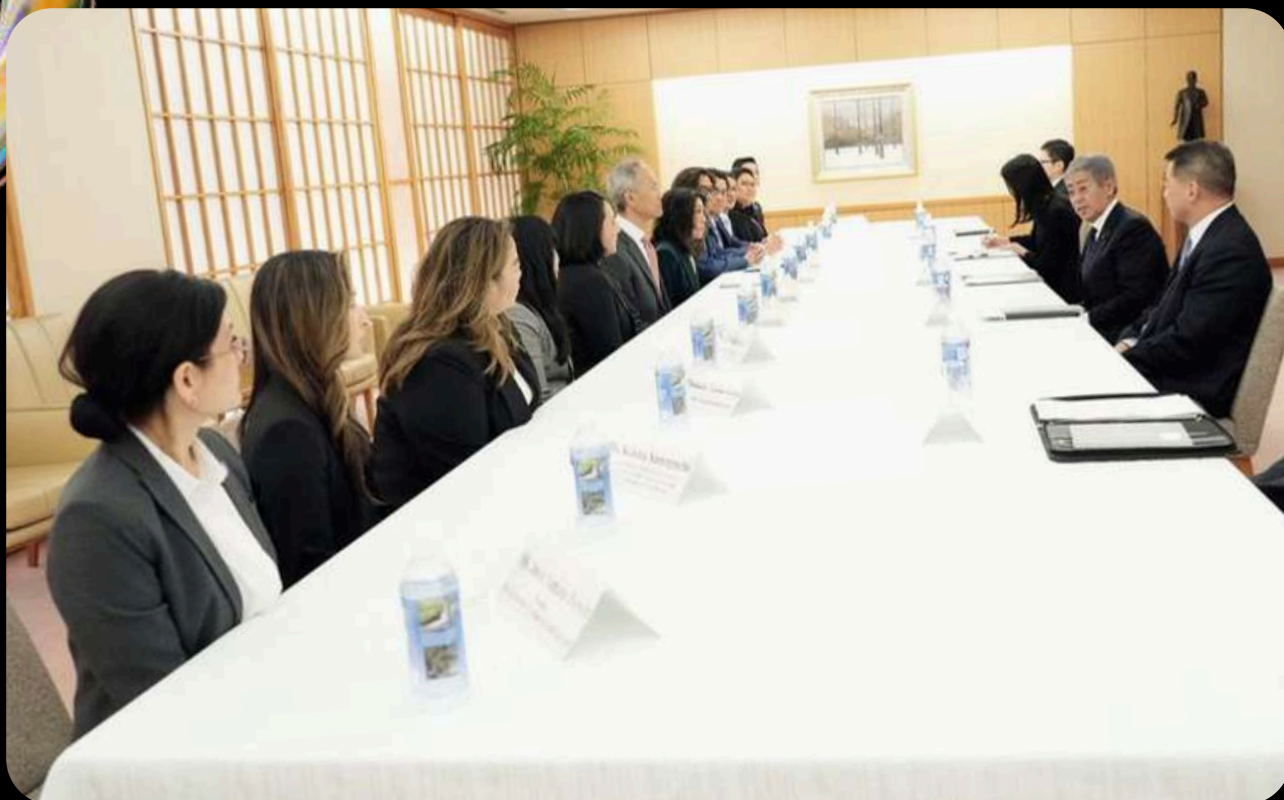
FOREIGN MINISTER IWAYA



The delegation met with Foreign Minister Takeshi Iwaya at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Tokyo. Minister Iwaya, representing Oita Prefecture, holds historical significance as the second Foreign Minister from the region, following Mamoru Shigemitsu, who signed Japan's surrender aboard the USS *Missouri* in 1945.

Minister Iwaya emphasized the fundamental importance of people-to-people connections in sustaining U.S.-Japan relations amid evolving global dynamics. He expressed substantial appreciation for the U.S.-Japan Council and JALD's contributions to bilateral relationship strengthening, recognizing these programs as essential mechanisms for cross-cultural engagement.

The Minister acknowledged Japanese Americans' pivotal role in post-WWII U.S.-Japan reconciliation and relationship development, noting the remarkable evolution of bilateral ties over subsequent decades. He affirmed MOFA's continued institutional support for these initiatives and committed to enhanced collaboration moving forward.



This high-level engagement demonstrates JALD's strategic importance in Japanese foreign policy considerations and validates the program's mission of fostering substantive dialogue between Japanese American leaders and senior Japanese officials. Minister Iwaya's commitment to ongoing partnership with USJC and JALD participants reinforces the delegation's role as a critical bridge between American and Japanese leadership communities, advancing mutual understanding and cooperation across governmental, business, and civic sectors in support of enduring bilateral alliance objectives.

MINISTRY OF ECONOMY, TRADE, AND INDUSTRY

The delegation engaged with Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry (METI) officials Kayoko Sawada, Director of Global Alliance, and Keisuke Takayanagi, Assistant Deputy Director, for strategic dialogue on Japan's startup ecosystem development and global innovation partnerships.

METI presented Japan's comprehensive five-year plan, initiated under former Prime Minister Kishida and continuing under Prime Minister Ishiba, designed to attract global startup investment and strengthen government support mechanisms. The strategy emphasizes Deep Tech acceleration and ecosystem expansion through substantial government investment, including \$666 million for Deep Tech research and design funding, \$1.3 billion for green transformation initiatives, and \$2.3 billion in pharmaceutical discovery venture subsidies.

Additional initiatives include establishing 30 Global Acceleration Hubs worldwide, implementing startup visa programs to attract international talent, and developing comprehensive investment frameworks. METI highlighted the upcoming Global Startup EXPO (September) themed "Shaping the Future with Startups," focusing on collaborative approaches to global challenges.

This engagement exemplifies JALD's role in facilitating bilateral economic dialogue and identifying collaboration opportunities between Japanese American business leaders and Japanese government agencies. METI's request for U.S. promotion of these initiatives demonstrates recognition of JALD participants' influence within American business communities, reinforcing the delegation's mission of strengthening economic ties and fostering innovation partnerships between Japan and the United States.



CABINET PR SECRETARY KOBAYASHI



The delegation met with Cabinet PR Secretary Maki Kobayashi, who has served in this capacity since July 2024. Secretary Kobayashi conveyed Prime Minister Ishiba's regrets regarding his inability to meet directly with the delegation due to budgetary obligations, while emphasizing the administration's commitment to U.S.-Japan relations.

Secretary Kobayashi provided a comprehensive briefing on Prime Minister Ishiba's strategic priorities, including enhanced national security investment targeting 2% GDP allocation for self-defense capabilities, continuation of joint military exercises with allied nations, support for the Tokyo International Conference on African Development, and sustained G7 cooperation.

The Secretary shared insights into her professional trajectory and the transformative impact of former Prime Minister Abe's "womenomics" initiatives on governmental leadership advancement, illustrating Japan's evolving approach to gender representation in senior positions.



The engagement concluded with delegation access to the official press room for photos and extended dialogue with Secretary Kobayashi. This high-level briefing demonstrates JALD's recognition within Japanese government circles and validates the program's role in facilitating substantive policy dialogue between Japanese American leaders and senior Japanese officials. Such engagements enable delegation participants to serve as informed intermediaries on Japanese domestic priorities and foreign policy perspectives within American political and business communities.

PARLIAMENTARY FRIENDSHIP LEAGUE

The delegation engaged with the Parliamentary Friendship League, which was established in 1984 to foster Japanese-American legislative cooperation. President of the Japan-U.S. Parliamentary Friendship League and Member of the House of Councillors, Mr. Nakasone, provided historical context for the organization's mission while acknowledging reduced parliamentary attendance due to concurrent budget deliberations.

Discussions addressed contemporary bilateral challenges, including potential impacts of evolving U.S. political dynamics on existing exchange programs. Participants examined modifications to the Mineta Embassy program resulting from shifting U.S. policy frameworks, while noting the U.S.-Japan Council's continued operational stability.

The dialogue explored Japan's expanding soft power influence, particularly through sports diplomacy exemplified by Shohei Ohtani's prominence in American baseball. This cultural bridge-building

demonstrates Japan's growing cultural resonance within American society beyond traditional diplomatic channels.

Parliamentary members sought JALD perspectives on regional tourism development strategies to promote visitor engagement beyond major urban centers. Delegation participants provided strategic recommendations for expanding Japan's tourism appeal to diverse geographic areas.

This engagement exemplifies JALD's role in facilitating substantive policy dialogue between Japanese American leaders and Japanese legislative bodies. Such exchanges enable delegation participants to provide informed American perspectives on bilateral challenges while gaining deeper understanding of Japanese legislative priorities, thereby strengthening the program's mission of enhancing mutual understanding and cooperation across governmental, cultural, and economic sectors.



KEIDANREN BREAKFAST



The delegation attended a strategic breakfast engagement with Keidanren, Japan's premier business federation representing companies, industrial associations, and regional economic organizations. As Japan's most influential economic organization with substantial political engagement and representing the established leadership of Japanese economic development, Keidanren provides critical insights into Japan's corporate strategy and policy direction.

JALD delegation members Akira Yamamoto and Dawn Yamane Hewett led the engagement, leveraging their extensive business experience and bilateral relations expertise to facilitate substantive dialogue with Keidanren leadership. Their backgrounds enabled informed discussion on contemporary economic challenges and opportunities affecting U.S.-Japan commercial relationships.



The meeting included participation from Chairman and Vice Chairs of the Board of Councillors, with representation from major Japanese corporations including Fujitsu Limited and Toyota Motor Company. This high-level corporate engagement demonstrates JALD's recognition within Japan's business establishment and validates the program's strategic importance in facilitating dialogue between Japanese American business leaders and Japan's corporate elite.

This engagement exemplifies JALD's mission of strengthening economic ties between Japan and the United States through direct interaction with influential business organizations. Such meetings enable delegation participants to gain essential insights into Japanese corporate priorities while providing American business perspectives to Japan's most powerful economic federation, thereby advancing bilateral commercial cooperation and understanding.

HER IMPERIAL HIGHNESS PRINCESS TAKAMADO

The Japanese American Leadership Delegation received an exceptional audience with Her Imperial Highness Princess Takamado at her residence, representing the highest level of cultural engagement within the program's framework. Princess Takamado demonstrated remarkable range in discussing contemporary global challenges, from artificial intelligence and climate change to educational innovation and cultural preservation initiatives.

Her Imperial Highness expressed particular interest in cultural diplomacy efforts, including New York's Japan Day parade, highlighting the importance of international cultural exchange in strengthening bilateral understanding. The Princess engaged extensively with delegation perspectives on global challenges, creating an environment of substantive dialogue that encompassed both serious policy discussions and moments of genuine connection.

Princess Takamado's gracious hospitality and genuine interest in delegate insights exemplified the highest traditions of Japanese cultural custom as she patiently stood and waved us goodbye. Her engagement demonstrated the Imperial Family's commitment to fostering belonging amongst the Nikkei diaspora and recognition of JALD's significance in advancing bilateral cultural understanding.

This extraordinary audience represents the pinnacle of JALD's cultural engagement objectives, providing delegation participants with direct access to Japan's most distinguished cultural leadership. Such unprecedented access validates the program's strategic importance in U.S.-Japan relations and enables participants to serve as informed cultural ambassadors, strengthening the foundational relationships that support broader diplomatic, economic, and social cooperation between the two nations.



CENTRAL JAPAN RAILWAY COMPANY



The delegation received comprehensive briefings on Central Japan Railway Company's operations and strategic initiatives at JR Tokyo Station. JR Central, established in 1987 with 18,727 employees, demonstrated exceptional operational excellence through its unparalleled safety record—zero fatalities or injuries since 1964—while maintaining high energy efficiency, mass capacity, and reliability standards.

The company's flagship Tokaido Shinkansen connects Tokyo and Osaka in 2 hours 21 minutes across 320 miles, exemplifying Japanese transportation innovation. Advanced projects include superconducting Maglev construction engineered for earthquake resistance, representing next-generation rail technology development.

JR Central's international engagement includes collaboration with Taiwan High Speed Rail and active promotion of U.S. high-speed rail projects, proposing transformative routes such as New York to Washington DC in one hour and Dallas to Houston in 1-2 hours. The Tokyo Station General Control Center serves as the operational hub for Shinkansen systems, centralizing traffic management through sophisticated coordination between JRC Tokaido and JRW Sanyo Shinkansen operations.

This technical briefing exemplifies JALD's mission of facilitating knowledge transfer between Japanese innovation leaders and American business professionals. Understanding Japan's transportation infrastructure excellence enables delegation participants to promote similar technological solutions within American markets, advancing bilateral cooperation in sustainable transportation development and infrastructure modernization initiatives that benefit both nations' economic and environmental objectives.



KEIZAI DOYUKAI

Contemporary business leaders face unprecedented uncertainty navigating complex trade and industrial policy environments. Current challenges include potential sudden policy shifts with significant economic impact, conflicting policy frameworks such as onshoring initiatives versus labor shortage realities, tensions between state and federal regulatory approaches, and U.S. social divisions creating dramatic policy reversals across election cycles.

These dynamics highlight critical needs for enhanced bilateral understanding. Japan requires broader U.S. comprehension beyond major metropolitan centers like Washington, New York, and Los Angeles, while Japanese youth need deeper understanding of American perspectives and priorities. Such mutual comprehension gaps threaten long-term bilateral business relationships and strategic cooperation.

Japanese business leadership maintains commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion principles, sustainability initiatives, and women's workforce advancement, regardless of shifting U.S. governmental priorities. This consistency demonstrates Japan's strategic approach to corporate responsibility and long-term value creation.

These challenges underscore JALD's essential mission of building substantive relationships between Japanese American leaders and Japanese business communities. Delegation participants serve as critical intermediaries, providing informed perspectives on American political dynamics while gaining insights into Japanese corporate strategy. Such cross-cultural understanding enables more effective navigation of policy uncertainty and supports sustained bilateral business cooperation despite changing governmental frameworks, reinforcing the program's strategic value in maintaining stable U.S.-Japan economic relationships.



JAPANESE AMERICAN LEADERS BREAKFAST



The Japanese American Leaders Breakfast, hosted by MOFA Ambassador Director-General of North American Affairs Yutaka Arima, convened U.S.-Japan Council members, JALD participants, and Japanese government representatives for strategic dialogue on strengthening bilateral relations through Japanese American community engagement.

Opening remarks by Ernie Higa, Chairman and CEO of Higa Industries Co. Ltd., emphasized deepening Japan-Japanese American connections. Ambassador Arima delivered comprehensive remarks on sustained engagement imperatives and mutual understanding, reaffirming Japan's commitment to Japanese American community relations while highlighting JALD's critical role in bridging cultural and diplomatic ties.

Fred Katayama of USJC addressed evolving U.S.-Japan partnerships, emphasizing personal connections' transformative impact through leadership programs. JALD participants reflected on their experiences, sharing perspectives on heritage rediscovery, network development, and renewed commitment to bilateral relations advancement.

Critical discussions addressed delegation responsibilities upon return, including mentoring future participants, expanding Japanese American community leadership opportunities, and supporting cross-cultural understanding initiatives. Participants explored momentum-building strategies for sustained bilateral engagement across business, educational, and cultural sectors.

The event concluded with appreciation for Ministry of Foreign Affairs support and delegate commitments to sustaining Japanese connections. This engagement exemplifies JALD's core mission of building enduring relationships between Japanese American leaders and Japanese institutions, reinforcing the fundamental principle that international relations depend on personal ties and sustained community-to-community engagement.



CHIEF CABINET SECRETARY HAYASHI

Chief Cabinet Secretary Hayashi received the Japanese American Leadership Delegation, emphasizing the U.S.-Japan relationship as Japan's most critical bilateral partnership and encouraging continued dedication to strengthening these ties. Ann Teranishi presented the delegation's comprehensive itinerary spanning Hiroshima and Tokyo engagements, highlighting the Hiroshima experience as particularly transformative in inspiring delegates' commitment to bilateral relations and global peace advancement.

Jason Miyashita outlined three strategic priority areas requiring sustained attention: economic cooperation, including U.S. business preparation for potential tariff implications; security and defense collaboration emphasizing mutual cooperation frameworks; and diplomatic relationship enhancement through USJC initiatives promoting peace and prosperity for both nations.

Chief Cabinet Secretary Hayashi articulated Japan's aspiration to serve as a global model demonstrating that democracy and free trade principles can achieve successful outcomes. He expressed appreciation for delegation efforts and emphasized their critical role as bridges in the bilateral relationship.

The Secretary concluded with President Kennedy's enduring message: "Ask not what your country can do for you, but what you can do for your country," extending the principle to encompass global responsibility. This high-level engagement validates JALD's strategic importance in Japanese government priorities and reinforces the program's mission of cultivating Japanese American leaders who serve as informed advocates for bilateral cooperation across economic, security, and diplomatic sectors, advancing shared democratic values and international stability.



US EMBASSY BRIEFING



The delegation ended their official meetings with U.S. Embassy Tokyo leadership, hosted by Deputy Chief of Mission Katherine E. Monahan pending the new Ambassador's arrival. Lead speaker Akira Yamamoto expressed appreciation for the reception and emphasized the U.S.-Japan relationship as a top American priority, noting Tokyo's status as one of the world's largest U.S. diplomatic missions, underscoring bilateral partnership significance.

The discussion highlighted Japanese companies' substantial economic contributions, employing nearly one million Americans and demonstrating deep bilateral economic integration. Participants addressed contemporary challenges including Japanese workforce barriers for global talent, particularly rigid hierarchical structures restricting experienced professionals' career advancement, and declining overseas education participation due to financial constraints and other barriers.

The conversation emphasized Japanese Americans' unique role in enhancing people-to-people connections between nations through their dual cultural heritage and understanding of both societies. Cultural Affairs Officer Sunshine Ison, who supports grassroots organizations and sister city relationships, and Counselor for Commercial Affairs Alan Turley, who facilitates U.S. goods and services importation to Japan, participated in discussions.

This embassy engagement exemplifies JALD's strategic importance in U.S. diplomatic priorities and validates the program's mission of strengthening bilateral understanding through Japanese American leadership. Such meetings enable delegation participants to serve as informed intermediaries between American diplomatic objectives and Japanese American community perspectives, reinforcing their role in advancing sustained bilateral cooperation.



OUR COHORT'S REFLECTION

As the 2025 Japanese American Leadership Delegation, we experienced a profound collective journey of cultural reclamation and shared discovery. Walking through Hiroshima's Peace Memorial Museum, we were not simply learning about nuclear warfare's consequences—we were connecting with stories that could have been our own families', understanding the resilience that defines our shared heritage across generations.

At Miyajima's shrine, watching the morning fog lift from waters our ancestors may have crossed, we felt the collective weight of generational responsibility. We are not outsiders studying Japan; we are family members returning home with new perspectives shaped by our American experiences. When Ms. Yahata shared her atomic bomb testimony, her words carried the same strength we recognize in our own grandparents' stories of perseverance and hope.

Our high-level meetings with Japanese officials felt profoundly different knowing we represented not just American interests, but the aspirations of generations who maintained cultural connections despite historical displacement. Her Imperial Highness Princess Takamado's gracious welcome reminded us that we belong to this extended family, carrying shared obligations to both nations as part of the Nikkei diaspora.

This delegation experience transformed our collective understanding of identity—we are not caught between two cultures, rather, we are uniquely positioned to strengthen U.S.-Japan relations through authentic relationship-building rooted in our shared heritage and contemporary leadership responsibilities. Like circles symbolizing unity and continuity, JALD creates a steadfast bond with our ancestral homeland that our cohort is dedicated to maintaining.



ELLEN KAMEI



My life changing experience on the Japanese American Leadership Delegation (JALD) was a unique opportunity to strengthen the bonds between our Japanese American community in the United States and Japan. I was honored to be part of a program that builds a bridge between our two countries, especially as we work together in critical areas such as technology, innovation, and cultural exchange. I left inspired by the youth of Japan we met while on JALD. As part of the “From Hiroshima to Hope” symposium, I was able to meet the Hiroshima Governor, as well as local junior high and high school students. In them, I saw the future change makers in U.S.-Japan relations and was inspired by their energy to bring positive change to our communities. The impact of my JALD experience is not limited to just the trip. Nearly every day, the experiences I had on JALD influence how I connect with others, strive to drive impact, and live my life of public service.

JASON MIYASHITA



The 2025 Japanese American Leadership Delegation experience was life-changing for me coming from the small Pacific Island of Guam and meeting nine other world class delegates who participated in this program alongside me was such an amazing experience altogether.

The fact that we were able to come together and experience, Hiroshima and Tokyo with very different mindsets from the historical aspect of the atomic bombing and the National Peace Museum alongside meeting with business leaders and government officials from all over Japan in Tokyo was absolutely incredible.

I would highly recommend future candidates to join the Japanese American Leadership Delegation and be part of the 250 delegates already having already participated in the program to represent the United States and build long lasting relationships with Japan.

The trip was timely given the new administration in the United States and the ongoing relationship with Japan from trade to defense to economic, religious nonprofit and other geopolitical aspects, this experience really opened up my eyes to the importance of the U.S.-Japan relationship going forward.

I look forward to growing the U.S. Japan Council presence in Guam and Micronesia to ensure the Western Pacific Islands are represented. Thank you again for the opportunity to help solidify the U.S.-Japan relationship.

ROGER NOZAKI



As the child of Japanese immigrants, with a lifelong personal affinity for Japan and longtime interest in deepening my engagement with Japan professionally, JALD was an incredible opportunity – to further my understanding of the current social, political, and economic context; to meet leaders in business, government, and nonprofit sectors; and to build friendships with my JALD cohort and connect with the broader JALD alumni network.

Though I have had the privilege to travel to Japan multiple times, this was the first opportunity to do so in a structured way centered on being a Japanese American, with other Japanese Americans. I was struck – and moved by – the comments from Japanese leaders about their care for and sense of connection with those of us of Japanese descent outside Japan. I was reassured by Japanese leaders' ongoing commitments to values and goals that I hold personally. I was excited by the possibilities to engage and contribute, not just as an American, but specifically as a Japanese American.

Arigato gozaimasu! I am forever grateful to MOFA, USJC, and my fellow JALD delegates for the time to learn, connect, and explore pathways for future contributions to the U.S.-Japan relationship.

ELISABETH TAMIKO OOKA



My experience as a JALD delegate was truly unforgettable and profoundly meaningful. As a Japanese American, this journey allowed me to see Japan through a new lens. Traveling with my incredible cohort of thoughtful, inspiring leaders gave me the chance to reflect on what it means to be Japanese American and the unique role we can play in bridging our two countries.

I'm especially grateful to the U.S. Japan Council and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs for making this opportunity possible. People-to-people connections are now more important than ever and as Japanese Americans, we are in a powerful position to help strengthen the U.S.-Japan relationship - not just through diplomacy or policy, but through empathy, understanding, and shared experience.

I returned with a deeper sense of purpose, humbled to have been part of this incredible delegation and thankful for the lifelong friends formed. I'm committed to continuing this work and doing my part to keep the bond between our two nations strong for future generations.

ANN TERANISHI



Three words summarize my 2025 JALD experience: gratitude, connection and commitment. I will be forever grateful to MOFA and the USJC for this once in a lifetime experience. I am humbled by the Japanese government's continued support of Japanese Americans and the care and thought that goes into this special program. As a yonsei, I have always felt an affinity for Japan, but this experience deepened my personal connection to Japan. Our time in Hiroshima was especially impactful, as my family originated from Hiroshima and it is the 80th year since the atomic bomb and the peace treaty ending the war. I was inspired by the leaders, both young people and hibakusha, who shared the importance of peace culture and our role in elevating this philosophy for generations to come. Our conversations with leaders across Japan shone further light on the importance of the U.S.-Japan relationship, which is built on personal connections and friendships. The JALD experience left a significant impression in my heart and mind, sparking a strong sense of commitment to explore ways to enhance the relationship between our two countries.

HANAKO WAKATSUKI-CHONG



The JALD experience has provided immense value and profound introspection. Growing up in Boise, Idaho, far removed from Japanese culture, I felt disconnected from my heritage and identity. I was unable to fully embrace my Japanese roots during those formative years.

This program represents a meaningful full-circle moment in my journey. I recognize that without the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' continued support, I would not have reached this point in my personal and professional development. During my college years, the Portland Consulate entrusted me with developing programs exploring the Idaho-Japan relationship at Boise State University. That foundational experience provided the essential leadership building blocks that ultimately led to my selection for this prestigious program.

I am deeply grateful for MOFA's sustained investment in my growth over the years. This delegation has afforded me the invaluable opportunity to explore and reconnect with my identity in ways that were not possible during my childhood and young adulthood in Idaho. Through the Japanese American Leadership Delegation, I have finally been able to authentically embrace and feel my Japanese heritage while being proud to be Japanese American at the same time.

I have so much gratitude for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs for this transformative experience and for believing in my potential. I am fully committed to supporting U.S.-Japan relations through people-to-people engagement.

KENDEE YAMAGUCHI



Throughout our trip, the U.S.-Japan Council, in partnership with the U.S. Embassy in Tokyo and U.S. Consulates across Japan, played an instrumental role in facilitating meaningful conversations and reinforcing the strength of our bilateral relationship. We were honored to be hosted by Deputy Chief of Mission Katherine Monahan, who shared valuable insights into the evolving U.S.-Japan alliance and the critical role of diplomatic engagement. The warm welcome from embassy staff, combined with the ongoing support of Japan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, highlighted the enduring commitment to strengthening diplomatic, economic, and cultural ties between our two nations.

Beyond the official meetings and engagements, what stood out most was the spirit of connection—between our delegation and our hosts, between the past and the future, and between our collective histories and shared aspirations. As Japanese Americans, we carry a unique legacy, one that enables us to serve as cultural ambassadors and advocates for deeper collaboration.

This journey reaffirmed that diplomacy is not just about policy agreements and formal treaties—it is about relationships, trust, and a shared commitment to building a better future. As I reflect on this life-changing experience, I am deeply grateful for the opportunity to represent our community, learn from Japan's leaders, and build lasting relationships that will continue to shape the future of U.S.-Japan relations. This is just the beginning of a renewed commitment to strengthening these ties, and I look forward to finding ways to give back, foster new partnerships, and continue the important work of deepening our shared connections.

AKIRA YAMAMOTO



Participating in the Japanese American Leadership Delegation (JALD) 2025 as a delegate has been a transformative experience, deepening my appreciation for the enduring ties between the United States and Japan. Organized by the U.S.-Japan Council and Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, this program offered unparalleled opportunities to engage with high-ranking Japanese government officials, representatives from Keidanren and Keizai Doyukai, and initiatives promoting a "Culture of Peace" during our visit to Hiroshima. These interactions illuminated the profound historical contributions of Japanese Americans and their unwavering commitment to fostering robust bilateral relationships through people-to-people connections.

This delegation not only enriched my professional perspective but also instilled a personal sense of gratitude for being part of this vibrant community. We remain proud to sponsor and support USJC's mission, and I encourage others to engage in these vital endeavors to strengthen U.S.-Japan partnerships for future generations.

DAWN YAMANE HEWETT



Participating in the 2025 Japanese American Leadership Delegation was an unparalleled and unforgettable experience that exceeded even my highest expectations.

Through candid and thoughtful discussions with senior leaders in government, business, academia, and civil society, we strengthened our understanding of Japan's history and current social and political landscape. The meetings highlighted the enduring importance of people-to-people diplomacy and reaffirmed the value of sustained dialogue and trust. Just as enriching were the informal conversations with my fellow JALD delegates, in which we shared stories, hardships, ideas, and many, many laughs. I look forward to many years of friendship and future collaboration with my JALD cohort as well as with our Japanese counterparts.

I am deeply thankful for the Government of Japan and the U.S.-Japan Council for this wonderful experience, their recognition of the unique role that Japanese Americans can play in strengthening U.S.-Japan relations, and their sustained efforts in the long-standing partnership between our two nations. I return to the U.S. inspired, reenergized, and hopeful for the future we can help shape together.

DERICK YANEHIRO



My experience as a delegate on the 2025 Japanese American Leadership Delegation was nothing short of life-enhancing. Our journey began in Hiroshima, where the visit to the Peace Memorial and our panel on peace, hope, and security left a lasting emotional impact. The gravity of the setting deepened my appreciation for the importance of diplomacy and dialogue. Transitioning to Tokyo, the pace intensified with a series of high-level engagements. As a television news producer representing Los Angeles, I initially felt out of my depth in some rooms, but I committed fully to every moment. From meeting the Chief Cabinet Secretary and the Minister of Foreign Affairs to a rare and gracious tea with Her Imperial Highness Princess Takamado, and a memorable interaction with the Japan-U.S. Parliamentary League, each encounter was humbling and inspiring. This delegation offered more than just access—it gave me purpose, connection, and gratitude for the bridges we can build between cultures and generations.

And best of all, I formed deep, lasting friendships with the nine brilliant fellow delegates—bonds I will truly cherish for a lifetime.

CONCLUSION AND COMMITMENT



Like circles symbolizing unity and continuity, JALD creates unbroken bridges through people-to-people diplomacy, fostering meaningful cultural exchange that strengthens relationships between Japanese American leaders and their Japanese counterparts. This circular journey—from Hiroshima and Tokyo—led to dialogue and continuing collaboration for our alumni.

As we return to our communities across America, we carry with us not just memories of Japan, but a renewed understanding of our role as cultural ambassadors. The connections forged in meeting rooms and sacred spaces alike have equipped us with a deeper appreciation for our dual heritage and clearer vision for our leadership responsibilities. We are no longer visitors to Japan—we are family members who have come home and are ready to share our experiences to strengthen the bonds that will guide future generations of Japanese American leaders in their own journeys of discovery and service.

Our profound gratitude extends to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the U.S.-Japan Council, whose support makes this transformative program possible. Through their investment in reconnecting our Nikkei community, they strengthen not just diplomatic ties, but the living bonds between peoples whose shared heritage transcends borders. This commitment to meaningful cultural exchange ensures that future delegations will continue this sacred work of building bridges between our two nations.

March 2

March 3

March 4

March 5

March 6

March 7

Reflections

Photo Gallery



March 2

March 3

March 4

March 5

March 6

March 7

Reflections

Photo Gallery



March 2

March 3

March 4

March 5

March 6

March 7

Reflections

Photo Gallery



March 2

March 3

March 4

March 5

March 6

March 7

Reflections

[Photo Gallery](#)



March 2

March 3

March 4

March 5

March 6

March 7

Reflections

Photo Gallery



March 2

March 3

March 4

March 5

March 6

March 7

Reflections

Photo Gallery



March 2

March 3

March 4

March 5

March 6

March 7

Reflections

Photo Gallery



TOKYO TOWER

