

Closing Remarks  
JIC Speech Contest  
Consul General George Hisaeda  
March 26, 2011

Ladies and Gentlemen:

Before beginning, let me say a few words.

We have all watched the unspeakable tragedy in Japan. The loss of so many lives is beyond comprehension. We are still struggling to overcome the devastation caused by the largest earthquake in Japanese history, and the tsunami. The Government of Japan is doing everything it can to address the damage quickly and effectively, including the nuclear power plant situation.

We deeply appreciate all the support we have received from the United States, and from the people of Chicago and the Midwest. We are truly thankful for the support of Japanese language teachers, students, and families.

Good afternoon and thank you all for coming. It's been a great contest with many great speeches. My staff is worried that some of you

may be suffering from a speech overdose. So they said three words to me – keep it short. I will.

I'm delighted that this is the 25<sup>th</sup> annual speech contest held by the Consulate General of Japan. It's a huge milestone for us.

Recently, Reverend Ashikaga of the Midwest Buddhist Temple, who is here today, sent me an interesting photograph. It was of the first Japanese language contest in Chicago in 1970, which was held by the Japanese American Association of Chicago. When I looked at the winner with the largest cup, I couldn't believe my eyes. Although he looked very young as a teenager, I instantly recognized Dave Spector.

Dave is now a famous TV commentator, personality, and producer in Japan, and he is one of a few celebrities in Japan from Chicago. I first met him in Tokyo three years ago, and we have been friends ever since. A few days ago, Dave sent me an e-mail, and proudly said he became the most read Twitter in Japanese.

Dave began studying Japanese here just like all of you. And now, if you ask in Japan, "Who is the foreigner most fluent in Japanese?" almost everyone would say Dave Spector.

Even with his remarkable proficiency, he still learns two difficult Japanese words every day. Mastering a language takes much effort over a lifetime, but the reward is priceless. It can open the door to a highly rewarding career.

Personally, I can tell you that I wouldn't be here today if I hadn't studied English when I was young. I really encourage you to continue your studies. Please use Japanese wherever you can, and as often as you can. Always carry a dictionary for the rest of your life.

For giving you the great opportunity to learn Japanese, I applaud your teachers and your schools. I also wish to thank our sponsors, The Japanese Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Chicago, The Japan America Society of Chicago, The City of Osaka Chicago Office, and The Chicago Sister Cities International Program Osaka Committee. They are the ones who have made today's speech contest possible.

As you know, many prizes will be presented in a few minutes. But remember, the best reward of all is learning Japanese.

Congratulations to all of you. Thank you very much.