

## **Consul-General Yuichi Oba Remarks**

Welcome Reception hosted by the Chicago Japanese American Council

Thursday, September 24<sup>th</sup>, 2026

Thank you very much for the kind introduction, President Sasaki.

Good evening everyone, thank you all for your warm welcome,

I would like to start off by expressing my sincere appreciation to the Chicago Japanese American Council (CJAC), Japanese American Service Committee (JASC), and the other member organizations in attendance tonight for organizing this wonderful welcome reception in my honor.

I was given 5 minutes for my speech. But I have prepared a long speech with my colleagues. Don't worry. It will not take more than 30 minutes.

I arrived in Chicago on September 1. Three weeks have already passed since then, and I have already seen so much warmth and hospitality from the Japanese and Japanese American communities here. I appreciate it so much.

Before my official remarks, let me start with my self-introduction. I would like to share some things about me not in my CV on our website.

First, my name is Yuichi Oba. My first name "Yuichi" is common in Japan, but not so common here. I have been trying to figure out my nickname for many years, but I cannot think of any. You can call me, Yuichi, Yuichi-san, or Yu-san, but if you call me "YU" for short, it doesn't work because everybody looks back at you.

My family name, "OBA" is simpler. You can call me Mr Oba, Oba san, or whatever you like. But if you say オバ san, it means older woman in Japanese, so please keep that in mind!

Next about my birthplace. I was born in Fukushima, the Tohoku region which is the Northern Part of Japan. My parents are still living there. Unfortunately, Fukushima became world-famous in 2011, 15 years ago, when a big earthquake and tsunami hit the region including my hometown and after the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power plant was damaged by the tsunami. I was moved to hear about the warm support extended by various organizations and individuals in Chicago following the earthquake, including generous donations and initiatives such as the KIZUNA Project.

As someone originally from Fukushima, I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to the people of Chicago for your friendship and support in the most difficult times.

Actually, I feel that Fukushima and Chicago have a lot in common. It's also cold and windy there, maybe not as much as Chicago. But I hope I can easily adjust myself to winter here. In addition, Chicagoans are very warm and kind like people in Fukushima, including me.

Allow me to talk a little bit about my family. In Japan, normally on this kind of occasion we do not talk much about family. But my family is the most important part of my life, and when they come to Chicago they also play a certain role. So I have decided to introduce my family a little bit although they are not here today.

I am married. I have a daughter, 21 years old, and another little daughter who is a 9 year-old dog named Belle.

As you know, this is my first assignment in the US, but I have a special weapon. My wife, Aki has very strong connections with the US.

My wife was born in Dallas Texas and brought up in LA and NY, as her father worked for a Japanese trading company specialized mainly in cotton. She lived in the US for more than 10 years in total, while I have been living in this country for only 24 days now. She speaks very good American!

I met her for the first time 30 years ago at a Christmas party held at the American Club in Tokyo. My first impression about her was "Oh she is very American". I don't go into details today. But looking back, maybe I was partly attracted to her American way. We've been married for almost 27 years now. Time flies. She has never been to Chicago before. She is looking forward to coming to Chicago soon with our dog, although they are a bit worried about winter.

My daughter, junior in university in Japan, always accompanied me in my previous overseas posts and she graduated from American High School in Thailand. She has friends in many places of the world, including Chicago. She is also eager to come and see her friend here and hopefully her father as well.

I'll stop talking about myself here. Let me move on to the official remarks, the most important part of my speech.

Our Consulate serves the largest jurisdictions among Japanese Consulates in the U.S., in terms of the number of States and the geographical area we cover. While I feel the weight of my responsibility, I see this positively as a great opportunity to work with many people and to learn more about the close-knit relationship between Japan and the Midwest.

Chicago itself is also unique in having many Japanese and Japanese American organizations all work jointly together under the one umbrella of CJAC. I look forward to getting to know each and every one of you, who have helped build such a strong and united community.

In the last 3 weeks since my arrival, I have already met many of you on various occasions not only here in Chicago but also in Indiana and in Wisconsin. Everywhere I go, I am always happy to see you. I feel this is a reflection of how deeply and closely we are connected with each other.

I have also had the chance to experience some of Chicago's bustling culture. I recently watched both Cubs and White Sox games. I have been working very hard. This is part of my job.

I also rooted for the Chicago Stars on my first weekend at their first-ever Japanese Heritage match, where I enjoyed my first Chicago-style hot dog on a poppy seed bun, with mustard, relish, onions, tomatoes, pickles, sport peppers, and celery salt—and, of course, no ketchup.

This past Sunday, at the kind invitation by Mr. Tanimura, I also attended "Defining Courage", a stage show honoring the stories of Japanese American Nisei soldiers, which CJAC, JASC and JCCC and many sponsors helped organize. I was moved by the theatrical production and accompanying live music, and I even learned new aspects of their history. Thank you again for giving me firsthand experience of your organizations' contributions in preserving Japanese American history and supporting the Japanese American community.

As Consul-General of Japan in Chicago, I also remain strongly committed to supporting the Japanese nationals who reside here, promoting the interests of Japanese companies, and strengthening the Japan-U.S. relationship.

Providing support to those who promote grassroots-level exchanges within the Japanese and Japanese-American communities is essential to the mission of our Consulate. I will do my best with my staff to honor and maintain our valued partnership with CJAC and your fellow member organizations.

On that note, I would like to take this opportunity to make a very important announcement. Today the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan officially announced the recipients of the Foreign Minister's Commendations for 2026. There are 3 recipients of the Award from the jurisdiction of the Consulate-General of Japan in Chicago:

- First, Mr. Stephen Potter, Chairman of the Japan America Society of Chicago;
- Second, Mr. Tetsuro Mitani, Executive Director of the Japanese Chamber of Commerce and Industry in Chicago;

- and last but not least, the Illinois Japanese Language Teachers' Association.

I would like to extend my heartfelt congratulations to all the recipients. I look forward to continuing to work together with you all to further strengthen Japan-U.S. relations. Please join me in giving a big round of applause to the award recipients.

I think I have spoken too long. Now I would like to conclude my speech by giving thanks to CJAC Chairman Mike Tanimura, JASC Board President John Sasaki, JASC CEO Hamilton Chang, and the leaders of every member organization for bringing the community together tonight on my behalf.

With the combined support of Japanese nationals, Japanese-Americans, and all those who share an interest in Japan, we can make great strides in promoting mutual understanding and strengthening relations between Japan and the United States.

Thank you all again for welcoming me this evening.