

Consul-General Tajima's Message
On the Occasion of His Majesty the Emperor's 62nd Birthday

I am pleased to deliver my message on the occasion of His Majesty the Emperor's 62nd Birthday on February 23rd. Unfortunately, the prolonged prevalence of COVID-19 has forced us to celebrate His Majesty's birthday virtually for two consecutive years. Still, I believe that we can be resilient and can keep moving forward.

On New Year's Day, His Majesty the Emperor released a New Year address to the public. In his message, His Majesty expressed his heartfelt condolences to the families and loved ones of those who passed away due to COVID-19. He also expressed a deep respect and gratitude for those in the health care field. I likewise would like to express my condolences to the families who lost loved ones and my respect for front-line workers.

After my arrival in Chicago in mid-September of last year, I visited eight out of the ten states that we serve, while following the appropriate COVID-19 preventive procedures. The states I have visited are Indiana, Iowa, Missouri, Minnesota, Nebraska, North Dakota, Wisconsin, and of course Illinois. I look forward to visiting Kansas and South Dakota. During all of my visits, everyone welcomed me warmly, and I was impressed by the close bond between Japan and the Midwest. Such strong bilateral ties are the product of all of your continuous efforts and contributions. I would like to thank everyone in the Japanese American Organizations, the Japan America Societies, the Japanese Chambers of Commerce and Industry, Japanese language and supplementary schools, Nihonjinkai, the Japan External Trade Organization and other organizations for promoting the Japan-U.S. friendship.

During the past year, His Majesty the Emperor conferred decorations upon two Midwesterners for their contributions to the Japanese American Community. Ms. Karen Izui Kanemoto, Executive Director of the Japanese Mutual Aid Society of Chicago, received the Order of the Rising Sun, Silver Rays. Dr. Alice Kishiye Murata, Professor Emeritus at Northeastern Illinois University, received the Order of the Rising Sun,

Gold Rays with Neck Ribbon.

I also would like to recognize four individuals and four organizations who received the Foreign Minister's Commendations last year:

- Mr. James A. Schellinger, Former Indiana Secretary of Commerce
- Ms. Josephine H. Oyama-Miller, President of Madison-Obihiro Sister Cities, Inc.
- Ms. Monica Mitsuko Rokuhira, Former Japanese Language Teacher, Langston Hughes Elementary School
- Ms. Vickie Sakurada Schaepler, Coordinator, Japanese Hall and History Project, the Legacy of the Plains Museum, Gering, Nebraska
- Iowa Sister States Yamanashi Committee
- Minneapolis Ibaraki Sister City Association
- Saint Paul-Nagasaki Sister City Committee
- Wisconsin Chiba, Inc.

Japan and the U.S. share fundamental values and have built mutual trust through a long-standing alliance. I have no doubt that Japan and the U.S. will continue to strengthen their friendship and bond in various fields. We at the Consulate-General of Japan in Chicago are committed to promoting even closer cooperation between Japan and the U.S.

On the occasion of His Majesty the Emperor's birthday, I wish for your health, happiness and prosperity, as well as for the continued development of the friendship between Japan and the Midwest and between Japan and the United States. I am looking forward to seeing you in person in the near future. Thank you so much for listening.

(End)