

March 31th, 2024

Sunday, March 17, St. Patrick's Day, is the anniversary of the patron saint who spread Christianity to Ireland. Even in the U.S., where there are many Irish immigrants, people celebrate the day in a big way by wearing the green of the white clover, Ireland's national flower. Even in Chicago, the Chicago River was dyed green by pouring dye into it. Every year at this time, the Irish Prime Minister is invited to the White House by the President of the United States. It is one of those days when you are reminded that the United States is a microcosm of the international community.

In Nebraska, which I visited twice in March, college sports are popular because there are no professional teams in the state's four major sports. Keisei Tominaga, who plays for the University of Nebraska basketball team, the Huskers, is more popular and well-known in the state than Shohei Ohtani. The state of Nebraska plans to appoint him as a goodwill ambassador between Japan and Nebraska.



Chicago River dyed green



Nebraska's Keisei Tominaga

1. Nebraska - "State of the Corn huskers"

Nebraska is famous for its magnificent cornfields, created by western pioneers who dreamed of the American dream, and for its high-quality brand-name beef raised on that corn. The state's nickname is "Husker," meaning "corn peeler".

On Saturday, March 2, I visited Lincoln, Nebraska to attend the Statehood Day Dinner at the State Capitol, at the invitation of Nebraska Governor Jim Pillen and his wife. The Statehood Day Dinner commemorates Nebraska's statehood on March 1, 1867, and each year several "outstanding Nebraskans" are honored at the dinner. I was seated at the head table with the Governor and Mrs. Pillen, and before the meal, my wife and I had the opportunity to be recognized during the introductions of the attendees.

Shortly after I took this office, I had met Governor Jim Pillen at a dinner party hosted by the Midwest Association of Japan last September in Tokyo. In January, Governor Pillen sent us a letter of sympathy for the victims of the Noto Peninsula earthquake and also sent a video message for the Emperor's birthday reception. It has been an absolute joy to get to know Governor Pillen better, who I have learned is also an owner of a farm and played defensive back for the University of Nebraska football team, "the Huskers".



With Governor Pillen



With US Senator Ricketts
(former Governor)



With US Congressman Bacon

From Wednesday, March 20 to Friday, March 22, we visited Nebraska. Presentations were made at Midwest International Trade Association (MITA), meetings with the Lieutenant Governor, state legislators (the only unicameral legislature in the nation), university officials, and the Mayor of Omaha, etc., delivered the same message as in 5 above. In addition to the above, I also mentioned that (1) the subway cars used by many people in New York and Washington DC are manufactured by KAWASAKI in Lincoln, the state capital, which celebrates its 50th anniversary this year, (2) "Japanese Hall," which will be opened on June 8 to promote the history of Japanese immigrants in Scottsbluff, Nebraska and their contribution to railroad and agricultural development, and (3) Former President Ford, who was born in Nebraska and was the first president to officially visit Japan, was one of the founders of the current Japan-U.S. global partnership.



KAWASAKI



Received Honorary Citizenship
from Nebraska Secretary of State



Presentation at MITA

2. U.S.-Japan Sports Exchange and U.S.-Japan Student Exchange

On March 4, I made an inaugural visit to Tom Ricketts, Owner of the Chicago Cubs (the younger brother of former Governor of Nebraska and current U.S. Senator). The Cubs have acquired 10 Japanese baseball players so far. This season, they added pitcher Shota Imanaga in addition to fielder Seiya Suzuki. Owner Ricketts has a strong passion for baseball and expressed his expectations for Suzuki, who showed remarkable performance at the end of the last season, and for Imanaga as a starting pitcher, as well as his strong hopes for future Japan-U.S. Baseball exchanges.

Owner Ricketts personally showed us around the locker room behind the dugout, the waiting room, the state-of-the-art training facilities, and an ingeniously designed relaxation corner. He presented me with a uniform number 45, which is a combination of the numbers 18 and 27 of the two players, in the hope that Imanaga would pitch, Suzuki would hit, and the Cubs would win the game.



With the Chicago Cubs owner



the Cubs' number 45

That same Monday, March 4, I visited Northwestern University, located in the city of Evanston, where the Official Residence is located.

The university has a world-class reputation for its Kellogg School of Management, journalism, medicine, and law school. Ambassador Emanuel also holds a master's degree in speech and communication from the university, which I assume provides the basis for his outstanding abilities.

First, I made an inaugural visit to the President of the University. After that, students who visited Japan through the "Kakehashi Project" gave a report on their visit and we exchanged views. The students introduced the places they visited, and presented their findings on the differences in lifestyle, society, and culture between Japan and the U.S., as well as their action plans after their visit. The faculty members gave high marks to the program and expressed hope for its continuation, saying that the visit to Japan and the

presentations afterward had given the students increased confidence in themselves and in the Japanese language and further motivated them to continue their studies. Our hope is that these students will be bridges between the two countries in the future.



With the President of NU With university students who participated in the Kakehashi Project of NU

3. Japanese Community Japanese School and Japanese Association

On Wednesday, March 13, I was invited to the graduation ceremony for Chicago Futabakai Japanese Day School. A class of 14 sixth graders and 6 ninth graders graduated during this ceremony. Futabakai is a school that hosts a full-day school on weekdays, a supplementary Saturday school, and a kindergarten all within the same building. This is made possible by the efforts of various groups, including the Japanese Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Chicago (JCCC), the school's steering committee, as well as school officials. For expatriates and Japanese companies, having a school to send their children with peace of mind is an invaluable infrastructure in the community. I would like to continue to promote Japanese Day School and Japanese Saturday School in all of our communities—particularly, in terms of safety and security for Japanese nationals, support for Japanese companies and ultimately, for the benefit of Japan's future.

On Saturday, March 16, the Chicago Japanese Club and the Milwaukee Japanese Association held a get together. The Chicago Japanese Club was established in 1993 and celebrated its 30th anniversary last year. The Milwaukee Japanese Association temporarily suspended their activities over the past 10 years, however they have recently restarted under a new generation of leadership. Japanese organizations across the Midwest vary in their origins, membership, organizational management, and activities. Each participant introduced themselves and talked about their thoughts on the organization's activities, what they value, their struggles and ideas. I hope everyone in attendance felt they could share their insights and inspirations, and that this provided an opportunity to connect people from both Japanese associations.



Congratulatory speech at the graduation ceremony
(courtesy of the Chicago Shimpo)



With members of the Japanese Association

4. Grassroots Caravan in Schaumburg (Northwest suburbs of Chicago)

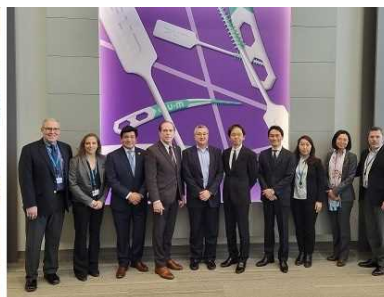
On March 15, the Mayor of Schaumburg, along with officials from Schaumburg, JETRO Chicago, the president of the Illinois Chamber of Commerce, and others, toured three Japanese companies (AMADA for metalworking machine, SUNSTAR for oral care products, and SODICK for electric discharge power supply unit) located in Schaumburg, a Northwestern suburb of Chicago. The "Grassroots Caravan" is an initiative that has been going on in the Midwest for several years.

The goal is to deepen local U.S. officials' understanding of the contributions of Japanese companies, while at the same time expanding new two-way investment and trade relations.

U.S. Congressman Krishnamoorthi (Dem.) joined the group during lunch. The Congressman's district, Illinois 8th District, which includes Schaumburg, is one of the largest in the United States, with approximately 320 Japanese-owned businesses employing 13,000 people. The congressman is a pro-businessperson who takes pride in that. I spoke about Prime Minister Kishida's planned visit to the U.S. and its significance, as well as my views on Japan-Midwest economic relations.



Met with federal legislators
at AMADA



SUNSTAR



SODICK

5. Fifth trip to Indiana: Meeting with Governor, JASI's Japan Currents Symposium

Monday, March 18, I met with Governor Holcomb (Republican). This was my fourth time meeting with the Governor Holcomb, following previous meetings in this January and last September and November. I discussed my activities in Indiana, exchanged ideas for future events and people-to-people exchanges between Japan and Indiana, and discussed Prime Minister Kishida's visit to the U.S. in April and its significance.

The Japan-America Society of Indiana (JASI) is unique in that it focuses on business and economic relations while most Japan-America associations, in various regions, focus primarily on cultural exchange. The Japan Currents Symposium hosted last Tuesday, March 19, is JASI's signature annual event. This year's focus was on new technologies, new energy, and geopolitical considerations of the U.S.-Japan alliance.

During this event I conveyed the following messages: (1) bipartisan support for the Japan-U.S. alliance; (2) the significance of Prime Minister Kishida's official visit to the U.S., scheduled for April, which will demonstrate to Japan and the world that Japan and the U.S. are united in maintaining an international order based on the rule of law and will provide direction for future cooperation in areas such as advanced technology; (3) The foundation of the U.S.-Japan global partnership is based on longstanding investment and economic relations as well as multiple-layers of people-to-people connections; and (4) Japan's diplomatic and defense efforts in recent years along with the a message about the revival of the Japanese economy and society.

I also visited the Indiana Packers facility during this trip. Indiana Packers are a pork processing company affiliated with Mitsubishi Corporation. A manufacturer of processed products, they produce pork, bacon, and other meat products, under strict hygiene control using state-of-the-art facilities, and sell them to consumers in the United States, Japan, and other countries around the world. Additionally, there are three Japanese automobile manufacturers with plants in the State of Indiana, following previous visits to Subaru and TOYOTA plants, we visited HONDA's plant during this trip.



Meeting with Governor Holcomb



JASI Presentation



Honda Plant Visit