

April 30, 2024

The cherry blossom trees that line the Potomac River in Washington, DC are a symbol of the friendship between Japan and the United States. During his official visit to the United States, Prime Minister Kishida announced that he would be donating 250 cherry trees to commemorate the 250th anniversary of the United States in 2026. At the Official Residence in the suburbs of Chicago, the cherry trees were also blooming. After admiring the cherry blossoms, known as sakura in Japanese, guests were able to enjoy seasonal delicacies, such as sakura jelly and Japanese confectionary sakura *nerikiri*, prepared by Chef Nishimura for the occasion.



Cherry Blossoms at the Official Residence



Seasonal Sakura Desserts

1 Prime Minister Fumio Kishida's Official Visit to the United States

Prime Minister Fumio Kishida made an official visit to the United States as a state guest. The Japan-U.S. Summit Meeting and state dinner were held on April 10th, and the following day on the 11th, the Prime Minister gave a speech at a joint session with the Senate and the House of Congress. This was the first time in nine years that a Prime Minister of Japan made an official visit since the late Prime Minister Shinzo Abe. In recent years, Japan has been bolstering its defense and diplomatic efforts to face various geopolitical challenges. In such a climate, Prime Minister Fumio Kishida's official visit to the U.S. was an opportunity to show that Japan and the United States are working in solidarity as global partners to maintain and strengthen a "free and open international order based on the rule of law."

Since the announcement of Prime Minister Kishida's visit to the United States in late

January, I have had many opportunities - including during my business trips within the ten Midwest states - to speak about the Prime Minister's visit to the U.S. and its significance. From the beginning of April, I spoke at a joint roundtable discussion with the United States-Japan Foundation and the Chicago Council on Global Affairs (on the 4th), at a meeting with the Economic Club of Chicago (on the 8th), gave an address to the Illinois House of Representatives (on the 10th), joined an economic conference in South Dakota (on the 11th), gave a lecture at the University of Kansas (on the 17th), attended the CULCON (U.S.-Japan Conference on Cultural and Educational Exchange) and DePaul University roundtable discussion (on the 19th), and I spoke to the Japan America Society of Chicago (on the 23rd), as well as many more instances.

As I meet people of various diverse backgrounds throughout the Midwest, I am always consistently heartened by their strong bipartisan support for the long-standing alliance between the U.S. and Japan. At the same time, I have come to fully realize that the foundation of the Japan-U.S. alliance and our 'Global Partnership' is the bonds of mutual trust and deep friendship that bind the peoples of our two countries, and that these bonds have been built upon through many years of multi-layered people-to-people interactions and business partnerships between a multitude of different social groups. In the ten Midwest states within our jurisdiction, there are 35,000 Japanese people living peacefully as local residents. More than 70 sister city relationships have been formed throughout the country. Japan is also the number one foreign direct investor in the U.S. for the fourth year in a row, and Japanese businesses have invested approximately 800 billion dollars creating nearly 1 million jobs (half in manufacturing) across the United States. Particularly within our jurisdiction's ten Midwest states, 1,500 Japanese business facilities have created jobs for 150,000 people, contributing to the local economy, employment, and community.

Furthermore, I have come to see these economic business relationships and cultural interpersonal exchanges act as two halves of a whole spurring each other on in a virtuous cycle. The development of economic and business relations promotes cultural and interpersonal exchanges like sister city relationships, and the promotion of cultural exchanges and Japanese study generates further investment and business relations. All of this can be said to be the foundation of a strong and resolute Japan-U.S. Global Partnership.



Meeting between CULCON and Uni



Round table meeting in USJF

2 Speech at the Illinois State House of Representatives

I had the great opportunity to deliver a speech to the Illinois State House of Representatives in Springfield on April 10, coinciding with Prime Minister Kishida's visit to the United States. During the speech, upon mentioning Seiya Suzuki and Shota Imanaga of the Chicago Cubs, I was interrupted by applause from the audience, to my great surprise and delight. After the speech, the Speaker said that he welcomed the addition of more Japanese players to the Cubs, thus confirming the significance of Japanese baseball and its players. After the speech, many legislators also gathered for a photo opportunity with me, which was a pleasant surprise. Before and after the speech, I met individually with Speaker Welch (D), Majority Leader Gabel (D), and Minority Leader McCombie (R).

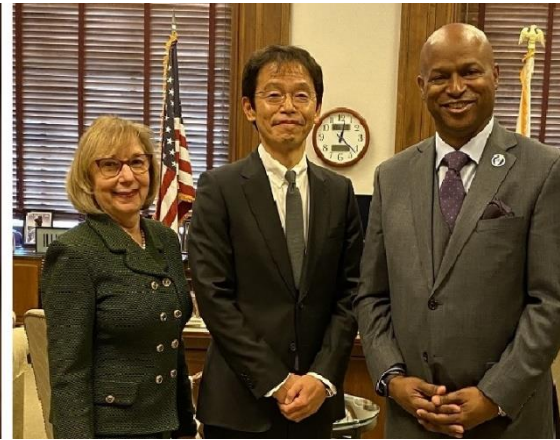
Springfield, the capital of Illinois, which is a three-hour drive from Chicago, is known as the city where Lincoln lived and attracts many out-of-town visitors. I was able to visit Lincoln's home and tomb during my short break after the speech. Much of the interior of the Lincoln home is original to the period. The tomb, along with a sculpture of Lincoln, rests quietly under a monument.

In the evening, I hosted a Japanese food and sake reception for Illinois state legislators at a nearby hotel to commemorate Prime Minister Kishida's official visit to the United States. The reception was attended by legislators from all parts of Illinois, including senators who had not attended my speech in the House of Representatives, seeing representation from districts in southern Illinois, as well as legislators from Chicago and its suburbs. This also served as a great opportunity to reaffirm and strengthen relationships with state legislators with whom I have developed a rapport with, while

also expanding my new network of contacts.



Speech at State House



with the Speaker



Rep. representatives



At the reception

3 Baseball Exchange between the US and Japan

On Sunday, the 7th, a group of Japanese-Americans and Japanese people went to watch the Cubs vs. Los Angeles Dodgers game. The battle between pitcher Shota Imanaga and Shohei Ohtani resulted in a strike out and fly ball. Pitcher Imanaga didn't allow anyone to score up to when he was substituted in the fourth inning after a long delay cause by the rain, missing out on being the winning pitcher. Seiya Suzuki also got off to a good start and scored an RBI on a sacrifice fly. Cubs officials and American fans were overjoyed by the remarkable performances of the Japanese players. Japanese athletes have increased Japan's presence overseas and greatly contributed to the positive image of Japanese people. I believe that Japanese people, as well as many Japanese-Americans, are happy and proud of the success and popularity of Japanese athletes.



Watching in the Rain



“Baseball Behind Barbed Wire”

On April 6th, I had the opportunity to hear from the producers of the film “Diamond Diplomacy” during a dinner after an event at the US-Japan Foundation. In a divided international community, sports have often provided a common playing field. How did American “baseball” take root in Japan as “yakkyu (baseball)”? How did American baseball become a common playing field between the US and Japan? The baseball exchange between the US and Japan has a long and strong history of more than 150 years. From 1910 to 1936, the University of Chicago baseball team visited Japan every five years to play against Waseda University. When I was transferred to the US, and watched baseball here for the first time, I realized that all Japanese baseball terminology is a direct translation of English.

At the US-Japan Foundation event, the movie “Baseball Behind Barbed Wire” was shown. For Japanese-Americans who were interred during World War II, playing the American-born “baseball” was a way to stay sane and active. The movie is a short documentary that talks about the life, thoughts, and circumstances of Japan-Americans at the time through the lens of baseball.

4 Trip to South Dakota, Kansas and Indiana

On April 11, I made my first trip to South Dakota to attend the Governor's Conference on Economic Development in Sioux Falls, the largest city in the state. Governor Noem appeared at the Awards Luncheon to recognize state residents for their contributions to economic development. Governor Noem, the first female governor of the state, has a conservative stance, small government, and the slogan "Freedom works here. During the event I observed her charisma and tremendous popularity. She is viewed as one of the

potential vice presidential candidates in the event of a second Trump presidency and is said to be very busy with the presidential campaign. If Governor Noem were to resign from the governorship in the middle of her term, Lieutenant Governor Rhoden would assume the position of Governor. The Lieutenant Governor is scheduled to lead a trade mission to Japan and Taiwan in late June, and I participated in a related panel discussion about the trip with him.

April 17, trip to Kansas. After having the opportunity to speak at the University of Kansas, I was honored to deliver remarks at the welcome reception for the JETRO investment mission hosted by Governor Kelly. The reception was hosted at her official residence on the outskirts of the city of Topeka. The governor's courteous and sincere attitude toward each of the Japanese business participants showed her gratitude, appreciation, and positive expectations for Japanese investment.

On April 20, attended the general meeting of the Indiana Japan Chamber. Kana Uemura, from New York, performed live, and the audience was thrilled by her passionate rendition of Toilet no Kami-Sama.

In Kansas and Indiana, I again expressed my appreciation and respect to Japanese companies for their efforts in building a relationship of trust serving as the foundation of positive bilateral relations, and conveyed the Japanese government's message that it will continue to strongly support the efforts by Japanese companies with a view to strengthening Japan's growth potential.



With Kansas Governor Kelly.



With the JETRO mission group in front of the Governor's official residence