

September 30, 2024

On September 4th, I threw out the ceremonial first pitch at the home stadium of the Cubs, looking forward to the success of the first two MLB games of the season between the Cubs with Mr. Suzuki and Mr. Imanaga and the Dodgers with Mr. Ohtani and Mr. Yamamoto, which will be held in Tokyo next March. It will be a great opportunity to boost relations between Japan and the United States (Chicago), organizing a delegation to visit Japan, etc. By the way, the ceremonial first pitch in the United States is different from Japan in that the catcher is sometimes a mascot and there is no batter or umpire. No one minds whether the pitch was successful or not besides the pitcher.



1 Midwest U.S.-Japan / Japan-Midwest U.S. Associations Conference

Since the visit of a government-sponsored private economic mission to Chicago in 1967, the Japan-U.S. Midwest and Midwest U.S.-Japan Associations have held joint meetings alternately almost every year to promote the growth of trade and investment and the overall exchange of industry, technology, and culture between Japan and the Midwestern states. This business community and state-led framework brings together business leaders and state governors. The multi-layered personal relationships built through years of economic exchange underpin the U.S.-Japan relationship.

This year, the meeting was held in Ohio under the jurisdiction of the Consulate-General in Detroit from Sunday, September 8 to Tuesday

September 10, and I participated in the conference together with Ambassador Yamada and Consul-General Shindo of Detroit. From the U.S. side, in addition to the Governor of Ohio, the Governors of Indiana and Wisconsin, and the Lieutenant Governor of Kansas participated. From Japan, the Governors of Saitama and Gunma prefectures – as well as the Governor of Shiga Prefecture, Ohio's sister state – joined. The governors, who used their ingenuity to convey the charms of their states and prefectures, knew how to capture the hearts and minds of their audiences.

On the subject of governors: Minnesota Governor Walz, the Democratic Party's vice presidential candidate, Governor Burgum of North Dakota (Republican) and Governor Pritzker of Illinois (Democrat) – who were at one point mentioned as possible vice presidential candidates – and Governor Whitmer of Michigan, who is considered a future presidential candidate – All have attended recent meetings of the conference, including last year's meeting held in Tokyo.



Gunma Governor Ichita Yamamoto, passionately singing “Purple Rain”



Closing Ceremony

2. Dissemination of Japanese culture and the arts

On Saturday, September 14th, I attended a moon viewing event at the Anderson Japanese Gardens in Rockford, which is located 90 minutes by car from Chicago. At the outdoor venue surrounded by

ikebana flower displays, I enjoyed a collaborative performance of tea offering by Gunji Sensei, flower offering by Takahashi Sensei, and shakuhachi flute performance by Francis Sensei. The birds in the garden seemed to be singing in time with the shakuhachi. The atmosphere created by the 60 guests was also refreshing. As the event was coming to an end, we saw the moon, which would be full in a few days, appearing on the opposite side of the red sunset.

This Japanese garden was established by Mr. John Anderson, who was fascinated by the Japanese Garden in Portland, and who commissioned Mr. Kurisu, who built the garden, to design and landscape it. It has become a base for disseminating Japanese culture and art, including lectures and the summer Japanese festival. Although it is three hours away by car from the Japan House where Gunji Sensei is carrying out activities, the two bases for disseminating information are connected. I would like to express my gratitude to Gunji Sensei for creating a place where local people can become familiar with Japanese culture.



The JET Program, which is highly regarded in both Japan and the United States

The JET Program is a program that invites young people from overseas to work as assistant language teachers in Japanese schools. Many former participants continue to play active roles in various fields in their home countries, and the program is highly regarded as a

success story of public diplomacy. Every year, more than 1,000 people from all over the United States participate in the program, and since its launch in 1987, a total of about 40,000 people have participated. The annual JET Alumni Association (JETAA) USA National Conference was held in late September, hosted by the JETAA Minnesota.

I would like to express my gratitude to these alumni for their grassroots activities, joining JETAA, recruiting new participants, sharing their experiences of living in Japan as JETs with their local communities and schools, and introducing Japan to others. I would also like to see the alumni further connect with Japan-America Societies, Japanese-American communities, local Japanese festivals, and people involved in sister city relationships, and also consider a career path as a Japanese language teacher.

I was reminded that the foundation of the Japan-U.S. Global Partnership is the bonds of trust and friendship that have been built through years of grassroots people-to-people exchange, including the JET Program.



Greetings at the Conference



Group photo of the participants