

January 31, 2025

In addition to welcoming Ms. Yoko Oginome and her husband Mr. Ryuso Tsujino – special guests at the Chicago Japanese Chamber of Commerce New Year's party – to the official residence, I also attended New Year's parties of Japan-related organizations throughout the Midwest to give New Year's greetings.

On January 20th, the inauguration of President Donald Trump attracted worldwide attention, but for the people of three Midwestern states, the inauguration of their new governor was a bigger and closer event to celebrate. In Indiana, Missouri, and North Dakota, new governors who won their elections last November were inaugurated, starting a new administration. All three states are Republican strongholds and are close to the new Trump administration.

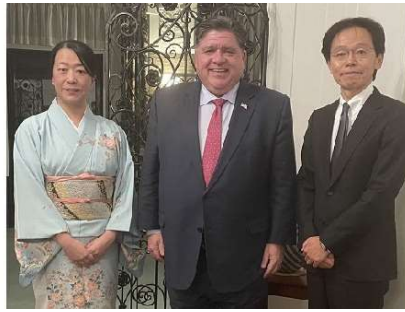
On January 27th, I was honored to have Illinois Governor J.B. Pritzker (Democrat) visit my official residence, as it was his first time. The governor visited Japan in October last year, leading an economic mission to the state. It was a wonderful chance to meet such a charming, friendly, and captivating person.

On January 29th, an Award Ceremony for the Foreign Minister's Commendation was held at the Official Residence for Dr. John Tadao Teramoto, Curator of the Indianapolis Museum of Art, who has worked tirelessly to promote Japanese art. Dr. Teramoto's family, friends and colleagues made the four-hour journey to Evanston to attend the event.

Dr. Teramoto commented on the rich essence that lies deep within Japanese art. His fellow curator commented on how Americans can learn about the treasure that is Japanese art through Dr. Teramoto. We were also moved by the words from Dr. Teramoto's son to his father and the emotional words from his wife to her husband.



Ms. and Mr. Oginome



Governor Pritzker



Dr. Teramoto

1 New Administrations Begin in Midwestern States

On Monday, January 13th, I flew to St. Louis and met with Honorary Consul Mr. Stephen Knapp. We traveled overland for two hours to Jefferson City, the capital city of Missouri.

From 2pm, we participated in a “Meet & Greet” offered by Governor Mike Kehoe and his wife at the Governor's Residence. In the quite cold weather, a long line formed on the road to the Governor's Residence. I introduced myself to the Governor and his wife, then took a commemorative photo. Visiting the state capitols and governor's residences in each state, where they each show their own individual state pride, is one of the pleasures of my business trips to these Midwestern states. I was suddenly interviewed by a TV station in front of the residence and had the chance to speak about Japan-U.S. relations.

From 7pm, there was a Grand March and Inauguration Ball at the State Capitol. In the central hall, not only the Governor and Lt. Governor, but all state legislators were read out in order as they dressed up and were introduced down the spiral staircase with their spouses and children. State dignitaries and legislators prepared drinks, snacks and souvenirs in their offices, and participants wandered around freely, enjoying themselves, eating, drinking, and conversating. This large and most spectacular event is held at the time of the governor's inauguration, like the night I attended, but it is also held every two years when new state legislators take office.

The following day, I had meetings with the new Governor Kehoe and the new Lt. Governor Dave Wasinger for 30 minutes each. These were their first meetings since taking

office. With no other diplomatic missions participating in the ceremony, it was a great opportunity to demonstrate Japan's presence and interest. Allowing Japan to leave a strong impression from the contributions of Japanese companies to the Missouri economy, jobs, and local community, and the importance of Japan-U.S. relations.



With Governor Kehoe



Being Interviewed

On Saturday, January 18th, I flew to Fargo, North Dakota's largest city, and met up with Honorary Consul Mr. Ronald Leonhardt. Amid a cold wave, we traveled overland for three hours to Bismarck, the state capital.

Around 1,700 people, including key figures from the state, men, and women of all ages, gathered for the inauguration ceremony of new Governor Kelly Armstrong. The venue was named "Armstrong Field" and the event centered on baseball, including baseball-shaped desserts, and a "first pitch" in which the Governor threw a ball for his son to catch. The video that was shown was a reel of outtakes footage from the gubernatorial election campaign. It evoked a sense of closeness to the Governor and his wife.

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I introduced myself to the new Governor, the new Lt. Governor Strinden, Ms. Julie Fedorchak (the solo member of the House of Representatives from the state), the State Secretary of Agriculture, the State Attorney General and others, and exchanged opinions on Japan-U.S. and Japan-North Dakota relations. It was a very early opportunity to demonstrate Japan's presence and interest to North Dakota's leaders. New Lt. Governor Strinden (center of the photo at bottom right) told me Ms. Fedorchak (left in the same photo) was her classmate in high school.



With Governor Armstrong



Ball Monument



Lt. Gov. Strinden and Ms. Fedorchak

2 New Year's Parties in the Midwest

While the New Year's holiday in the U.S. ends abruptly and work begins immediately, New Year's parties for Japan-related organizations are held in various parts of the Midwest in the weeks following the holiday. These New Year's celebrations are major events that serve as an opportunity to strengthen the bonds of unity and friendship.

The Japanese Chamber of Commerce of Chicago, with its long history and tradition, invites a special guest to its New Year's party every year. This year it was Ms. Yoko Oginome. She performed “Dancing Hero” and sang and danced for an hour to the nearly 700 people in attendance.

In late January, as I did last year, I had the honor of giving a New Year's greeting at the New Year's parties of the Japanese Chamber of Commerce and the Japanese Association in St. Louis.

The Japanese Chamber of Commerce of St. Louis was established in 1987. In addition to fostering friendship and mutual learning among the 17 member Japanese companies in the surrounding areas, it also contributes to the local community through support for Japanese language classes, goodwill and exchange. It is the only chamber of commerce outside of Chicago among the 10 states in its jurisdiction. I once again expressed my gratitude to Japanese companies throughout the Midwest for their long-standing contributions to the U.S. economy, employment, and local communities, and for building relationships of trust that form the foundation of good U.S.-Japan relations.

The Japanese Association of St. Louis was established in 1973. It boasts a long history of more than half a century. President Shinichiro Imai, who is currently conducting research on aging and longevity at Washington University, is trying to revive ties through

the activities of the Japanese Association in the midst of the disconnect within generations and communities that the super-aging society is bringing. Together with everyone, we enjoyed fresh sashimi from Boston.



Japanese Association of St. Louis NY Party St. Louis Japanese Chamber of Commerce's NY Party