

March 5, 2025

First weekend this year without official duties. I visited the Farnsworth House, the masterpiece of Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, one of the three greatest architects of the 20th century. After the Bauhaus was closed by the Nazis, Mies defected to the United States and taught at the Illinois Institute of Technology. The house is an 80-minute drive from Chicago, a city filled with skyscrapers designed by Mies, and stands in harmony with the nature and the river flowing in front of it. Indeed, as Mies famously said, “less is more.”



1 “Heart of America” Japan-America Society (Kansas City)

On February 1st, I was invited to Kansas City to attend the *Shinnenkai* of the Heart of America Japan-America Society, one of their biggest annual events. In the past, there used to be a Japanese Consulate in Kansas. Yet even after merging with the Consulate-General of Chicago in 2004, successive members of the Japan-America Society have continued to foster grassroots relations between our two nations. One of these important contributors, Ms. Sachie Stroder, was awarded the Foreign Minister’s Commendation in honor of her tremendous contributions over several decades including her time as President of the Society. Three former staff members of the former Kansas Consulate also attended the *Shinnenkai*, and I got to hear about their past experiences working there.



Opening the Sake Cask
at the Shinnenkai



Foreign Minister's Commendation
Ceremony for Sachie-san

2. Invitations from Governors and University

On February 19th, I was invited by Governor Pritzker to go to Springfield, the state capital, and the land of Lincoln. In addition to his house and grave, the old Capitol where Lincoln worked (also where former President Obama declared his candidacy for president) is well preserved. As one of the Governor's guests (only foreigner), I participated in his “State of the State” address. During a meeting with the Governor and his wife that was arranged before the address, I gave them a farewell message in person. After the address, I had a meeting with about 10 members of the International Relations, Tourism, and Trade Committee of the Illinois State House and exchanged views on various topics. Surprisingly, none of them had ever been to Japan! I strongly recommended them to visit Japan as a committee, highlighting the Osaka Kansai Expo this coming April.



With Governor and his wife



With members of Illinois State House

On March 1st, I was invited to the Nebraska Statehood Dinner, as I attended last year, and it served as my last business trip to the state. The dinner was for 400 people in the hall of the Capitol. Same as last year's event, I had the honor to sit at the same main table as Governor Pillemer and First Lady Suzanne. I enjoyed a wonderful night, but, at the same time, felt a bit of disappointment as I was unable to be joined by my wife this time around, who wore a beautiful kimono at last year's event that attracted attention to us and Japan.

On March 5, I visited the University of Wisconsin-Madison to give a lecture at Prof. David Fields' class "East Asia and the U.S. since 1893." I had the chance to talk with 40 undergraduate students. The class discussed themes such as "The Japanese Monroe Doctrine in Asia" and "The Road to Pearl Harbor" in the past few weeks and will talk about "Occupation of Japan," "U.S. and Japan in the 1980s and 1990s," and "The Outlook for U.S.-East Asian Relations." I always find it refreshing to have a discussion with students, rather than just one-way lecture of my own perspectives. I am always surprised by the insights from interactive dialogues with students.



Nebraska Statehood Dinner



With Students at U of Madison

3 The Emperor's Birthday Reception (February 21st)

Many people gathered to attend the reception, not just from the Chicago area, but from all over the states under our jurisdiction. The Lieutenant Governor of Kansas, the Secretary of State of Indiana, the President of the Federal Reserve Bank of Chicago, and Mr. Melamed (who was issued a "Visa for Life" by Chiune Sugihara) all gave congratulatory remarks. Additionally, various mayors, representatives of Japan-America Societies and Japanese Businesses, and Japanese-Americans attended – including the founder of the

Japan Hall in western Nebraska (a Japanese-American meeting hall from before WWII that has since been relocated and opened as a museum). Our Honorary Consuls that represent Japan in their respective states joined me on stage during my welcome remarks, as well. We also took this opportunity to hold a commendation ceremony for Ms. Grant, the first and former Honorary Consul of Iowa, who received an award bestowed by his Majesty the Emperor.

As I informed guests in advance that I would be returning to Japan in mid-March, I received many heartwarming words at the reception. Since beginning my appointment in Chicago, every day has been eventful, and it feels like I have been here twice as long as I actually have. Numerous shared memories and flashbacks come to my mind with each and every person I speak with. I would like to express my sincere gratitude to all Consulate-General staff for their daily dedication and service, including their work in preparing for this reception. I would also like to thank my wife Norika, Chef Nishimura, the staff at the Official Residence, and my personal driver. And above all, thank you to all the people in both the United States and Japan who have supported me.



Giving welcome remarks with
Honorary Consuls on Stage



Group Photo with all Consulate Staff