



日本国際交流センター

JAPAN CENTER FOR INTERNATIONAL EXCHANGE

US Congressional Staff Exchange Program

25th Congressional Staff Delegation to Japan

JULY 2016

SEVEN SENIOR CONGRESSIONAL staff visited Tokyo and Aichi Prefecture from July 23 to 30, 2016, as part of JCIE's US Congressional Staff Exchange Program to speak with a wide range of political leaders, government officials, and policy experts about the dynamics shaping the US-Japan alliance. This educational program had a special focus on US-Japan economic relations, and it provided the group with opportunities to discuss trade, investment, and economic rules-making with a wide range of government officials and business executives in Tokyo and Nagoya, go on site visits to learn about cutting-edge technologies, and speak with local leaders about US-Japan economic ties.

SUMMARY OF DISCUSSIONS

The China Question

Questions about China's growing clout and what can be done to check its assertive behavior factored heavily in the delegation's discussions. China had spent the two prior weeks issuing condemnations of an international tribunal ruling that found China's efforts to extend control over disputed territories in the South China Sea to be a violation of international law, and Chinese authorities were portraying Japan as having schemed to manipulate that tribunal. Tokyo University Professor Akio Takahara explained that China's recent



The 2016 delegation with Health Minister Yasushisa Shiozaki



Chatting with Aichi Governor Hideaki Ohmura

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Rep. Seiko Noda talks about challenges facing women in politics

assertive behavior stemmed in part from the domestic politic challenges facing Xi Jinping and other leaders, who cannot appear weak before next year’s Party Congress. Domestic pressures to take a hard line combined with perceptions of weak political leadership in the United States during its presidential transition were creating a potentially volatile situation and adding to a sense of insecurity in Asia. Lt. General (ret.) Noboru Yamaguchi described how military contacts between Japan and China remain tense, and other analysts argued that China’s growing clout had already intimidated some of the ASEAN nations, which had become less willing to speak up against it. This makes it crucial, several of the briefers argued, for the United States and Japan to have a deeper dialogue on how to coordinate their approaches to China.

TPP’s Strategic Significance

Unsurprisingly, Japanese legislators and policy experts told the group that they increasingly view Asia as the scene of a competition between Chinese and American visions for the region, with Japan standing firmly with the United States and looking to it for leadership. These tensions have been clear in the economic realm, as China has championed a series of new



Speaking at Meiji Shrine about religion’s role in Japanese society

JCIE’s US Congressional Staff Exchange Program at a Glance

- Over the past four decades, nearly 1,200 leaders have taken part in JCIE’s various political exchange programs.
- Since its inception in 1982, a total of 177 senior legislative aides have traveled to Japan on the US Congressional Staff Exchange Program.
- The 2016 delegation spoke with 50+ leaders, government official, and experts covering a broad range of areas—including Health Minister Yasuhisa Shiozaki, Aichi Governor Hideaki Ohmura, Diet members, US and Japanese diplomats, demographers, Japanese CEOs, American business executives, Shinto priests, policy analysts, local elected officials, university professors, trade negotiators, and former military leaders.
- As part of a visit to Aichi Prefecture, Japan’s industrial heartland, the group took part in a roundtable with local business leaders, toured a cutting-edge auto plant, and test drove the Toyota Mirai, the first hydrogen fuel cell vehicle available for the consumer market.
- Prior to their departure for Japan, delegation members took part in a briefing on US-Japan security relations by Jeffrey Hornung (Sasakawa USA).
- The program is funded by the Japan-US Friendship Commission, a US federal agency.

regional initiatives that challenge US influence in Asia, including the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank; the One Belt, One Road initiative; and the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) trade pact. Many of them seemed to perceive the significance of the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) as lying less in its economic impact and more in its strategic value as a means of advancing a rules-based regional order. Several of the experts briefing the delegation explained that if both the United States and Japan quickly ratify the TPP, they expect other nations such as Thailand and Indonesia to rush to become members. However, if the TPP stalls, it is likely that pressure will quickly build for Asian countries to instead join the RCEP, nudging many ASEAN nations more firmly into China’s orbit.

The delegation met with a total of eight Diet members in four separate meetings, and each of them felt confident that Japan’s legislature would vote to join the TPP soon after the Diet reconvenes in September, before the US Congress takes up its ratification. However, taking this step before the United States will require



On the floor of the Nagoya City Assembly with Speaker Kazuto Kato

the ruling parties to take a political gamble, and several Diet members hinted that a subsequent US rejection of the pact would then hurt Prime Minister Abe's standing while also undermining confidence in the US ability to deliver on its promises and reinforcing perceptions of a weakening America withdrawing from Asia. In the eyes of many of the policy analysts who spoke with the group, a failure to ratify the TPP would do far-reaching damage to US credibility in the region at a particularly sensitive time.

Concern about the US Elections

A wide range of governmental and private sector figures displayed a deep concern that a victory by Donald Trump, who has consistently displayed a disregard for the US-Japan alliance, will force Japan to go it alone in Asia. Former Deputy Foreign Minister Hitoshi Tanaka spoke about how Trump's jingoism and his calls for Japan to be left to take care of its own defense may feed calls from nationalists in Japan to further expand the country's military power, destabilizing Japan's sensitive relations with Korea and China. All of the Diet members that the group met had pointed questions about the US elections; worries about the implications of a Trump presidency even came up when the delegation met local leaders, such as Aichi Governor Hideaki Ohmura and Nagoya City Assembly Speaker Kazuto Kato.

Japan's Demographic Dilemma

One subtext to the delegation's discussions involved the implications of the rapid aging of Japan's population. Japan already has a larger proportion of its population that is 65 years old or older—nearly 26 percent—than any other major country in the world, and the demographic experts who spoke with the group projected

that this figure will rise to roughly 40 percent of the population by 2050. The country's population began shrinking from 2010, and now Japan is being forced to close 400–500 schools every year and abandon 2,000 kilometers of rural bus routes annually. The political leaders who met with the delegation explained how the challenges of an aging population are straining Japan's social safety net, especially its healthcare system, and they also pointed out lessons that the United States and others can take from Japan's experience.

In order to cushion the economic impact of the shrinking population, the Japanese government is working to expand the number of women in the workforce by taking steps to make it easier for women to stay in their jobs and advance to senior positions. Representative Seiko Noda, one of the most prominent women in Japanese politics, spoke with the delegation about the challenges that women face in pursuing their careers, noting that a great deal of progress has been made in recent decades but women still often slip off their career paths when they have children. Meanwhile, Health, Labour and Welfare Minister Yasuhisa Shiozaki cited the shortage of childcare facilities as one major factor impeding women's career advancement and spoke of how the Abe government is now investing heavily in an expansion of nursery schools to combat this problem.

Site Visits to View Cutting-Edge Technologies

The delegation members also received briefings on a number of cutting-edge technologies that are being rolled out in Japan and discussed their possible use in the United States. During their trip to Aichi Prefecture, they spoke with one of the engineers who designed the Mirai, the world's first hydrogen-powered vehicle for the consumer market, and went on a test drive of the car. They also were briefed on a Maglev



Discussing auto safety at Toyota headquarters

(or “magnetic levitation”) train, which is being developed for the Nagoya area and which is revolutionizing high-speed rail. Japan is constructing the world’s first long-distance Maglev line between Tokyo and Nagoya,

and when it becomes operative in 2027, it will travel at 300 miles per hour, cutting the travel time for the 177-mile trip between Tokyo and Nagoya to 40 minutes, less than half of what it currently takes the bullet train.



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