



日本国際交流センター

JAPAN CENTER FOR INTERNATIONAL EXCHANGE

US Congressional Staff Exchange Program 2019 Congressional Staff Delegation

MAY 25–JUNE 1

TOKYO | AICHI

SEVEN SENIOR CONGRESSIONAL STAFF discussed US-Japan relations with more than 60 government leaders, policy analysts, business executives, and experts during the 2019 US Congressional Staff Exchange Program. Over the course of their visit, which took place while President Donald Trump was making a trip to Tokyo, the delegation exchanged views with a total of eight Diet members, including Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga, the second most powerful figure in

the government. They also spoke about US-Japan trade with executives from leading companies, one of the country’s top trade negotiators, and the governor of one of the country’s most business-oriented prefectures, Aichi Governor Hideaki Ohmura. The trip also featured a number of site visits, including one to a pioneering company created specifically to employ people with disabilities and another to Tokyo’s cutting-edge disaster preparedness center.



Speaking with Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga



Posing with Diet members after a policy roundtable

DELEGATION MEMBERS

Philip “PJ” Austin, Legislative Assistant, Senator Pat Roberts (R-KS)

Robert Gardner, Legislative Assistant, Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer (D-NY)

Drew Kennedy, Senior Legislative Assistant, Representative Joe Wilson (R-SC)

Zoë Oreck, Legislative Director & General Counsel, Representative Hakeem Jeffries (D-NY)

Hilary Ranieri, Legislative Director, Representative Will Timmons (R-SC)

Bruce Vaughn, Specialist in Asian Affairs, Congressional Research Service

Carolina Young, Policy Advisor, Senator Mark Warner (D-VA)

SUMMARY OF DISCUSSIONS

Worries about China tensions

While US-Japan trade relations were intended to be a major focus of the program, growing US-China tensions ended up becoming a central topic. In meeting after meeting, Japanese interlocutors expressed deep concerns that US-China tensions were in danger of spinning out of control and—in a turnabout from recent years—they urged the US government to take a more measured approach. Diet members and scholars alike explained that they agreed with US objectives in pressuring Beijing, but not with its methods, and they hoped that more sophisticated and multilateral approaches could be utilized to deal with unfair trade practices, intellectual property theft, and other points of friction in US-China relations. Congressional staffers countered that there is nearly bipartisan consensus in Washington DC that it is necessary to take a harder line on China. However, several policy experts on the Japan side argued that the Chinese government is weaker than it appears from the outside and its vulnerabilities make the current situation more volatile. A number of them made it clear that the message they wish to relay to their American ally is “Please don’t escalate.”

US-Japan trade troubles

Concern about bilateral trade permeated most of the delegation’s meetings as well. The participants and everybody they met uniformly felt that US-Japan trade ties are important for both countries’ well-being and need to be deepened. The American side expressed concern

JCIE’s US Congressional Staff Exchange Program at a Glance

- More than **1,000 Americans and Japanese** have taken part in JCIE’s political exchanges.
- Since its launch in 1982, **nearly 200 senior legislative aides** have traveled to Japan on the US Congressional Staff Exchange Program.
- The 2019 delegation spoke with **60+ legislators, government officials, and experts** about US-Asia relations, bilateral trade, and Japanese societal trends—including 3 members of the Abe Cabinet, diplomats, business executives, a trade negotiator, a governor, and a Shinto priest.
- They visited Toyota Motor Corporation’s headquarters to discuss technological innovation; a pioneering company, Chuden Wing, which was created specifically to employ people with disabilities; and Tokyo Rinkai Disaster Prevention Park, which provides cutting edge disaster preparedness education.
- Prior to their departure for Japan, delegation members were briefed on US-Japan relations by Shihoko Goto of the Woodrow Wilson Center.
- The program is funded by the **Japan-US Friendship Commission**, a US federal agency.

over the competitiveness of US agricultural products, which receive less favorable treatment in Japan than those from countries that joined the TPP-11 and EU-Japan FTA pacts. Japanese analysts and officials explained that they felt they had reached an agricultural



Congressional staff with Aichi Governor Hideaki Ohmura



Visiting Tokyo’s earthquake response operations room

deal previously with the United States in the context of the TPP negotiations, and renegotiating a new bilateral agreement would involve a number of internal political challenges for the ruling Liberal Democratic Party that are not evident from the outside, although it is trying to push forward on a new deal.

Meanwhile, Japanese leaders were disturbed by US government steps on tariffs, some components of the proposed USMCA [US-Mexico-Canada Agreement] that will affect Japanese interests (i.e., “overly strict” rules of origin), and especially the speculation that the United States may favor quantitative restrictions on imports from Japan. In multiple meetings, Diet members and senior officials insisted that Japan has been opposed to quantitative restrictions for decades and that the United States and Japan need to work together to uphold the WTO’s rule-based trading system. Several made it clear that there is room for a US-Japan trade deal that tackles some of the bilateral issues that have cropped up in recent years, but that strategic competition with China makes it crucial that this just be one stepping stone toward a more comprehensive approach to setting standards for the Indo-Pacific region that will advance a rules-based regional order.

Unease over US-Japan security relations

Government officials and experts praised the work that has been done to strengthen bilateral military cooperation and stressed the importance of the US-Japan alliance. But Japanese discussions of security issues were undergirded by a palpable sense of unease. Experts and elected officials told the Congressional staff that they have felt a growing sense of uncertainty in the region,

as China has gained more leverage and North Korea has become more aggressive. The result, as one leading analyst explained, has been that Japan has become more dependent on the United States. However, the unpredictable and unconventional behavior of the Trump administration is leading some to debate whether they have put too many eggs into one basket. Nonetheless, another policy analyst explained that “Japan has no Plan B” and thus needs to stick as close as possible to the United States. Given this situation, several Japanese experts noted that it is now even more meaningful for Japanese leaders to see signs that the Congress values US-Japan ties.

Exchanging views on workforce challenges

The delegation members also had a rich exchange of views during various meetings on ways to improve conditions for women in the workplace, deal with demographic challenges, and utilize the talents of workers with disabilities. The labor participation ratio for women in Japan has risen to nearly 71 percent, which is significantly higher than the United States (66 percent) and the EU (62 percent). However, as pointed out by former Internal Affairs Minister Seiko Noda, one of Japan’s most prominent women in politics, women’s wages still average only 70 percent those of men and Japan still has a great deal to learn from the United States in terms of leveling the playing field for women by changing attitudes, mandating greater accommodations for mothers of young children, and improving work-life balance. Japan’s rapidly aging population was also raised in numerous meetings as a major constraint on economic growth, and senior government officials and business representatives took surprisingly progressive stances



Discussing women’s challenges in politics with Rep. Seiko Noda



Talking with horticultural workers at Chuden Wing Company

when speaking with the group, stressing the importance of liberalizing Japan’s traditionally strict limitations on immigration and building on the recent introduction of a five-year visa scheme to attract blue-collar workers from abroad. Meanwhile, in a site visit to Chuden Wing, a company created to employ people with disabilities, executives described how the Japanese government instituted a law mandating that corporations with more

than 100 employees have to ensure that people with a disability constitute at least 2.2 percent of their workforce. This has led, in some instances, to the creation of subsidiary companies, like Chubu Electric’s Chuden Wing, that are taking innovative steps to adapt to and complement the specific physical, psychological, and intellectual challenges of their employees.



Discovering Shintoism at Meiji Shrine



Getting a briefing on Toyota’s hydrogen fuel cell autos



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