

Keynote Speech by U.S. Senator Daniel K. Inouye
U.S.-Japan Symposium
October 11, 2007
Keidanren-Kaikan, Tokyo, Japan

In 1978, a year after Senator Mike Mansfield arrived in Tokyo to begin his service as United States Ambassador to Japan, he declared, “The U.S.-Japan relationship is the most important bilateral relationship in the world, bar none.” Ambassador Mansfield believed that the bilateral relationship between the United States and Japan would foster peace and stability in the Asia-Pacific region. He envisioned this bilateral relationship – when complimented with positive relations with China – as greatly advancing the likelihood of peace and stability in the oftentimes volatile Asia-Pacific region.

Today, the question before us is whether the words of Ambassador Mansfield from 29 years ago have lived up to his expectations.

Although there have been periods of cautious concern – such as the involvement of the United States in the divisive Iraq war, and the recent and sudden resignation of Japan’s Prime Minister – I am certain analysts agree with me that Japan-U.S. relations are still strong and healthy.

The strength of this relationship can be evidenced by security ties between Japan and the United States that date back to 1951. In March 2000, Japan and the United States entered into a security agreement, and discussions are presently under way to extend this pact for a few more years.

Other examples of our enduring relationship include:

The strong involvement of Japan and the United States in assisting the governments and people of Indonesia, Thailand, Sri Lanka, and India in the aftermath of the deadly tsunamis that hit in 2004;

and the Japanese maritime forces having their ships supply fuel to U.S. naval ships, for which the United States is most grateful;

and Japan’s noteworthy assistance in providing aid to the poor and stricken nations in Africa, the Mideast, and Asia, for which the United States is pleased to note.

Moreover, I believe a few words will suffice in assuring you that the United States appreciates the leadership of Japan in the multinational effort to resolve the problem in North Korea.

In every business relationship there are moments of up and downs, and trade relations between Japan and the United States are no exception. However, I can assure you that we look upon our trade relations with Japan as positive and friendly. This relationship has been productive and profitable for both nations.

Therefore, it is not surprising that the bipartisan leadership of both the U.S. House of Representatives and the U.S. Senate have noted with much gratitude those actions of mutual assistance and positive partnership between our two nations. It should also be noted that when Prime Minister Shinzo Abe recently visited Washington, he was cordially received at a historic meeting of the joint bipartisan leadership of both houses of the Congress. I cannot recall any meeting of this nature had ever been convened in the past.

For the past few years, I along with the leadership of the Japanese American National Museum have been working to build stronger connections between Nikkei and Japanese leaders. I believe this is one of the most important investments we can make to ensure a strong U.S.-Japan relation in the long term.

You can be assured that many of the Nikkei leaders of the United States wish to be involved in ensuring that the insightful words of Ambassador Mansfield are fostered and enhanced.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Japan Foundation, Keidanren, and the Nippon Foundation have actively supported programs that are building stronger ties between Japanese Americans and Japan. These include the sponsorship of Japanese American leaders visiting Japan, a global Web site connecting Nikkei in the Americas and Japan, business networks, and public programs in the United States and Japan. But while we have made progress, we are only just beginning.

Today's symposium is one of the activities which are part of these initiatives, and we hope this process of interchange and interaction will lead to a better understanding of the challenges each side is facing. Equally important is the fact that we must come to the understanding that, while a vast ocean may separate us, we share many common values.

Because of the physical and historic separation between the Nikkei and the

people of Japan, one can understand why certain events may be a bit more sensitive to the Japanese, but is of limited interest in the Nikkei community, and vice versa.

For example, during the past six years, there have been two issues that could have erupted and caused some harm to our present positive and friendly relations.

First, there was the issue of prisoners of war. When the Treaty of San Francisco was signed in 1951, it officially ended World War II, formally put to an end Japan's position as an imperial power, and allocated compensation to Allied former prisoners of war and Allied civilians who had suffered Japanese war crimes. It was understood that sufficient redress and payments would be made to the United States for those soldiers who had spent time in Japanese military prisons during the war.

However, in 2001, a legislative effort was made in the U.S. House of Representatives for redress payments beyond what had been agreed upon at the San Francisco treaty conference. Notwithstanding the fact that the U.S. government opposed this move, a bill was introduced in the House calling for additional payments of a much greater value. The matter, fortunately, was put to rest in the Senate.

Most recently, we had the issue of the comfort women of World War II. Some members of the U.S. House introduced a resolution calling upon Japan to officially apologize to the comfort women and provide payments to them. This resolution, with no legal impact, was adopted in the House of Representatives. But it should be noted no similar action was taken in the Senate.

While we have made progress in our joint initiatives, I hope that more Japanese will realize that there are many Nikkei in the United States who stand ready to speak up when their ancestral home is wrongly maligned or unjustly treated.

It is time to push aside the barriers that have kept Nikkei and Japanese nationals apart. Yes, most of the grandparents and parents of the Nikkei were not members of Japan's illustrious classes. Yes, our ancestors traveled far to the United States and its territories to work with bended backs and with their hands in farms and cane fields.

However, I am certain some of you are aware that today, among the diverse ethnic groups in the United States, the Nikkei have done exceedingly well. Studies

have concluded that they are considerably better educated, enjoy higher incomes, and are employed more greatly in professional fields than virtually any other segment of the American population.

A few weeks ago, the U.S. Census Bureau released one of its 2006 American community surveys. It showed that:

49.2 percent of the Nikkei population were enrolled in college or graduate school, nearly double that of the total U.S. population. 31.8 percent had attained a bachelor's degree, compared to 17.1 percent of the total population. 14.5 percent had attained a graduate or professional degree, compared to 9.9 percent of the total population.

The median income for Nikkei was \$61,276, nearly \$13,000 more than the median income for the total population.

51.5 percent of the Nikkei population were employed in management, professional, and related occupations, far surpassing the 34 percent for the total population.

And Nikkei were in the lowest ranks when so-called negative measures are used. For example, only 4 percent of all Nikkei families were living at or below the poverty level. That's far lower than the 9.8 percent figure for the entire population.

You should be pleased with what the Nikkei have been able to achieve in a century of existence abroad. Yet much of the first century of the Nikkei in America was not a time of easy living. That discussion, however, can be held at another time.

My purpose here today is very simple. It is to say: Just as much as Ambassador Mansfield saw a shared destiny between the United States and Japan, I believe there is also a shared destiny between the Nikkei and the people of Japan. The Nikkei are ready. I hope you will accept us as friends, and join with us to establish a relationship of mutual understanding, mutual assistance, and deep friendship.