

Emperor's Birthday Reception
Remarks by Consul General Jun Yamada
Tuesday, December 5, 2017 at Kotei

Ladies and gentlemen, welcome to the reception honoring the birthday of His Imperial Majesty the Emperor of Japan. His Imperial Majesty will turn 84 on December 23rd. Let us celebrate this occasion together and wish the Emperor much continued happiness and prosperity! Also, we would like to express our deep gratitude to all the friends of Japan in Northern and Central California for your wonderful support throughout 2017!

As all of you are fully aware, Northern California was put through quite an unprecedented ordeal this year. Wildfires ruthlessly devastated many wineries, other business, and indeed entire neighborhoods all over the region. I surmise that many in this room have also been affected by this catastrophe, and too many precious pieces of regional history have been lost.

On behalf of the government and people of Japan, I would like to take this opportunity to express our deepest sympathy and condolences once again. At the same time, we pray for the earliest possible recovery for everyone affected by this disaster.

Among those lost in the wildfire was Paradise Ridge Winery in Santa Rosa. Paradise Ridge's land and vines were first used in a winery which originally opened in 1882 by a Japanese samurai-turned-business man, Mr. Kanaye Nagasawa. Known as the "Wine King" of California, he was the very first to introduce California wine to Europe, and Paradise Ridge built a wonderful museum dedicated to him which was unfortunately lost in the recent fires. To honor his pioneering role in fostering Japan-California relations and to express our solidarity with all the affected people in the area working toward recovery, we are serving Paradise Ridge wine today with Mr. Nagasawa's portrait on the bottle, and we have also set up a special table showcasing his legacy.

Notwithstanding such challenges, the year 2017 has witnessed that Japan-U.S. relations, particularly here in Northern California, have been greatly advanced and further developed, whether it be in the business, academic or cultural fields.

With such continuous and robust economic performance in the Bay Area led by further development of the startup and IT sectors, the number of Japanese-affiliated companies simply keeps going upwards. Today we count approximately 770 Japanese companies in the region. Many more of them are looking to expand their operations in the areas of AI, robotics, regenerative medicine and other life-sciences.

To recall such examples, we immediately think of Rakuten's sponsorship of the Golden State Warriors, Sapporo's decision to carry on the flag of Anchor Steam Beer, Softbank's \$10 billion investment in Uber – the will to work together can be found everywhere!

The cultural front has been no less exciting. The Northern California Cherry Blossom Festival in Japantown turned 50 years old this year with resounding success, attracting more than 200,000 people from the Bay Area and beyond.

Once again, congratulations to Japantown on their Golden Jubilee!

At the same time, another annual favorite of ours, the J-Pop Summit, will soon be celebrating its first decade. Each year, it continues to prove the genuinely universal appeal Japanese youth culture has on not only this region, but the rest of the world.

And if you turn your eyes to our State Capital, the "Sakramento" Project made a grand kick-off in October. Eventually, more than two hundred cherry trees will be planted along the Sacramento River, rivaling the up to now unmatched display along the banks of the Potomac in Washington, D.C.

Last but not least, the 2020 Summer Olympics in Tokyo is approaching just around the corner. Japan is now intensifying its effort to host an even more historic set of games than the last time in 1964, which in itself marked a profound turning point in the modern history of our country.

I hope that you will come to Japan on this occasion, whether it is your first visit or your 25th. Thanks to the addition of new sports like surfing and skateboarding, Californians will undoubtedly have a great advantage in gaining medals for the USA! Also, with regards to traditional sports like judo, I sincerely hope that Mr. Yosh Uchida, the foremost judo master in this country who will be turning 100 in 2020, will be leading the US team once again, just as he did back in 1964!

Before finishing, I feel compelled to say one thing concerning the current state of the sister-city relationship between Osaka and San Francisco. It was with tremendous sadness that we saw such indispensable and precious relations suspended due to the complication of a certain historical dispute. And this had to happen, of all years, on their 60th anniversary.

It may not be very appropriate to touch upon such a topic at a happy occasion like today, but please allow me to say this much:

I believe that there is only one direction forward through which the whole of humankind is able to grow and develop, and that is to attain ultimate harmony, compassion and reconciliation - someday, somehow on this finite planet.

If not, all of us will simply have to perish. The many tragic pages in the history of the previous century teach us that much. That is precisely why Japan continues to pursue genuine reconciliation with all our neighbors, however difficult or sluggish the process may be.

Indeed, we'd rather achieve reconciliation with all of them just like the one we have realized with the United States.

As you know, hate is the exact antipode of reconciliation. When combined with various forms of half-truths, it can strain relations between local communities, and even paralyze progress on resolving international issues.

I sincerely hope that this great city, a real gem of the West Coast, will continue to be “united against hate” in all its forms, and assist in achieving ultimate reconciliation all over the world.

But my apologies, I digress. We have to move forward!

Ladies and gentlemen, once again please accept our deepest gratitude for your unwavering support and encouragement over the past year! Let us renew our hope for further maturing of the relationship between California and Japan, and indeed the overall relationship between the United States and Japan, which shall remain as the ultimate cornerstone of peace and prosperity in our rapidly changing world. We have yet to know what the new year will bring us, but let us remember that uncertainty often leads to an infinite number of new possibilities and opportunities ahead!

Thank you very much for your attention!