

## **Opening Remarks by Chairman Shukuri**

*for the JTTRI / JNTO International Exchange and Tourism Seminar  
held in Washington DC on March 21<sup>st</sup>, 2019*

Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen.

I am Masafumi Shukuri, Chairman of the Japan Transport and Tourism Research Institute, JTTRI. I would like to express thanks for the attendance of the Honorable Norman Mineta, Former Secretary of Transportation, and the Honorable Shinsuke Sugiyama, Ambassador of Japan to the United States. Also, I am delighted to have all of the distinguished speakers and guests from both the US and Japan participating in our seminar. In addition, I would like to extend my appreciation for the support from our co-sponsor, President Satoshi Seino and the personnel of the Japan National Tourism Organization, JNTO. On behalf of the hosts of this seminar, I welcome you all here today.

This year's National Cherry Blossom Festival officially opened yesterday, inaugurating a season of spring celebrations and events in the DC area. While cherry blossoms began as a symbol of spring in Japan, I have

heard that they are now loved by Americans in Washington D.C. and across the United States. At this commemorative moment of the cherry blossom season, we hold this seminar as an opportunity to discuss, from various perspectives, the future of international exchange and tourism between the US and Japan.

More than 100 years ago, Japan gifted the original cherry trees to Washington, and in exchange Japan received America's iconic dogwood trees, which people across Japan still cherish to this day. Just like these trees traveled across the Pacific Ocean, it would be my lifelong dream for exchanges to expand and the friendship to continue blossoming between our two countries.

The strong relationship between the US and Japan has continuously grown. About 8 years ago, in the aftermath of the Great East Japan Earthquake of March 11, 2011, the United States military and the Japan Self-Defense Forces successfully worked together on "Operation Tomodachi" to provide immediate humanitarian relief to the Tohoku region. Built upon these foundations of cooperation and the spirit of friendship, the United States Embassy in Tokyo, under the leadership of Ambassador John V. Roos, and the U.S.-Japan Council led the launch of the "Tomodachi Initiative". To this day, many Japanese people are

extremely grateful for this initiative.

Another initiative encouraging the US-Japan Friendship is “Japan 2019,” hosted by the Japan Foundation, in close collaboration with the Embassy of Japan in the U.S. This program aims to broaden understanding of and interest in Japanese culture in the United States, and features a series of events including “The Life of Animals in Japanese Art” at the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C. from May to July.

The US-Japan relationship is one of the most intimate relationships in the world, and has continuously deepened over time thanks to numerous initiatives such as these.

Even in the era with the spread of “I o T (Internet of Things)”, people-to-people exchanges and face-to-face communications play a great role in international relations as well as human relations. It remains unchanged that the people’s diplomacy is given equal weight as government diplomacy. Comings and goings of people between the US and Japan, which now exceeds 5 million per year, has become the concrete pillar of exchange between the two countries.

The United Nations / World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) asserts that tourism can play a key role as a catalyst for world peace and development. In this sense, international exchange and international tourism serve the same function. International tourism may be said to be the beginning and a part of international exchange.

With awareness of these issues, we have prepared today's seminar, "The Future of the US-Japan Friendship: How International Exchange and Tourism are Changing Perspectives," which I will introduce briefly.

During the first part of today's seminar, Former Secretary of Transportation Mineta and JNTO President Seino will give keynote speeches. Secretary Mineta's career has included extensive experience in public services including being Secretary of the U.S. Department of Transportation, and Secretary of Commerce, as well as various executive positions such as Honorary Chairman of the Board of Trustees for the Japan-America Society of Washington DC.

After the speeches, a panel of experts from the US and Japan will continue the discussion of how international exchange and tourism are changing perspectives of the U.S. - Japan Friendship, and we have invited them to express their thoughts on the current situation and issues of exchange between the US and Japan.

I myself am looking forward to hearing the discussions of our specialists today. As a host, I believe that today's seminar will be fruitful for all people in related fields, and will produce beneficial suggestions towards the creation of a new dawn for international exchange and tourism between the US and Japan.

Thank you very much.