

**Toast to the Emperor
Japanese Consulate
December 9, 2014 (as prepared)**

Consul General Masahiro Omura, distinguished guests. I would like to give a short toast on this occasion of His Majesty, The Emperor's 81st birthday!

This is an incredibly grand annual occasion here at the Official Residence of the Japanese Consulate. I am honored to be taking part once more this year.

Washington State and Japan have strong and close ties. As a state we both honor and celebrate our longstanding friendship with the Land of the Rising Sun. In August we welcomed Eikei Suzuki, the governor of the Mie Prefecture and his delegation. At that time I witnessed the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding between the Mie Prefecture and the state of Washington. Through this memorandum we hope to stimulate two-way economic development.

It was only a little over a year ago that we were marking the 50th anniversary – the Golden Jubilee - of sister statehood with the Hyogo Prefecture. There were a number of events and activities in Seattle and Olympia. We were honored by the large delegation that came from Japan, led by Hyogo Governor Toshizo Ido. One of the highlights was the signing of a historic, first of its kind sister marina agreement between the Shin Nishinomiya Yacht Harbor and the Port of Olympia.

The cities of Washington have more sister city agreements with counterparts in Japan than with any other nation. There are 37 of them.

Japan is Washington's third largest trading partner with annual imports and exports totaling about \$7 billion each way. More Hard Red Spring Wheat from Washington is shipped to Japan than to any other country in the world. We drive a lot of Toyotas, Hondas, Mazdas and Suburus, and you cannot go too far in the country side without seeing a bright orange Kubota tractor working the fields.

Many Washington state products and delicacies end up in Japan. And at today's feast, many of these are paired nicely with Japanese sake.

As a result of all of the trade and sister city relationships, there are numerous trade delegations, business and cultural missions, and exchanges between young professionals and students each year between Washington and Japan. In fact between last year and this year 115 students from Washington went to Japan through the Kuzuna and KAKEHASHI projects. Those projects also brought 1,202 students from Japan to Washington state.

With the dollar appreciating against the yen, this is the perfect time for those of you who have not been to Japan to plan a visit. I hope that I may be among you.

With that I would like to raise a glass to His Majesty the Emperor. May he continue to live in good health for many more years. And may our relationship with Japan endure in strength, prosperity and peace, and wrought of great joy.