



Mr. Aniya at the Conference

“Jump up at right time after tenaciously accumulating energy”

My name is *Masaru Aniya*

and I am the Head of the Consular Office of Japan in Anchorage. This year, I would like to talk about a story with the theme of “Jump up at right time after tenaciously accumulating energy.”

“12,000 km from Alaska to NZ without rest for 11 days, breaking the longest flight record for migratory birds.” Recently, I found an article with this headline. This migratory bird, the bar-tailed godwit, left Alaska on September 16, 2020, traveled south through the Aleutian Islands, then flew over the Pacific Ocean at an altitude of several thousand meters, driven by strong easterly winds, to New Zealand. It was reported that it flew over 12,000 kilometers (approx. 7,500 miles) non-stop over 11 days.

Even though I’m nowhere near the bar-tailed godwit, I spend an hour jogging around Lake Hood near my house every weekend. When you start jogging, if you put up with the pain at first and keep running, at a certain point, you will experience a feeling of pleasure called “runner’s high.” In my case, this runner’s high comes 30 minutes after I start running, just as I reach a point where I can clearly see the mountains east of Anchorage in the distance. I feel refreshed when I run with no mind while looking at the beautiful scenery. If you live in Anchorage, you probably know that there are many seaplanes on the shores of Lake Hood. One of the pleasures of running while jogging is watching seaplanes taking off or landing one after another. After flying freely in the skies of Alaska, or perhaps the Northern Pacific Ocean, like a bar-tailed godwit, watching the seaplanes return one after another after enjoying the scenery of nature, I think, “What a free place Alaska is!”

The Consular Office of Japan in Anchorage, like other overseas diplomatic missions, has the mission of promoting friendly relations between the United States and Japan. From 2022 to 2023, our office has held two events aiming at promoting friendship between the United States and Japan: the “Online Youth Forum” and the “Online Arctic Symposium.” The “Online Youth Forum” is an online meeting where lectures by celebrities, free discussions, etc., are held mainly for high school and college students of Japan-Alaska sister cities. It has been held once a month since September last year, six meetings in total. As an overall summary of these meetings, we held “The Presentations” on March 3, and had students brag about their home towns. The event was joyful and successful.

Beginning with Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, various unpredictable incidents are breaking out



Online Youth Forum



The Presentation

in the current international community. As members of the international community, Japan and the United States must respond to each and every one of them. To that end, cooperation between the two countries is absolutely necessary. Some problems, such as climate change, are difficult to deal with effectively without international cooperation. Faced with this situation, I have the impression that young people in Japan are recently less interested in international issues than they used to be. This is why I came up with the idea of holding an online youth forum. The students who attended most of the 6 meetings were accustomed to speaking out without being nervous. I look forward to seeing these students play an active role in the international community in the future. As I mentioned earlier, “various unpredictable incidents are breaking out in the current international community.” We are facing situations where we constantly need to make new decisions. The same is true for cooperation in the Arctic Circle, and even without Russia, the countries concerned must proceed with cooperation in a steady manner. This is because cooperation related to the Arctic, including climate change, is an urgent issue. The “Online Arctic Symposium” held on January 18 and 19, 2023, was created from this idea, and it was the second Symposium following the first one in January 2022. At the Opening, Senator Lisa Murkowski and Representative Mary Peltola emphasized, through video message, the importance of



Online Arctic Symposium



Conference Attendees

bilateral cooperation in the Arctic. With a total of 79 attendees altogether, steady research results on dinosaurs, fisheries, ice cellars and others were presented and opinions were exchanged. In May last year, Governor Dunleavy visited Japan and introduced to Japanese officials and businessmen the promising Alaskan LNG development. I believe that it was very useful to be able to present and discuss the benefits of Alaskan LNG and the de-carbonization activities in Alaska and Japan at this Symposium. In addition, under the agenda of “Vital community activities,” Ms. Julie Kitka, the AFN President, and Mr. Ben Mallott, the AFN Vice President, introduced

the favors received from the late Senator Daniel Inouye, and a video message from the Chitose Ainu Association explained about activities to preserve Ainu culture, and showed performance of traditional dances. I believe that it was a good opportunity to reaffirm the cooperative relationship that has been built up between the two countries, and to open up the prospects for the future.

There were other happy events. On August 10, last year, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs announced the recipients of the 2022 Foreign Minister’s Commendation, and from Alaska, Dr. Yasuko Lehtinen, Professor of the Language Department at Kenai Peninsula College and Dr. Hiroko Harada, Professor and Coordinator of the Japanese Program and Director of the Montgomery Dickson Center for Japanese Language and Culture at the University of Alaska, Anchorage, were selected for achievements in teaching Japanese in the United States. The Foreign Minister’s Commendation is given to individuals who have made outstanding achievements among many people who are active in various fields of international relations and who have made great contributions to the promotion of friendly relations between Japan and other countries. The conferment ceremonies were held for Professor Yasuko Lehtinen on October 28, and for Professor Hiroko Harada on November 3rd. I attended both events, and many friends gathered to congratulate on receiving the awards. They were very heartwarming events.

I sometimes wonder if the migratory bird introduced at the beginning, the bar-tailed godwit, does not feel overwhelmed right before its 11-day, 7,500-mile journey. However, if he continues to live in Alaska aimlessly without leaving, the harsh winter will soon come, and the situation will get worse and worse. Likewise, the people of Japan and the United States must calmly look at and analyze the international environment and prepare for cooperation as early as possible, when there is ample time to spare.

I recently found another article. On February 8, Saga City of Japan and the U.S. Department of the Interior’s Bureau of Land Management signed a memorandum of understanding regarding a sister wetland partnership. The Higashiyoka Tidal Flat in Saga City is the largest migratory site in Japan for shorebirds, and the Qupaluk Wetland in Alaska, USA, is their breeding ground. Over a distance of more than 6,000 kilometers (3,728 miles), in addition to research cooperation, exchange activities for children are also planned.

If we do nothing, nothing will happen. If we do something, the prospects for the future will surely open up. This year is the zodiac year of the rabbit. It is a good year for jumping up at the right time, after tenaciously accumulating energy. There are many positive projects between the two countries. The Consular Office of Japan in Anchorage will hold various events to promote cooperation projects, as many as possible.

Here is the link to our homepage: https://www.anchorage.us.emb-japan.go.jp/itp_top_en/index.html

