

U.S.-Japan-South Korea Legislative Exchange Program

For the past 27 years, George Washington University has helped Congress run a legislative exchange program that brings together Members of the US Congress, Japanese Diet Members and the South Korean National Assembly. Started in 1989 the program, known as the US-Japan-South Korea Legislative Exchange Program (LEP/TLEP), developed personal ties among legislators at a time when trade and other issues divided America's security alliances in Asia. Henry R. Nau, a professor at GWU's Elliott School of International Affairs, directed the program for 25 years, joined in 2013 by Professor Mike M. Mochizuki.



Kim Jong-hoon (ROK), Co-Chair Kim Sung-gon (ROK), Co-Chair Jim McDermott (US), Jim Sensenbrenner (US), Hank Johnson (US), and Program Co-Director Henry Nau discuss trilateral issues at the 20th TLEP in Tokyo, Japan in January 2016.



Congresswoman Diane DeGette leads the discussion with Members. From left to right: Masaharu Nakagawa (Japan co-chair), Soon Ok Chun (ROK), Kuniko Inoguchi (Japan co-chair) and Diane DeGette (US), May 1st, 2014.

The program involved confidential talks among core members of the three legislatures. It evolved with little fanfare or publicity. Members met in Washington in the spring and Asia (Tokyo or Seoul) in the fall. They met for a day of bilateral US-Japan talks followed by a day of trilateral US-Japan-South Korea discussions. The idea was to urge the participants to speak candidly and learn directly from one another. They covered the range of domestic and foreign policy issues.

To preserve confidentiality, experts, embassy and official government ministries were not involved. Members from the major parties in each country conducted the discussions. During years when partisan rancor grew, the LEP/TLEP operated as an island of exemplary bipartisanship. Legislators on opposite sides of the political divide in Congress contributed regularly. The most recent US Co-chairs, Liberal Democratic Congressman James McDermott (D-WA) and conservative Republican Congressman F. James Sensenbrenner (R-WI), provided sharply different assessments of political issues in the United States and did so in good humor. Participants from opposing parties in Japan and South Korea did the same regarding their countries.



54th US-Japan LEP and 20th US-Japan-South Korea TLEP in Tokyo, Japan in January 2016.

It was not always easy going. Early meetings were stiff and uninformative. Translation was tried and then dropped, largely because the Japanese participants felt it impeded the free flow and candor of the discussions. As time passed, more Japanese Members spoke English, and English was the natural language once the South Koreans joined the program. Members valued the informality of the English language and commented that it gave them the opportunity to speak less formally even with representatives of their own country. The meetings became so interesting that US Members traveled the long distances just to attend the discussions. At one meeting on Okinawa, US Members flew in on Saturday to attend all day discussions on Sunday and fly back to Washington on Monday. The LEP/TLEP repeatedly demonstrated the value of foreign travel by US Congress at a time when legislators were often criticized for such travel.



Iwao Matsuda (far left), founder of the LEP, and other LEP participants meet with US Ambassador to Japan Caroline Kennedy during the 50th LEP held in Tokyo, Japan in January 2014.

After a few years, the meetings involved no lectures or written presentations. Members led and sustained the conversations on their own. They disagree frequently, within as well as between countries. As one regular member put it, "I count the number of times we disagree as an indication of how comfortable we are with each other." On multiple occasions, Korean and Japanese members have confided that it would be difficult to discuss such sensitive topics were the United States not involved. As a result, the participants cultivated strong personal and social ties, visiting one another in homes and on the campaign trail.

Both the LEP and TLEP involved high-level leaders of the three legislatures from both major parties. Former Speakers of the U.S.

House of Representatives Nancy Pelosi (D-CA) and Dennis Hastert (R-IL) participated. Norm Shumway (R-CA), Don Pease (D-Ohio), Amo Houghton (R-NY), David Minge (D-MN), Tom Sawyer (D-Ohio), Tom Petri (R-WI), Eddie Bernice Johnson (D-TX), Madeleine Bordallo (D-Guam), Mike Honda (D-CA), Hank Johnson (D-GA) were core participants. Altogether over 27 years more than 150 American Members of Congress participated.

Japanese Members represented senior Diet and government officials, including Former Minister of Defense (Yoshinori Ohno and Yuri Koike), former Special Advisor to the Prime Minister (Yoshinori Suematsu), former Ministers of Education, Culture and Sports (Iwao Matsuda, Masaharu Nakagawa and Kenji Kosaka), former Chief Cabinet Secretary (Yasuhisa Shiozaki), former Minister of Foreign Affairs (Tsuyoshi Yamaguchi), and Chair of the Special Committee on Okinawa and Northern Territory Problems (Kuniko Inoguchi) have participated on the Japanese side. Current Japanese co-chairs



Kuniko Inoguchi (Japan co-chair) leads the discussion with, from right to left, Kiyohiko Toyama (J) Masaharu Nakagawa (Japan co-chair), and Jim McDermott (US co-chair) at the 53rd LEP, Washington DC, April 29th, 2015.

are Reps. Kuniko Inoguchi (LDP) and Masaharu Nakagawa (DPJ).

More than 100 Diet Members participated over 27 years.



The 16th TLEP discussions held in Tokyo, Japan on January 22, 2014.

South Korean participants included former Foreign Affairs Committee Chairman (Jin Park), current Chairman of the Second Policy Coordination Committee (Jin Ha Hwang), former Democratic Party Floor Leader (Hyo-seuk Kim), current member of the Foreign Affairs, Trade & Unification Committee (Sung Gon Kim), current Chair of the International Affairs Committee of the Saenuri Party (Jong-hoon Kim), and current member of the Trade, Industry, and Energy Committee (Soon-ok Chun). Reps. Jin Ha Hwang (Saenuri Party) and Sung

Gon Kim (New Politics Alliance for Democracy) are current co-chairs from Korea.

The University's involvement brought special advantages to the program. It ensured the bipartisan character of the meeting. It also encouraged interactions with faculty and students. The program was part of the Elliott School's Sigur Center for Asian Studies. Graduate and undergraduate students, who specialize in Japanese or South Korean studies, helped administer the spring meetings in Washington. A graduate student, fluent in Japanese or Korean, served as administrative assistant to the program and traveled with the delegation to Tokyo or Seoul in the fall.



Japanese Co-Chair Kuniko Inoguchi (far left), Rep. Hank Johnson, US Co-Chair Jim McDermott, and US Co-Chair Jim Sensenbrenner meet with current Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe during the 54th LEP held in Tokyo, Japan in January 2016.

Occasionally, the LEP organized a public forum at the University to showcase the type of conversation that takes place privately among the legislative leaders. In 2014 seven visiting Japanese Members discussed *President Obama's Trip to Asia: Challenges and Opportunities*, which engaged University students, faculty and the public in a discussion with the Program's participants.

The Program received funding for 27 years from the Japan-United States Friendship Commission (JUSFC). Starting in calendar year 2016, it arranged to transfer the administration of the program to the Mansfield Foundation. Thus the program continues as the longest lasting exchange program among any countries with a unique format of direct confidential discussions across countries as well as major political parties within the countries.