



## **The Congressional U.S. -Japan Caucus and the U.S.-Japan Relationship**

Following is a discussion of remarks by U.S. Congressman Joaquin Castro (D-TX) at the CULCON Seminar in Washington, D.C., on September 27, 2015.

Facilitator: Dr. Sheila Smith, *Senior Fellow for Japan Studies, Council on Foreign Relations, U.S. CULCON Panel Vice Chair*

### **Introduction:**

In the U.S. Congress, there has been an increasing interest in Japan in recent years. The bi-partisan U.S.-Japan Caucus, created two years ago, now has close to 70 members, and Congressman Joaquin Castro, co-chair of the caucus, is leading their efforts. As the CULCON Seminar Luncheon Speaker, Congressman Castro shared his impressions of Japan and what the years ahead mean for the alliance.

### **Summary of Remarks:**

Congressman Castro began with an explanation for what has inspired him, a Hispanic-American congressman from San Antonio, Texas, to want to help sustain the strong U.S.-Japan relationship. Between 2001 and 2003, Toyota decided to locate the sixth of its North American manufacturing plants on the south side of San Antonio, a largely Hispanic section of the city with multiple challenges, including poverty. Congressman Castro was impressed that Toyota not only chose a neglected part of the city for its plant, but that the company also chose to use local businesses as suppliers, as opposed to bringing them in from the outside. Toyota changed the face of the south side of San Antonio and reinvigorated manufacturing in the city. The company's actions helped the congressman understand the value that Japan and Japanese businesses have brought to the United States.

“When CULCON was created, the founders could not have envisioned the exact challenges we have now,” the congressman said, “but they knew that we could solve them together.” In his two years as co-chair of the U.S.-Japan Caucus, Congressman Castro has traveled to Japan twice and met with members of the Diet, Prime Minister Abe, and private citizens. While the two nations share many goals, he found Japanese political leaders and citizens were mainly concerned about three issues: energy, security and economic development. According to the congressman, current challenges in these areas are the following:

- The United States must do a better job of supplying energy to its allies. The congressman co-sponsored legislation to expedite liquefied natural gas exports to countries like Japan. There is currently debate in Congress about whether the 1975 law banning the export of crude oil should be lifted.

- As the first and third largest economies in the world, there is much that the United States and Japan can do together to spur economic growth. The U.S.-Japan Caucus has played an active role in the negotiations and vetting of the Trade Promotion Authority and Trans-Pacific Partnership.
- President Obama has reaffirmed the United States' intent to defend Japan, and the U.S. supports Japan's new security legislation. Americans recognize that this legislation is a significant step for Japan, which has been a peaceful nation for decades. However, considering the current environment in the South Pacific and the South China Sea, particularly China's assertive posture in the region, preparedness is the obvious step.

Congressman Castro closed by talking about the sense of civic duty that was a part of his household when he was growing up. He was elected to the Texas Legislature in Austin at the age of 28. His grandmother came from Mexico in 1922 as a six-year-old orphan. Her education stopped at the fourth grade, but she was determined to insure that the congressman's mother had a better life. His mother, who was involved in the Mexican-American civil rights movement in the 1960s, taught her sons about the importance of public service. She instilled in them the idea that anyone can make a difference in their country and their world.

The congressman said that he and his colleagues on the caucus want to do what they can to help the work of CULCON. "We rely on your knowledge," he said. "Your work gives Congress the backbone to continue to develop this important relationship."

In a question and answer session, the congressman was asked about what he sees as the security pressures in the Pacific region. The congressman responded that the United States has a working relationship with and seeks to develop an even better relationship with China. However, territorial boundaries must be respected. The U.S., he said, will continue to ensure that it is protecting its allies militarily.

Another participant pointed out that new ethics rules and public relations concerns have had the effect of decreasing the number of exchanges and other international trips by members of Congress. The congressman agreed that this is a problem and that he and his colleagues will have to work on this.

The congressman said that one of his biggest regrets was never having gone overseas as a student. He was the son of a working single mother, and the expenses of study abroad were part of the reason he didn't go. This led to a discussion of the many organizations, including the CULCON-created U.S.-Japan Bridging Foundation, that provide scholarships and other assistance to make study abroad available to those for whom the cost is a barrier. The session closed with the congressman again urging those present to contact him and let him know how he and the U.S.-Japan Caucus can help CULCON's efforts.

