

**Dinner in appreciation of the great efforts on the Washington-Hyogo Sister State
50th Anniversary celebration and a toast to even stronger ties – 11/14/2013**

Senator Fraser, Senator Hasegawa, Former Secretary of State Munro,
Weyerhaeuser President Simons, Dr. Massey, ladies and gentlemen.

Good evening.

At the outset, I would like to take a moment to pay our condolences to the victims of Typhoon Haiyan in the Philippines, and express our solidarity in their recovery efforts. Both Japan and the United States have already taken action to engage in relief operations. Let us hope that the situation will improve. Our thoughts and hearts are with the people of the Philippines as they tackle this catastrophe.

Now I would like to express our sincerest appreciation to all of you for your commitment and dedication to the Washington-Hyogo 50th Anniversary celebrations. You and many others worked hard, demonstrating the importance of local initiative for strong sister relations. It was the blending of grassroots efforts with government organizations that ensured the great achievement of this year's commemoration. Thank you very much.

Last January, in Olympia, the Olympia-Kato Sister-City Association and the Consulate General of Japan co-hosted "Oshogatsu in Olympia" to outstanding success. We will be co-hosting for a second time this coming January and look forward to Oshogatsu becoming one of Olympia's eagerly anticipated annual occasions and a widely known sister-city event.

In the collaborative spirit of the 50th anniversary, and in the tradition of our long and fruitful history together, if you are not already involved in Oshogatsu, please join us with all your enthusiasm and support. It is with events like these that we forge even stronger ties between our two countries, on the sister-city, sister-state and even national levels.

Tonight should be a great opportunity for everyone to exchange views and strengthen vital communication between Japan and the US. At the 50th anniversary ceremony in Olympia, Governor Inslee and Governor Ido expressed their dreams and expectations for the next half-century of friendship and now, starting with this very gathering, let us carry that momentum forward into a meaningful next step.

Thank you.