

“Japan Update” features Economic Advisor to Prime Minister Abe

On October 17th and 18th, the Japan America Society of the State of Washington (JASSW) partnered with the Japan Business Association of Seattle (JBA) and the University of Washington’s Foster School of Business and The Henry Jackson School of International Studies to host their annual Business Roundtable Series. This year’s Business Roundtable Series topic was “Japan Update: Business Opportunities for 2014 and Beyond” and was expanded from an evening only event last year, to a two events this year--a panel of featured keynoters at the University of Washington Campus on October 17th and an afternoon symposium at Bellevue City Hall of keynotes, plus a panel of international relations/business professionals from local leadership companies on October 18th. The purpose was to bring together a group of experts in the fields of economics, international relations, and international business to talk about the present Japanese economic conditions and present and future business opportunities with Japan. These events were enabled and supported by a grant from the Sasakawa Peace Foundation to the Japan-America Society of the State of Washington.

On Thursday evening, October 17th, more than one-hundred University of Washington students gathered to hear a lecture given by Professor Koichi Hamada, former Yale professor and the current Special (economic) Adviser to Prime Minister Shinzo Abe of Japan, and Professor Joseph Massey, former Assistant U.S. Trade representative for Japan and China and current Chairman of Global Reach (U.S.) Inc. The lecture highlighted the difficulties facing the Japanese economy now and the steps Prime Minister Abe is taking to address these difficulties with the support of Hamada. Hamada introduced the three arrows of Abenomics: monetary policy, fiscal policy, and strategies to promote growth. Hamada started his lecture with a story of a man who gave each of his three sons an arrow to break. After the man’s sons easily broke these arrows he

tied the arrows back together and asked his sons to try and break them again, which they did to no avail. Hamada explained that monetary policy and fiscal policy will only be able to help the economy if they are used in tandem with promoting economic growth. A hindrance to the growth of the Japanese economy is the labor shortage issue that has resulted from an aging population. However, as Massey says, “crisis contains both dangers and opportunity”. One of the points Hamada and Massey emphasized was the opportunity for economic growth through more women entering the workforce, a hot topic considering the difficulties of getting women into the workforce due to cultural barriers. Breaking through these cultural barriers, Abe has pledged to do so by increasing childcare services and requiring at least one woman on every corporate board. This, Hamada argues, along with other structural change will help Japan continue the progress it has already made under Abe towards economic growth. After the lecture students had the opportunity to ask questions during a short Q & A period and have short one-on-one time with the speakers.

After the session at the UW, Hamada and Massey joined other Business Roundtable panelists: Herman Uscategui, Director of Strategic Alliances International Business Development at Starbucks; Tom Robertson, Vice President and Deputy General Counsel at Microsoft; Ryo Kubota, President and CEO of the biotech firm Acucela; and representatives from JASSW, JBA, the Consulate General of Japan, UW Jackson School for a private dinner at Bellevue’s Seastar restaurant. The evening began with everyone exchanging business cards and bowing to each other out of respect. Once everyone arrived introductions were given, with everyone stating why they were excited to be involved with the Business Roundtable Series. The guests expressed their delight in being part of an event that created a setting in which people

working towards the common goal of promoting international relations/business could share ideas and experiences and build valuable relationships.

The next day, on October 18th, one-hundred and fifty professionals, academics, and students gathered for the Business Roundtable event at Bellevue City Hall. At this session, Professor Hamada and Dr. Massey repeated and expanded upon their topics of the previous day. The business leadership panelists from Microsoft, Acucela, and Starbucks discussed their experience in conducting business between Japan and America and shared lessons they learned from challenges they have faced, the current economic/business conditions in Japan, and what people need to be aware of when going into business with Japan. A sentiment they all echoed was the importance of innovative and out-of-the-box thinking that can be promoted through collaborative efforts between the U.S. and Japan. Microsoft's Tom Robertson touched on the rising opportunities in the IT communications field, which he believes has a large role to play in the growth of Japan's economy under Abenomics, especially by allowing for idea sharing and cooperation between Japan and the U.S. Ryo Kubota explained how his company Acucela is a prime example of a company that has grown exponentially and thrived through international collaboration, as a U.S. based started by Japanese funds. Herman Uscategui addressed opportunities in the international market, showcasing Starbuck's success in Japan, but also highlighted the importance of understanding the culture of the people you are trying to market to, the lack of which can be detrimental to one's business ventures.

A Q & A session featuring the keynoters and the leadership business panel resulted in a lively and interesting exchange with the audience that provided greater insight to the many aspects of the U.S.-Japan relationship. Afterwards, the speakers and audience adjourned to a two-hour networking reception, during which Japanese and American professionals, academics,

and students were able to connect. JASSW Executive Director Dale Watanabe commented on the event saying, “It’s a great opportunity for people to take what they heard from the seminar and think about how they can apply it to their own business thinking and awareness.” I personally look forward to seeing what business ventures develop as a result of the knowledge attained and connections made at this event.