

Remarks at a State Dinner Honoring Prime Minister Fumio Kishida of Japan
April 10, 2024

President Biden. Tonight we celebrate the alliance between Japan and the United States.

And Jill and I are honored to have you all here, including so many members of the Japanese American community. And we'd like to extend a particular welcome to President Clinton and Secretary Clinton, who've joined us this evening.

Mr. Prime Minister, Mrs. Kishida—Kishida, thank you for looking forward to this visit for a while. We've been anxious for you to come. I'm delighted you're here. And you know, even the cherry blossom bloomed early in anticipation of your—[laughter]. Well, they did, by the way. They really did.

And all of us—as you all know, those blossoms are the first sign of spring has arrived, and they remind us that we can begin anew every year and tomorrow can be a better day than today. It's a symbol of both our countries—what both our countries hold dear: new beginnings.

So thank you, again, for being here.

And a few days after my Inauguration over 3 years ago, I received a big, shiny, blue-and-red envelope covered with stickers on the envelope. It was a big envelope. And it was full of letters from elementary school teacher in Japan who compiled them from her students. She teaches children who stutter, like I did as a child. And she wanted them—me to know that when she told them—her class about—that I had a similar liability at the time, the kids lit up, smiling, and they said: "We're the same. We're the same."

Well, we are the same, Japan and the United States. Many—we may be divided by distance, but the—generations after generation, we've been brought together—the same hopes, the same values, the same commitment to democracy and freedom and to—dignity for all.

And today, without question, our alliance is literally stronger than it has even been. This was both not inevitable, but it was also—the fact is that both the Prime Minister and I came of age as our countries were—as they came together. We both remember the choices that were made to forge a friendship that were once only a devastating—a fight that existed before.

We both remember that hard work, what it has done to find healing, and where there was once such hardship. We both remember Japanese and American people who not only brought us together, but who brought us forward, transforming our relationship for better—from bitter foes to the best friends we could be.

Tonight we pledge to keep going. We stand at an inflection point where the decisions we make now are going to determine the course of the future for decades to come, a future that the kids of our two families and children in all of our two countries will remember.

But I also know that Japan and the United States stand together—and everyone should know that as well—committed to each other and committed to keeping—building a future worthy of the highest hopes and—that—of our predecessors and our people have dreamed of.

Ladies and gentlemen, so please join me in raising your glass—and I don't have a glass. Neither do you. [Laughter]

[At this point, a White House aide brought glasses for President Biden and Prime Minister Kishida.]

There you go. Do you have one for the Prime Minister?

Prime Minister Kishida. Thank you.

President Biden. Join me in raising your glasses to our alliance, to our friendship, and, in the words of those young students in Japan, to the same future we share. Cheers.

[*President Biden offered a toast.*]

Audience members. Cheers.

President Biden. I turn it over to you, Mr. Prime Minister.

[*President Biden handed his glass back to a White House aide.*]

Thank you.

Mr. Prime Minister.

Prime Minister Kishida. Thank you.

Mr. President, Dr. Biden, distinguished guests, and ladies and gentlemen, I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to you for hosting such a wonderful dinner and your warm welcome and hospitality.

Before I came here, my protocol staff told me that no one had ever complained that my speech was too short. [*Laughter*] This is probably good advice. So I'll keep my speech short. [*Laughter*]

First and foremost, to be honest, my breath is taken and I'm speechless in front of such a huge number of prominent American and Japanese guests. My wife Yuko also left breathless, just told me that it was hard to tell who the guest of honor is. [*Laughter*] So I was relieved when I was shown the seat right next to the President. [*Laughter*]

Last year, President Biden and Dr. Biden visited my hometown of Hiroshima to attend the G-7 summit meeting. It is a little-known fact that the largest number of Japanese immigrants to the United States came from Hiroshima. Many Hiroshimans headed to the United States to seek a new world, a better future, and greater heights.

Mr. President, I know that the late Senator Daniel Inouye was a good friend of yours.

President Biden. He was.

Prime Minister Kishida. His mother was also from Hiroshima.

Looking back at the long history of Japan and the United States, our predecessors have carved out the path in various fields, such as business, academia, art, and sports, traveling back and forth between the two countries.

"The Pacific Ocean does not separate Japan and the United States. Rather, it unites us." These were the words that President Kennedy sent to Prime Minister Ikeda, also hailing from Hiroshima, at the state luncheon held at the White House about 60 years ago.

I like this line. I use it so many times that my staff tried deleting it—[*laughter*—whenever this phrase appeared on speech drafts. However, there is nothing that expresses our relationship as visibly as this. And never have these words been more relevant than today. Japan and the United States are united than ever before.

I believe that the Pacific Ocean has brought Japan and United States together and so close because of the pioneering spirit of those who came before us and frontier spirit that we all have in

common. The success of those standing on the frontier is not just because of their individual efforts but also the result of collective efforts as a team. This holds true even between nations.

Our joint efforts are valuable and indispensable for our bright future and for the peace and stability of the world. We are now standing at the turning point in history, embarking on a new frontier and elevate this unshakable Japan-U.S. relationship to even greater heights and hand it to the next generation.

And finally, let me conclude with the line from "Star Trek"—[laughter]—which you all know: "To boldly go where no one has gone before." [Laughter] By the way, George Takei, who played Hikaru Sulu, the helmsman of the USS *Enterprise*, also has roots in Hiroshima. [Laughter]

Mr. President, Dr. Biden, distinguished guests, and ladies and gentlemen, I would like to propose a toast to our voyage to the frontier of the Japan-U.S. relationship with this word: "boldly go."

Audience members. Cheers.

Prime Minister Kishida. Thank you.

President Biden. Hear, hear.

Prime Minister Kishida. And "boldly go." Cheers.

[*Prime Minister Kishida offered a toast.*]

President Biden. Good job.

Prime Minister Kishida. Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 8:06 p.m. in the East Room at the White House. The transcript was released by the Office of the Press Secretary on April 11. A portion of these remarks could not be verified because the audio was incomplete.

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