

Unity and Equality Together | Liza Normandy

On behalf of JACL/OCA Leadership Attendees, we would like to say thank you for the unforgettable experience. It was absolutely motivational as well as inspirational. Having had the opportunity to have met some incredible individuals during our journey as well as shake the hands of our honorable congressmen and women was exciting to say the least. We visited places I had only heard of or read about in history books. Well, now I can say that experiencing it “for real” has broadened not only my perspective of Washington DC, but of politics as well.

A tour of the Capital was a great way to kick off our conference, followed by a reception at the OCA National Center, which was a nice welcome and ice breaker for many of us who just arrived that evening. One presentation that captivated us was by Phil Nash, who spoke to us about the History of APAs – From Railroads to the New Millennium. I thought I knew about my own heritage and my parents’ history but quickly learned that there were some “gaps” that needed “filling”. I knew that upon my return home, that there was a lot of catching up to do with mom. And when she and I spoke, she described to me her life leading up to my birth. This was one “history lesson” that was long over due. Wow! Having heard the details about her struggles and for the generation of struggling APAs before me, left me speechless and impacted me in a way that only mom could describe it. What they endured in order for them to come to the US was spellbinding. How fortunate we are to be where we are and to have what we have.

On the first day of our conference, we were all inspired by the energy of Charmaine Manansala and Parag Mehta when they spoke about our Asian American Blueprint of the New Administration, as this was a room full of future leaders and some with the ambition that one day, they too would be in DC. In between our day’s panels of presenters, coffee with lots of sugar was normal. We visited famous landmarks such as the Japanese American Memorial to Patriotism and had Warren Minami as our Tour Host. He about left us in tears as we all listened attentively to his story. Listening to and dining with Bruce Yamashita, Vice Admiral Harry Harris and Congressman Mike Honda were the highlights of many attendees. Hearing about their struggles and accomplishments as well as feeling their passion behind their words left all of us with a sense of hope. We were inspired by their words of wisdom, and some of us saw opportunities of what our futures could bring.

What resonated loudly at our conference was that the civil rights of ALL groups must be forever protected and that we must move tirelessly in a forward direction of Unity and Equality together. The friendships created in five-days are friendships I know I will keep for a lifetime...even if that means having to create a face book page to do it (I do not have one, yet). I came back a stronger leader and with a deeper commitment to create a positive change, rather than sitting back and waiting for it to change on its own. I left on the final day knowing that the conference made a difference for all of us, not just within our related chapters, but, within ourselves.

A special thank you goes to Leslie Moe-Kaiser and State Farm for your generous sponsorship. And thanks again to ALL those involved (you know who you are) for making this a successful conference and for allowing this “once in a lifetime” experience to be a memorable one!

Roudebush Reports on D.C. Conference | Tomoko Roudebush

Tomoko Roudebush, our chapter board member, would like to thank you for your support in having her represent Diablo Valley chapter and the JACL Northern California Western Nevada Pacific District on March 6-10 at the 2009 JACL/OCA National Leadership Conference where JACL and OCA staff, including Irene Mori did a marvelous job organizing this event. She was honored to be selected to attend a conference with 29 other extraordinary OCA and JACL participants from across the United States, including two local JACL participants Jessica Kawamura of Berkeley Chapter and Megumi Kaminaga, NCWNP District Youth Representative, who all accomplish amazing things in their communities.

The conference allowed Tomoko and her fellow participants to gain further knowledge from experts about social and political issues that affect the AAPI community, learn about the federal legislative process in implementing public policies and most importantly, learn how to improve their service to the community.

The most valuable part of the experience was the appointments Tomoko made well in advance at Congresswoman Barbara Lee and Congressman George Miller's Office at the Rayburn Building on Capitol Hill. She had a wonderful time thanking Congressman Lee's Senior Appropriations Counsel and her staff and Congressman Miller's Deputy Chief of Staff and front desk staff for their service to the community. She also had the opportunity go into Congresswoman Tauscher's office and met Mayor Harry Price of Fairfield, California. Tomoko provided each individual she met at the Rayburn Building with stories of our chapter's accomplishments and provided names of several JACL chapter members who have dedicated their lives of service to our community. She also made sure they all received our chapter's current newsletter, our contact information and invitations to attend our chapter's future events.

Everyone was impressed with the work we do and it was an honor for Tomoko to represent Diablo Valley JACL on this occasion.