



JAPANESE AMERICAN CITIZENS LEAGUE / JACL

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PRESS RELEASE
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JACL DC FELLOWS COMPLETE ASSIGNMENTS

Washington, D.C. – Two Fellows from California recently completed their assignments with the Japanese American Citizens League (JACL). Scott Sakakihara, the 2009 JACL Masaoka Fellow and a Harvard Law School Graduate, and Shirley Tang, the 2009 JACL Inouye Fellow who graduated from the University of California at Davis, served the JACL during the past year. Scott worked in the office of Congresswoman Mazie Hirono (D-HI) and later in the White House. Shirley worked in the JACL’s Washington D.C. Office.

Shirley wrote this report about her fellowship experience: “Serving as the current JACL Daniel K. Inouye Fellow, I was an active advocate for the Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) community for health care reform issues and policy. My advocacy efforts focused on eliminating health disparities within minority populations, increasing access to affordable quality health care services, and ensuring linguistically and culturally appropriate services. As a fellow, I had the opportunity to attend coalition meetings to discuss legislation that will eliminate health disparities, drafted talking points and support letters, and had the opportunity to share the countless stories of individuals who were affected by the current health care crisis. The stories I collected from frustrated individuals who struggled with obtaining timely and quality health care due to language access and cultural barriers were far too similar to the personal stories of many of my family and community members and were personal motivation for me to become a more vigilant advocate.

“After months of advocacy through meetings and assisting in campaigns, the most significant moment came when I was granted a meeting with my representative of Congress and her staff. Given the opportunity to address health care issues plagued by members of my community and to share their stories was empowering because I was able to provide a voice for those who lacked it due to language barriers. The experience I gained through my fellowship at JACL affirmed my commitment and further inspired me to continue in advocacy for the individuals who lack a prominent voice at the decision making table.”

Scott recorded his experience of his *One Year in Washington*. “After spending the past year in our nation’s capital, I can confirm firsthand what we all know from watching the news: we as a country are deeply divided in our views. In Washington, the one thing that we can all agree on is that there’s nothing we can all agree on. And yet, despite a contentious and turbulent atmosphere, this Congress and the new Administration have been busy—really, really busy—trying to create jobs, overhaul our health care system, invest in clean industry, fight two wars, reform our nation’s education system, and help Americans out in this tough economy, for starters. We also saw the extension of historic site preservation grants for Japanese American internment sites, the signing of hate crimes legislation, the restoration of the President’s Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) Commission, and AAPI’s with a seat at the table in the discussions surrounding health care and immigration.

“I come away from this tremendous experience with a great level of respect for the staff here, who live and breathe politics and policy, trying to change the world one constituent letter or stakeholder meeting at a time. In a city filled with politicians scratching each other’s backs and groups with not-so-special interests, getting anything done is not easy and certainly not pleasant. But people from all over the country are here—conservatives and liberals, careerists and true believers, pragmatists and idealists—trying to improve lives and make America a healthier, greener, safer, more respected, and more prosperous place to live. I can return to California knowing that regardless of what I may see when I turn on the TV, there are plenty of people here just trying to do what’s right. The fact that they may disagree on what that is—well, that’s just the American way.”

Several JACL Fellowships are available and open to college graduates who are interested in the AAPI community. The fellowships run for ten to twelve months. College graduates with a commitment to the JACL are invited to check out Fellowship opportunities at www.jacl.org.

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