

Being Positive and Proactive in a Changing World: My Experience at the 2025 JACL at the OCA Leadership Summit

From March 15 through 19, 2025, I had the honor of attending the 2025 JACL- OCA (Organization of Chinese Americans) Leadership Summit in Washington, DC. In 1984, the JACL established the four-day annual leadership summit to introduce community leaders from across the country to the national policy-making arena. Co-convened with OCA since 1994, the JACL/OCA national leadership summit is structured to provide participants with a broad overview of the decision-making process at the federal level. During this year's event, 30 members of JACL and OCA from across the country attended meetings and briefings with Congressional staffers and representatives from various federal agencies, advocacy organizations, and the media. Participants were briefed on legislative issues affecting AAPI communities and examined the role Asian Pacific American civil rights organizations, such as JACL and OCA, play in affecting public policy and pursuing civil rights legislation in the nation's capital.

The focus of this year's summit were three house bills: 1) the Fred Korematsu Congressional Gold Medal Act (S.338 and H.R. 821), 2) the Neighbor Not Enemies Act (S. 193 and H.R. 630), and 3) the ABC Act: Alleviating Barriers for Caregivers Act (H.R. 2491). Participants were placed into small groups, based largely upon state of residence. Each group researched the three bills, the specific members of Congress with whom they were scheduled to meet and drafted talking points in preparation for in-person meetings with Congressional staffers on Capitol Hill. On the final day of the summit, each group met with Congressional staffers to advocate JACL and OCA's position on the bills. Although most of the participants had little to no prior experience in legislative advocacy, the information and practice sessions ably prepared us for this adventure.

Going into the Leadership Summit, I was frustrated and somewhat overwhelmed by the deluge of sweeping Executive Orders as well as the DOGE-led cuts to federal agencies and programs. I entered the program looking for hope and language I could employ when discussing the new realities of our changing world. It was no coincidence that many, if not all, of my fellow participants entered the Summit with similar motivations.

It was truly energizing to meet and work with my 29 fellow leadership summit colleagues, some of whom were in high school, some in college, graduate school or professional school, some who were just entering the workforce, and others who were mid to late career professionals. Although I was the only retired participant, I was assured that age is not a factor, and in the past, people much older than I had participated. Inspiration also came from the smart, dedicated, helpful and professional JACL and OCA staff who kept the leadership summit fun, stimulating and running at a high level. They shared their personal experiences as Asian Americans and also as advocates representing the interests of the AANHPI at large.

Although it has been a few weeks since the leadership summit, I am still energized and inspired to use the lessons and skills learned. I gained valuable connections and am grateful for the

opportunity I had to collaborate with JACL and OCA professional and student leaders who are committed to civil rights, advocacy and AAPI issues. I met incredibly passionate people that I now call my friends, I also became more aware of the issues that are important to me.

I strongly encourage any and all Philadelphia JACL members to attend the leadership summit. It is free, and all travel, room and board is covered by JACL. Online applications for this event are typically made available in December and publicized in the JACL Weekly Digest.