



REMEMBERING ROBERT “SKIPP” ORR

The Pacific Forum mourns the passing of long-time friend of Pacific Forum and International Advisory Board member Robert “Skipp” Orr, former U.S. ambassador to the Asian Development Bank, who passed away on August 12 in Kamakura, Japan due to heart failure.

Skipp enjoyed a long and distinguished career in business, government and academia and was a key figure in the U.S.-Japan relationship. As noted in a Japan Times obituary, he is credited with opening up Japan’s cell phone market in the 1990s as a Motorola Inc. executive, and he served as president of Boeing Japan Co. from 2002 to 2007. During his time at Boeing, the 787 Dreamliner was developed, with 35% of the components made in Japan. Between 2007 and 2010, he was chairman of the board of the Panasonic Foundation. He also served as vice chairman of the National Association of Japan-America Societies.

In 2010, then-U.S. President Barack Obama appointed Orr as executive director, with the rank of ambassador, to the Asian Development Bank. He served as ADB ambassador until Dec. 31, 2015, the longest serving ambassador during the Obama administration.

Orr graduated from Florida Atlantic University in 1976 and went on to earn a master’s degree in government from Georgetown University and a doctorate in political science from the University of Tokyo. His interest in government led him to work as a legislative assistant to former Democratic congressman Paul Rodgers in 1976. While in Washington, he also worked as a staff member for the House Foreign Affairs Asia subcommittee. In 1981, he joined the U.S. Agency for International Development, working on Asian issues.

Between 1985 and 1993, Dr. Orr was a political science professor and director of the Institute of Pacific Rim Studies at Temple University Japan. He also ran the Kyoto Center for Japanese Studies and the Stanford Center for Technology and Innovation at the Stanford Japan center in Kyoto for two years.

In 1991, his book “The Emergence of Japan’s Foreign Aid Power” won the Ohira Prize for best book on the Asia-Pacific region.

During his career, Orr played senior leadership roles in a number of other organizations, including the Council of American Ambassadors and the Pacific Forum. His door was always open to friends when visiting, either in Tokyo or Manila.

On Nov. 3, 2018, the Japanese government recognized his many contributions to the US-Japan relationship, conferring upon him the Order of the Rising Sun, Gold Rays with Rosette. The presentation ceremony took place on June 4, 2019, at the residence of the Japanese ambassador to the United States.

Ralph Cossa, Pacific Forum President Emeritus and Worldwide Support for Development-Handa Haruhisa Chair in Peace Studies expressed his sorrow at Orr’s death: “Skipp was a dear friend and devoted New York Yankee fan, who was always there when we needed him to lend a helping hand or share his insights. He will be sorely missed.”