On March 30, 2016, the East Asia Institute (EAI) was very honored to host Congressman Joaquin Castro who gave a lecture on "The Future of the U.S.-Japan Strategic Partnership" held at UTSA’s Main Campus.

The 170 seat auditorium was overflowing with students and faculty reaching almost 200 attendees. President Romo kicked off the event by introducing the East Asia Institute's outreach programs between U.S. and the Far East. He then acknowledged esteemed guests, and presented Congressman Castro to the podium.

In 2003, Toyota manufacturing corporation located its 6th North American manufacturing plant in South San Antonio, at the time a low developmental area. "This caused an influx of 6,000 new positions for local residents," said Castro. "Toyota partnered with local businesses delegating ownership parts of the company. This business "blueprint" has been noted throughout other states."

Approximately 3 years ago, Congressman Castro became co-founder and co-chair of the US-Japan Caucus of about 70 members. They have received members of the Japanese Diet (parliament) from all parties to strategize and build relationships between U.S. and Japan. “In the past, President Obama has talked about a "pivot to Asia" for opening communication, security legislation, and to recommit U.S. engagement with East Asia, commented Castro. "A world that demands American leadership with strong allies, and that is why our alliance with Japan is especially important."

Castro also touched on the gravity of making sure to allow for a good relationship with China, maintaining the commercial passage way despite military tension due to aggression in islands in the South China sea. China has been recently helpful to the U.S. within trade and in the United Nations. “It is important to make sure that waters around Asia are free to traverse for nations,” stressed Castro.

Congressmen Castro expressed 3 issues in which U.S.-Japan Caucus is concerned with.

Security legislation: Japan has been a pacifist nation. This has been a controversial issue to change in order to allow Japan’s Self-Defense Forces (SDF) to help protect their country and help its allies even if Japan is not under attack. He was supportive of the change in legislation not as an increase in aggressiveness but that Japan could be prepared for any situation.

Energy: Castro expressed his support within congress for expediting liquefied natural gas to allies, such as Japan since it has had high energy costs in the
last several years. A lot of countries are paying high price for energy and are buying from hostile countries. Ukraine and Germany have been receiving energy from Russia even after conflict with Russia. So it is important, when we can, for U.S. to supply energy to our allies, because when trying to form a coalition, if allies are struggling to support their people, the more difficult it is for our allies to take action with us.

Economic Development: There has been massive investment between U.S. and Japanese economies. We are the 1st and 3rd largest economies and are each other’s top 3 trading partners in the world. Castro expressed that he sees the relationship continuing to prosper. The congressman left with the sentiment that he hopes the students would help build the U.S.- Japan relationship.

Council General Tetsuro Amano of the Consulate General of Japan in Houston also spoke at the event expressing his appreciation for Castro’s leadership in the U.S.-Japan Caucus. “I look forward to the continuing relationship between Texas and Japan,” said Amano.

A participant at the Q&A session asked what the position of the caucus was for reopening the Japanese nuclear power plants. “In the recent years the Japanese government has reopened power plants and they will continue to do so,” said Castro. “The United States will also supply natural gas to Japan when they are in need.” Another student asked what the next step is for students to become involved in the caucus or to become involved in foreign relations. Castro explained that students are the best people to get involved in foreign relations because they are on the cutting edge of scholarship. “The student generation is next in making decision for the country. There are various civil societies that students can get involved in and the next step would be to contact those groups,” exclaimed Castro.

The UTSA East Asia Institute’s mission is to promote appreciation and understanding of East Asian societies and cultures both on campus and in the community through research, outreach, networking, education, student/faculty exchange, and business development and cooperation.