



The Japanese Diet (Parliament) of the future and the progress of the services to the Diet

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Abstract:

The Research and Legislative Reference Bureau of the National Diet Library (NDL) Japan assists the activities of the Diet (parliament) by providing research, analysis and information. 190 staff members of the Research Bureau answer 42,000 requests from Diet Members and produce 3,700 pages of research papers per year.

The 2009 general election brought about many changes in Japanese politics and the policy process. The changes will lead to new type of Diet Members' needs for our services. Improved research services and expansion of services of legislative support organizations will be demanded by the Diet Members.

The Research Bureau has been making efforts to improve its services for Diet Members, by setting two goals: "Brains" for the Legislature, and "Comprehensive Information Center." The major initiatives to realize the goals are (1) qualified policy analyses, (2) more direct services for Diet Members, (3) interdisciplinary research, (4) science and technology policy research, and (5) constitution and parliamentary system research.

Our challenge is to provide high quality research and analysis on a wide range of policy issues, as well as very large amounts of information, in a timely manner. In addition, the NDL will improve its function of linking the Diet and the public, enabling the people to

access Diet information more effectively and providing the Diet with diverse views of the public.

1. Research and Legislative Reference Bureau of the National Diet Library

The National Diet Library (NDL) is the parliamentary library and at the same time the national library of Japan. The primary mission of the NDL is to assist the activities of the Diet by providing research, analysis and information.

The Research and Legislative Reference Bureau, a department of the NDL, offers the Diet Members comprehensive background materials, authoritative analyses and evaluations, and factual information on a wide range of legislative agenda. In 2009 the Research Bureau answered 42,000 information and research requests from Diet Members, and produced 3,700 pages of reports and research papers on current national and international issues. Our research is extensive, timely, confidential, objective and nonpartisan. 86% of the Diet Members used our research service during the ordinary session of 2010.

The Research Bureau has about 190 staff members; 110 are policy analysts and 80 are information specialists, or administrative and supporting staff. It has 14 divisions, of which 10 are research divisions and 4 are administrative and information (library) service divisions.

2. General Election 2009: Changing Politics and Public Policy Process

Japanese politics has been in a transformation process in the past 20 years. The stable 1955 setup politics ended. The Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), which had been the ruling party for almost all the time since 1955, lost the majority at the 2009 general election and the Democratic Party Japan (DPJ) took control. It is the first government change arising from a general election since 1955.

Japanese elections under the 1955 setup were centered on candidates and their support organizations. Voters elected Diet Members based mainly on what they did for their constituencies, not on the political party the candidate belonged or on the party's policies. The election system reform of 1994 was intended to change election system to one centered more on political parties and their manifestos (campaign pledges). Since then the Japanese election has changed in the way voters choose a party's campaign pledges.

The 2009 general election brought about many changes in Japanese politics and the policy process. Elderly Diet Members retired and many new, younger members were elected. They are highly educated, have professional careers, and have strong expertise in policy issues.

The DPJ promised to abolish the unique legislative process under the LDP government that was called “pre-deliberation.” Pre-deliberation was the bill deliberation process inside the ruling party before the introduction of bills to the Diet. Almost all substantive negotiation was carried out among ruling party Diet Members, interest groups, and government bureaucrats during the deliberation. The process was criticized because it made the Diet deliberation just a rubber stamp and the real process was behind closed doors.

The new DPJ Government also promised to change the policy making process into a more Diet-Member-dominant process. Traditionally, each government Ministry and its bureaucrats had very strong power over public policies. In the past 20 years, Japan faced very serious challenges, such as a weak economy, huge budget deficits, aging society, and globalization. That period is called the “lost 20 Years.” The DPJ said during the 2009 general election campaign that the traditional policy process could not solve these issues.

After the 2009 general election, the DPJ abolished the pre-deliberation process, but it has not yet reformed the Diet deliberation process of government-sponsored bills. The future mode of Diet deliberation and the policy process are still uncertain. These changes of politics and the policy process will lead to new type of Diet Members’ needs for our research services. They will need more information and higher quality analyses for their decision making. Improved research services and expansion of services of legislative support organizations will be demanded by the Diet Members.

3. Strategic Goals and Initiatives

The Research Bureau sets two strategic goals to improve its service. The first goal is “Brains for the Legislature,” that means the Research Bureau will serve the Diet as its brain center. The second goal is to be a “Comprehensive Information Center for the Diet Members.”

The major initiatives to realize the goals, especially the first goal, are as follows:

(1) Qualified policy analyses and improved research services

We seek further to improve the quality of our research and analysis. We are trying to focus our research issues more on the current Diet agenda. We are planning to provide more overseas legislative information and comparative institutional analyses.

(2) More direct services for Diet Members

Committee staffs of both Houses serve chairmen and members of committees directly on a daily basis. On the other hand, our services for Diet Members are less direct and there are fewer face to face interactions. Often our services are provided through research papers and information materials. Sometimes we feel that Diet Members and their staff use us like a research vending machine or a research ATM, where you put in a card and money pops out.

We are making efforts to construct a more consultative and direct relationship with Diet

Members and their staff through face-to-face services such as briefings and seminars. We presented six policy seminars for Diet Members in 2009. One was an international seminar: a forum where scholars from overseas, Diet Members and our researchers discussed hot policy issues.

(3) Interdisciplinary Research

Interdisciplinary research is conducted on wide-ranging cross-cutting issues of future agenda on our own initiative. Policy analysts of different disciplines in the Research Bureau conduct field studies and joint research with outside specialists. The term of research is one year. In 2009 we did 2 interdisciplinary researches, and the results are published as research reports: "Policy Issues of Japan in International Comparison" and "Toward Establishing a Sustainable Society."

(4) Science and Technology Policy Research

Science and technology policy research is the major area where we have expanded our research capacity. There are wide-ranging research requests from Diet Members.

In 2010, we newly established "Science and Technology Research Office" to carry out new types of research projects. This year the section, together with a think tank, is carrying out a survey of world science and technology policy.

(5) Constitution and Parliamentary System Research

Another research area in which the Research Bureau is planning to expand its research capacity is a comparative study of constitutional and parliamentary systems of the world. Since very few research institutes in Japan do comprehensive research on these issues, we will be able to do outstanding research.

4. New Challenges for the Research Bureau

The rapid increase of the research requests from the Diet Members has been one of the major challenges for the Research Bureau in the past 10 years. In addition to the increase of research requests, the Members demand prompt answers, customized research reports and more skillful policy analysis. Since we cannot increase our staffers in the face of huge budget deficits, we have to deal with a growing amount of demanding research done by the same size of staff.

Human resource development is also a major challenge for us. The changing political environment, policy making process and legislative process lead to more demands for legislative support agencies' research expertise. More policy specialists are needed, who, not only can fully utilize huge information resources of the NDL but also, have strong expertise in policy analyses, who can assess policy options, who can equally discuss policy options among policy specialists at research institutes, and who can link policy options to legislation or amendments for bills. Many research requests from Diet Members are about

international comparison of public policies. Strong analytical skills of government and policy institutions in foreign countries are also needed.

Our research agendas are very wide. New issues are constantly emerging. Providing objective, nonpartisan analysis and policy information on always-changing issues is another challenge for us. It is not at all easy to anticipate and respond to the Diet Members' research requests in a timely and adequate manner. The Research Bureau should establish a network of policy research institutes to collect policy information and to anticipate policy agenda.

5. A Node of Diet Public Relations

To achieve more responsive politics, the NDL is required to be a node of Diet-public relations through providing the general public with Diet information, and through collecting materials which include diverse public opinions, analyzing and providing them to the Diet.

The NDL has already developed a full-text database system for the minutes of the Diet since 1890 (both plenary sittings and committees), and the index database to all Japanese laws, regulations and bills since 1867. The NDL provides the public with this Diet and legislative information via its website. It also provides widely for the public via its website research papers produced by the Research Bureau, such as Issue Briefs.

In future, we wish to enable the people to access Diet information more effectively utilizing advanced telecommunication technology. We also hope to improve the means of linking the Diet and the public by providing more information including diverse views of the public to the Diet.

6. Conclusion

The future of the Research Bureau largely depends on the future politics and policy process of the Japanese Diet. As mentioned earlier, the Research Bureau has been making efforts to improve its services for Diet Members, by setting two goals: "Brains" for the Legislature, and "Comprehensive Information Center." The need for the latter function will not reduce, but we will have to enhance the former function, the goal of which is to become a qualified research institution or a kind of think tank. Our challenge is to provide high quality research and analysis on a wide range of policy issues, as well as very large amounts of information, in a timely manner. In addition, the NDL will improve its function of linking the Diet and the public.

Organization Chart

Research and Legislative Reference Bureau

Interdisciplinary Research Service	Interdisciplinary Research
Research Planning Division	General Affairs, Planning, Editing and Planning Publications, Secretariat of Interdisciplinary Research
Legislative Reference and Information Resources Division	Acceptance of Research on Request from the Members, Simple Research, Preparation of Research Materials, Management of Diet Members' Reading Room and Study Room
Electronic Information Services Division	Management of Full-text Database System for the Minutes of the Diet, Database System for the Minutes of the Imperial Diet and The RLRB's Website "Window on Research Services"
Parliamentary Documents and Official Publications Research Service	Preparation and Use of Basic Parliamentary Documents, Statutes, Official Publications and International Organizations in Japan and Other Countries, Index Database to Japanese Laws, Regulations and Bills
Parliamentary Documents and Official Publications Division	
Politics and Parliamentary Affairs Research Service	Parliamentary, Cabinet, Political Ethics, Party, Election, Political Fund, Political System, Political Process
Politics and Parliamentary Affairs Division	
Constitution Research Office	Constitution
Public Administration and Judicial Affairs Research Service	Administration, Public Employee, Local Government, Fire Fighting, Police, Civil Legislation, Criminal Legislation, Human Rights, Judiciary
Public Administration and Judicial Affairs Division	
Foreign Affairs and National Defense Research Service	Diplomacy, International Politics, International Law, National Defense, Security, the United Nations, International Institutions
Foreign Affairs and National Defense Division	
Financial Affairs Research Service	Finance, Tax, International Finance, Economic Activity, Short-term Economic Management, Prices, Account System
Financial Affairs Division	
Economy, Trade and Industry Research Service	Economic Management, Industry, Trade, Economic Cooperation, Resources and Energy, Fair Trade, Consumer Issues
Economy, Trade and Industry Division	
Agriculture, Forestry and Environment Research Service	Agriculture, Forestry, Marine Products Industry, Rural Areas, Food, Global Environmental Protection, Pollution, Nature Conservation, Environmental Issues
Agriculture, Forestry and Environment Division	
Land Development and Communications Research Service	Land Development, Social Capital, Construction, Natural Disaster, Transportation, Tourism, Weather Forecast, Coast Guard, Information and Communication, Postal Administration
Land Development and Communications Division	
Education, Culture, Science and Technology Research Service	Education, Sports, Art and Culture, Copyright, Religion
Education, Culture, Science and Technology Division	
Science and Technology Research Office	Science and Technology
Social Welfare and Labor Research Service	Social Security, Social Welfare, Public Health, Medical Care, Labor Conditions, Employment, Population Problem
Social Welfare and Labor Division	
Overseas Legislative Information Research Service	Foreign Legislative Developments, and General Policy Trends, Publication of <i>Foreign Legislation</i>
Overseas Legislative Information Division	
Detached Library in the Diet	Library Services of Books, Magazines, Newspapers and Parliamentary Documents

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Education

M.P.A. 1993	John F. Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University, U.S.A. Fulbright Scholar
B.S. 1984	University of Tokyo, Japan

Employment

1986-present	National Diet Library
2010	Director, Overseas Legislative Information Division
2006	Senior Researcher, Politics and Parliamentary Affairs Division
2001	Assistant Director, Administrative Division
1995-2007	Part-time lecturer of American politics and public policy, University of Air, Chuo University, Gakuchuin University
1992 summer	Consultant, Japan Task Force, Congressional Research Service, Library of Congress, U.S.A.

Recent Publications

Book

Hirose, Junko, 2004, *U.S. Congress: Most Powerful Congress in the World*, Kojin-sha.

Book Chapters

Hirose, Junko, 2009, “Ideology and Congress,” in *Modern American Politics*, Takeshi Igarashi and Fumiaki Kubo, eds., University of Tokyo Press.

Hirose, Junko, 2008, “Bicameralism of the U.S. Congress,” in *Parliaments and Constitution*, Ichiro Urata and Masahito Tadano, eds., Shinzan-sha.

Hirose, Junko and Kazuhiro Maeshima, 2010, “Congress and Foreign Policy Process,” in *U.S. Foreign Policy*, Tomohito Shinoda, ed., Minerva Shobo.