

“Manchin gets VIP Treatment in Japan”
05/30/2005

By: George Hohmann
Daily Mail Business Editor

Osaka, Japan – It’s good to be the governor – or just to be the West Virginia trade mission. Travel hassles melt away when the big guy moves. The trip from the Osaka airport to the Hilton Osaka downtown was a case in point. As soon as the Boeing 777 from Chicago landed here with the West Virginians on Saturday afternoon, the usual long lines of incoming passengers formed in front of passport control officials.

But Patrick Chow of the American Consulate General’s Osaka office short-circuited the long wait. He made arrangement with his Japanese counterparts and whisked Gov. Joe Manchin and the 19 other West Virginians through. The young lady whose job it was to affix a sticker in each passport flipped the pages and handed the documents back with lightning speed.

Chow worked his magic again at Japanese customs. Then the entire West Virginia delegation was waved through the gates by uniformed, white-gloved Japanese agents who bowed time and time again. They didn’t inspect a single suitcase.

Outside the airport there were people holding signs, mostly in Japanese, looking for special guests. But for Manchin and the other West Virginians, there was St. Albans native Ken Crockett, the head of West Virginia’s Japan trade office. Crockett greeted everyone, grabbed one of Manchin’s suitcases and led the group to a nearby bus, which, it turned out, was waiting just for the West Virginians.

After a ride through this sprawling city, the bus pulled into the front entrance of the Hilton. Even though it was a Saturday afternoon, the manager of the big hotel was standing at the front door to welcome the West Virginians and to escort Manchin and first lady Gayle to their suite on the 31st floor. After quick showers, the West Virginian delegation enjoyed a beautiful summer evening stroll to “Slow Blu Conscious,” a Japanese restaurant where the Americans took off their shoes and sat on padded seats at sunken, black-lacquered tables. Manchin started the casual evening by offering a toast. “It’s my first trip to Japan and Gayle’s,” he said, “We are very appreciative to everyone involved.”