

“Rockefeller backs bigger role for Japan”

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Tokyo – Sen. Jay Rockefeller said today he supports reforming the Japanese constitution to allow the Japanese to play a larger leadership role in Asia. The West Virginia Democrat, who serves as vice chairman of the Senate Intelligence committee, delivered a major foreign policy speech to the Nippon Keidanren or Japan Business Federation. The federation “is probably the most powerful, influential business group in the world,” said former Rockefeller chief of staff Lane Bailey, who accompanied the senator.

Rockefeller was introduced by Kunio Suzuki, co-chairman of the federation and chairman of Mitsui O.S.K. Lines, one of the largest shipping companies in the world. Japan has made great progress in becoming a world leader, Rockefeller said. He pointed to Japan’s economic clout as an example. “In my state of West Virginia, companies such as Toyota and NGK have invested close to \$2 billion, helping create 15,000 jobs directly and indirectly,” Rockefeller said. “You are by far the largest foreign investor in our state.”

“In the security area, Japan’s commitment to the reconstruction of Afghanistan and Iraq has been exemplary, as was Japanese assistance in the aftermath of the tsunami,” Rockefeller said. He added that with tsunami relief, “Japan really showed the United States what leadership is all about.” “Yet even with all these positive moves, Japan can still, in my judgment, do more,” Rockefeller said. “I commend those in the U.S. and Japan who are working to develop better ways for the (Japanese) Self Defense Forces and the U.S. military to share more of the defense burden in the Asia-Pacific region.

“I also agree with those who are looking at ways to amend or reinterpret the Japanese constitution so that Japan can play a role in regional security affairs commensurate with its economic clout,” he said. Since the end of World War II, Japan’s constitution has prohibited it from having a military other than a Self Defense Force.