

On The Move: Ron Bookbinder

By Christopher Snow Hopkins

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When he was promoted earlier this year to be general director of the Washington office of the Japan Automobile Manufacturers Association, which represents 14 automakers, Ron Bookbinder visited plants in Marysville, Ohio; Georgetown, Ky.; and Smyrna, Tenn.

“Almost everyone there is American,” says Bookbinder, who has been with JAMA for most of his career.

Bookbinder, 51, takes issue with the distinction between foreign and domestic automakers. “It’s pretty hard to say who is American and who is not American,” he says. “There’s just so much investment here by [the Japanese auto industry]: \$35 billion. Nearly 70 percent of the cars that are sold in the U.S. by Japanese makers are made in North America.”

The auto industry is also one of the largest components of Japan’s economy—about 9 percent of Japanese workers are in industry-related jobs, according to JAMA’s website. Furthermore, Japanese automakers account for 16 percent of the total value of the island nation’s manufacturing shipments.

A former legislative director for then-Rep. Gerald Kleczka, D-Wis., Bookbinder acknowledges, “Not everyone might want to work for a foreign trade association.” But he distrusts the parochialism of the American business community and credits his parents—former reporters for the Long Island, N.Y.-based *Newsday*—with “helping me become more aware of the world.” Bookbinder says, “They opened me up to international matters.... Journalists tend to be deep thinkers with a broad outlook.”

A Harvard graduate, Bookbinder says the most salient difference between when he joined the association in 1996 and now is the proliferation of hybrid and electric vehicles. “I don’t know about you, but I see them all over the place,” he says. Some of the most popular models, including the Toyota Prius, are Japanese-made.

A resident of Arlington, Va., Bookbinder has amassed a sizable collection of books on international history and politics. In an ironic twist, he is also a dedicated cyclist.