



American Citizen Newsletter U.S. Consulate General Belfast

Dear Fellow Americans,

Welcome to the U.S. Consulate's second quarterly newsletter. We had very positive feedback to the first newsletter and welcome your continued input and suggestions. We are working hard to keep you informed about the U.S.

Consulate's work here. Our recent Town Hall meeting at the Odyssey's W5, where each of the American officers told guests about their work, was a great success and gave us the opportunity to visit with many of you. We will look for an opportunity to hold similar events in the future. Meanwhile on the political front, the United States continues to play a strong role in advancing the peace process in Northern Ireland. President Bush issued a statement April 6, 2006 in support of the British and Irish plans to reestablish the Northern Ireland assembly. We have encouraged all political parties to seize this opportunity to get Northern Ireland's government up and running again. Last month, President Bush welcomed a cross section of Northern Ireland political, business and community leaders to the White House for the annual Saint Patrick's Day celebrations. The President made a strong appeal to the assembled guests to continue to work for a stable and prosperous Northern Ireland. May will

see visits by Special Envoy Mitchell Reiss and Ambassador Robert Tuttle, both of whom will reiterate the United State's continued commitment to the Northern Ireland peace process. Enjoy this quarter's newsletter and keep in touch.

Dean Pittman
Consul General

Gearing up for Summer Travel? American Citizens Must Use U.S. Passports to Enter and Leave the U.S.

The summer holidays are right around the corner, so plan now to ensure you reach your holiday destination. Do all family members have current U.S. passports? Have any children born overseas been documented as U.S. citizens? Remember, all American citizens, including dual nationals, must use their U.S. passport to enter or leave the U.S. Most expired passports can be renewed through the mail. In certain circumstances, however, citizens must appear in person at the U.S. Embassy or Consulate serving their area. For example, all children under the age of 18 must apply in person. Processing will take about 2 weeks. To determine whether to apply in person and to obtain

more information on how to apply, visit the Consulate General's website at <http://london.usembassy.gov/nireland/nipass.html>



Holiday Travel to the U.S. for Non-Americans

Do your summer travel plans include visiting the United States with a non-American family member, friend, or work colleague? If so, your traveling companions should review U.S. visa and Visa Waiver Program (VWP) requirements online at the Consulate General's website. The United States has implemented rules that require visa-free (VWP) travelers to be in possession of modern, tamper-resistant travel documents. The vast majority of British Citizens already possess a qualifying passport, but check out http://london.usembassy.gov/cons_new/visa/niv/vwp.html for VWP criteria. In particular, we are experiencing an upsurge in requests for emergency visa appointments for children who are still on their parent's UK or Irish passport. Every individual, even an infant, must either have a passport that meets the requirements for VWP travel or a visa.

Traveling companions who are not from one of the 27 VWP member countries or who do not have a qualifying passport are encouraged to schedule a visa appointment early as visa wait times increase during the spring and summer

season. At time of writing, the wait time for an appointment is approximately 4 weeks. Visa appointments may be booked by calling 09042-450100 (charges apply).

E-Passports are Coming!

On December 30, 2005, the U.S. began issuing electronic passports, or "e-passports," on a small-scale basis to some U.S. government diplomats and officials. The State Department plans to introduce e-passports by the end of this year for all American citizens who require a new passport. However, your old passport will remain valid, so you can continue to use it until it expires.

The new U.S. e-passport is similar to the current passport, with the addition of a small contact-less computer chip embedded in the back cover, and a symbol on the front cover indicating that it's an e-passport. The chip, which stores the same information visually displayed on the bio-data page, can be read only at close proximity by special chip readers at international borders. The data stored on the chip is protected from "skimming" or "eavesdropping" by third parties. The new passport incorporates enhanced security features, as well as a new page design that reflects the varied landscapes of the U.S. Each page includes a quote reflecting the hope and success that is the United States of America. To see the design of the U.S. e-passport, visit http://travel.state.gov/passport/eppt/eppt_2501.html. To review a list of frequently asked questions about the e-passport, including data security questions, visit http://travel.state.gov/passport/eppt/eppt_2788.html#Six

Avian Flu Information

The UK has reported its first case of avian influenza, commonly referred to as “bird flu,” in a wild swan in Scotland. The U.S. Consulate General sent a warden message on this subject on April, 10, 2006. It can be accessed at <http://london.usembassy.gov/nireland/nis.cs.html>.

For general information on avian flu see USINFO Department of State website http://usinfo.state.gov/gi/global_issues/bird_flu.html. This site includes links (under Resources) to World Health Organization and The Center for Disease Control. You can find information on UK contingency plan at www.dh.gov.uk/pandemicflu and information from the U.S. Health and Human Services Agency on emergency preparedness at <http://www.pandemicflu.gov/plan/pdf/guide.pdf>.



IRS Due Dates and Extensions of Time to File

Beginning with 2005 Income Tax returns due in 2006, individuals will be able to use a single IRS form (Form 4868) to get an automatic six-month extension of time to file. Taxpayers residing overseas are allowed an automatic extension of time to file to June 15 without filing Form 4868. Simply write across the top of your return: TAXPAYER RESIDENT

ABROAD. **Please note: If tax is due but not paid by April 17th, interest and penalties will be applied until the tax is paid.** For further IRS tax questions check the London Embassy website at <http://london.usembassy.gov/irs/index.htm>.

Federal Benefits in Case of Death

The loss of the family wage earner can be devastating, both emotionally and financially. During this trying time, family members don't always know where to turn. If the wage earner has worked in the U.S., then one of the first places to contact is the Federal Benefits Unit at the Embassy in London. The Federal Benefits Unit can help determine if any survivors are eligible for Social Security benefits. In some cases, family members of a deceased wage earner, who worked as little as 1 ½ years, in America, may qualify for benefits.

Potentially eligible individuals include:

- A. Children under the age of 18.
- B. Children over the age of 18 but still going to a secondary school.
- C. Children who became disabled prior to age 22 and
- D. Spouses at any age who meet certain criteria

For a fuller explanation of survivors benefits, please check out the Social Security Administration's website of www.socialsecurity.gov.



Retired Overseas- Do You Still Need Medicare Part B?

Medicare insurance isn't for everyone. Medicare does not pay for medical expenses overseas. Therefore, if you've retired overseas and do not plan to spend time in the United States on a regular basis, you might want to consider terminating Part B of Medicare. You'll be saving yourself \$88.50 per month. If you are not sure whether you have Part B of Medicare, check your Medicare card. It will show whether or not you are enrolled in Part B of Medicare.

On the other hand, if you visit the U.S. on a regular basis, you may wish to keep your Medicare Part B coverage. Once you terminate coverage, you can only re-enroll between January and March (this is known as a General Enrollment Period). Your coverage won't begin until July of the year you re-enroll and there will be a penalty increase in your premiums. If you have TriCare coverage from the U.S. Military, Medicare Part B coverage is mandatory. For more information, please call the Federal Benefits Unit at the Embassy in London at 0207 499 9000 from 8:30am – 1:00pm; select option 2 (American Citizen Services) and then choose option 6 (Pensions) or email us at IN.GB.FSP.LONDON@ssa.gov.

Don't Be Scammed

In recent months the U.S. Embassy in London has received a number of calls and emails from American citizens who are the potential or actual victims of "advance fee" scams. These take several forms.

Most commonly, a person receives an unsolicited email or letter informing them they've won a large sum of money from the lottery, inherited money from a long-lost and now-deceased distant relative, or been chosen as the facilitator for moving unclaimed government money out of a third country. In each type of case, a "processing fee" or "good faith deposit," substantially smaller than the promised riches, must be paid before access to the money can be granted. If a person pays the fee, usually by wire transfer, the scammer will sometimes attempt to elicit more money from the victim, or just cease all contact and disappear. To avoid becoming a victim of this kind of trick, remember: if it appears to be too good to be true, it very likely is. Also note that nearly all official U.S. government websites and email addresses end with ".gov".

A variant scam arises from contact with a person masquerading as a U.S. citizen who claims to be in distress. The person "can't get help" from the local Embassy, Consulate or other authorities and need money for treatment/to pay a fine/to get back to the U.S. If you encounter such a situation, don't send money; contact the U.S. Embassy or Consulate in the area where the person claims to be and the consular staff there will attempt to help. A couple of useful websites with tips on avoiding these types of scams are the FBI's Internet Crime Complaint Center

(<http://www.ifccfbi.gov/crimeschemes.aspx>), and the UK Office of Fair Trading websites at <http://www.offt.gov.uk/Consumer/Scams/default.htm>.

Problems with the Voting Information Center and world-wide toll free access numbers

The Federal Voting Assistance Program is currently experiencing technical difficulties with the Voting Information Center and worldwide toll-free access numbers. U.S. citizens are encouraged to use the FVAP website, <http://www.fvap.gov>, or contact the program via email at vote@fvap.ncr.gov for information and questions until these technical difficulties are resolved.

Cultural Corner

The U.S. Consulate General occasionally provides partial grants for cultural events which have an American element. Some of the events are free, for others there is a charge. In this quarter, we encourage you to check out: Hollywood International Jazz Festival from June 2-4. For the schedule, which includes a free New Orleans style parade see <http://www.hollywoodjazzfestival.com/>.



Consulate Closure Dates

The Consulate will be closed on the following dates:

Friday, April 14th, Good Friday
Monday, April 17th, Easter Monday
Tuesday, April 18th, Easter Tuesday

Monday, May 1st, May Day
Monday, May 29th, Memorial Day

Contact Information:

American Citizen Services:
02890-386104

For all other inquires, please contact our office via email: consularbelfast@state.gov

In the case of a life or death emergency of an American Citizen, the out-of-hours phone number is 0870- 2385428.