



## American Citizen Newsletter U.S. Consulate General Belfast

**Dear American Community,**

Happy New Year from all of us here at the United States Consulate. A new year and new challenges. There are real opportunities for political progress this month. We continue to urge all parties to seize this chance to reach a lasting political settlement. We also expect visits this quarter from Special Envoy Mitchell Reiss as well as our Ambassadors in Dublin and London, so we'll be busy here at the Consulate. On the fun side, we are looking forward to the Belfast-Nashville Songwriters Festival in February. This annual event highlights the strong musical ties that connect Northern Ireland with Nashville. I know there will be some great entertainment. Finally, be on the lookout for my new column in the Belfast Telegraph. I will be writing from time to time on a wide-range of topics focusing on the work of the Consulate and the ties that connect the United States and Northern Ireland.

Regards,

Dean Pittman  
Consul General

### **American Citizens Must Use U.S. Passports to Enter and Exit the U.S.**

We regularly receive calls from American citizens who have been prevented from boarding U.S.-bound flights because they were attempting to travel with a non-U.S. passport. **All American citizens, including dual nationals, must use their U.S. passport to enter or leave the United States.** The long-standing requirement that American citizens enter and depart the U.S. with a valid U.S. passport is set forth in the Immigration and Nationality Act, Section 215 (b), which states: "... it shall be unlawful for any citizen of the United States to depart from or enter, or attempt to depart from or enter, the United States unless he bears a valid United States passport." An American citizen attempting to travel to the U.S. with a non-U.S. passport will generally be instructed by the airlines to contact the nearest U.S. Embassy/Consulate in order to apply for a U.S. passport. For more information, go to [http://london.usembassy.gov/nireland/ni\\_pass.html](http://london.usembassy.gov/nireland/ni_pass.html).

## Check Your Passport's Validity

Many governments require that your passport be valid for at least 6 months as a condition for entry. We recommend that you check with <http://www.travel.state.gov> for this and other entry requirements well ahead of any planned travel. If you do need to renew your passport, please plan on approximately ten working days from the date of application receipt to receipt of the new passport.

More information can be found at [http://london.usembassy.gov/nireland/ni\\_pass.html](http://london.usembassy.gov/nireland/ni_pass.html).

## Need More Passport Pages?

If your full-validity U.S. passport has not expired yet, but has no blank pages left, we can add additional pages free of charge. For further information see [http://london.usembassy.gov/nireland/ni\\_pass.html](http://london.usembassy.gov/nireland/ni_pass.html).



## Important Information Concerning Notary Services

The American Citizen Services Section at U.S. Consulate General Belfast provides notary services on documents for use in the United States. These documents include, but are not limited to powers of attorney, mortgage and other real estate documents, U.S. savings bonds, and certified copies of U.S. passports. Appointments are available most afternoons, from 1:30 p.m. to 3:30 p.m. The fee for notarial services is

\$30.00 for the first signature, \$20.00 for each additional (payable in US Dollars, Sterling equivalent or credit card).

For Americans sponsoring non-U.S. citizens as immigrants to the United States, the form I-864 Affidavit of Support no longer requires notarization. The forms, which still indicate notarization is required, are being modified to note this change.

The Consulate is unable to certify or authenticate U.S. academic credentials or diplomas. For information on the appropriate process for having them authenticated, visit [http://london.usembassy.gov/cons\\_new/cs/scs/hague.html](http://london.usembassy.gov/cons_new/cs/scs/hague.html) (if the credentials are to be used in a country that is signatory to the Hague Convention on legalization of documents, such as the UK) or [http://london.usembassy.gov/cons\\_new/cs/scs/non-hague.html](http://london.usembassy.gov/cons_new/cs/scs/non-hague.html) (for those countries that are not signatories), or the State Department's webpage on this process:

[http://travel.state.gov/law/info/info\\_606.html](http://travel.state.gov/law/info/info_606.html). The UK Educational Advisory Service, part of the Fulbright Commission, may also be able to provide assistance. For further information, contact them direct at: <http://www.fulbright.co.uk/eas/contact/index.html>.

## New Procedures for Non-Immigrant Visa Processing

Effective December 6, 2006, two new procedures are in place relating to non-immigrant visa processing at the U.S. Consulate General.

- The visa application fee must be paid in advance. Payment must be made by credit card and is

taken by the call center when an appointment is scheduled.

- The DS-156 form **MUST** be completed online prior to arriving at the U.S. Consulate General for an interview. The paper version must be cleanly printed and must be scannable. Applicant will be directed to area internet cafes, if the DS-156 is not scannable.

The U.S. Consulate General in Belfast is **not** open for walk-in visa enquiries. For comprehensive **Belfast-specific** visa processing information, please go to our website, available at: <http://london.usembassy.gov/nireland/ni-visa.html>. You may contact a live operator by telephoning our call center at 09042-450100 for information or to make an appointment. The lines are open Monday through Friday between 8:00am and 8:00pm, and on Saturday between 9:00am and 4:00pm. The service is not available on British public **holidays**. Calls are charged at £1.20/min from BT landlines. Some mobile and network providers may charge more. This number can only be dialed from within the UK.

Callers from **within the United States** who wish to obtain information and schedule an appointment should dial 1-866-382-3589. Callers are charged a fixed rate of \$16.00 for up to 7 minutes which is payable by credit or debit card (MasterCard, American Express or Visa but NOT Visa Electron). Please ensure that you have your credit or debit card details available when making the call. You will not be charged for the call until payment has been taken.



## Update on Security Procedures at UK Airports

On November 6, 2006, the Department for Transport announced an update to the UK's aviation security measures for flights departing from UK airports.

Some liquids are now allowed through airport security checkpoints, though there are still restrictions on the quantity allowed. Passengers may carry small quantities of liquids, but only within separate containers. Each container's capacity can not be greater than 100ml. These containers must be brought to the airport contained in a single, transparent, re-sealable plastic bag, which itself must not exceed 1 litre in capacity (approximately 20cms x 20cms). The contents of the plastic bag must fit comfortably and the bag must be sealed. Each passenger may carry only one such bag of liquids. The bag must be presented for examination at the airport security point.

Liquids that can not be placed inside the re-sealable bag must be packed into the hold luggage and checked in. Liquids of any amount can still be carried in luggage checked into the aircraft hold. Remember that "Liquids" includes:

- All drinks, including water, soup, syrups;
- Creams, lotions, oils, perfumes, mascara, etc.;
- Sprays and pressurized containers including shaving foam and spray deodorants;
- Pastes, including toothpastes;

- Gels, including hair and shower gel;
  - Any other solutions and items of similar consistency.
- Essential medicines and baby food may be permitted in larger quantities above the 100ml limit, but will be subject to authentication.

For further information, visit Department of Transport’s website at <http://www.dft.gov.uk> , or Belfast International Airport at <http://www.belfastairport.com>, and Belfast City Airport at <http://www.belfastcityairport.com>.



### Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative Air Rule

Travelers in North and South America should familiarize themselves with new rules that will take effect soon pursuant to the Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative (WHTI). **Beginning January 23, 2007**, all persons, including U.S. Citizens, **traveling by air** between the United States and Canada, Mexico, Central and South America, the Caribbean, and Bermuda will be required to present a valid passport, Air NEXUS card, or U.S. Coast Guard Merchant Mariner Document.

**As early as January 1, 2008**, all persons, including U.S. Citizens, traveling between the U.S. and Canada, Mexico, Central and South America, the Caribbean, and Bermuda **by land or sea (including ferries)**, may be required to present a valid passport or other documents as determined by the Department of Homeland Security. While recent legislative changes permit

a later deadline, the Department of State and Homeland Security are working to meet all requirements as soon as possible. Ample advance notice will be provided to enable the public to obtain passports or passport cards for land/see entries. For more information, go to [http://travel.state.gov/travel/cbpmc/cbpmc\\_2223.html](http://travel.state.gov/travel/cbpmc/cbpmc_2223.html).

### Avian Influenza: How to Prepare for “Sheltering-In-Place”

Health professionals are concerned that the continued spread of a highly pathogenic avian influenza (H5N1) virus among animals in Asia, Africa, the Middle East and Europe has the potential to significantly threaten human health. If a virus such as H5N1 mutates and spreads easily from one person to another, avian influenza may break out globally. While there are **no reports of sustained human-to-human transmission** of avian influenza, the U.S. government and international health agencies are preparing for a possible pandemic.

Depending on the severity of a pandemic, commercial airlines might drastically curtail or even cease operations. Travel restrictions could also impede people from returning to the United States or fleeing to other countries. For these reasons, it may make more sense to **“shelter-in-place”** (i.e., stay home and practice “social distancing” to avoid contagion) for an appropriate period of time.

**United States Residents:** The Department of Health and Human Services suggests that **US residents** prepare **two weeks** of emergency

supplies (food, water, medicines, etc.) in order to **shelter-in-place** during an influenza pandemic.

**American Citizens Abroad:** Due to varying conditions overseas, **Americans abroad** should evaluate their situation and prepare emergency supplies accordingly (non-perishable food, potable water, medicines, etc.) for the possibility of **sheltering-in-place** for **at least two and up to twelve weeks**. Water purification techniques such as boiling, filtering and/or adding chlorine to locally available rainwater, swimming pools, lakes, rivers and wells may replace the need to store large quantities of water.

**What can you do on a daily basis?** Cover your cough. Wash your hands regularly with soap and water for at least 20 seconds to eradicate viruses **and** bacteria or apply a hand sanitizer with a minimum of 60% alcohol content when soap and water are not available. Stay home if you are sick. Vaccinate yourself against seasonal flu.

**Travel:** American citizens living in or traveling to countries with human or animal cases of H5N1 virus should consider the **potential risks**. Keep informed of the latest medical guidance and practical information and plan accordingly. Consult [www.travel.state.gov](http://www.travel.state.gov) for the latest tips on international travel.

**On-Line Resources:** Detailed information about suggested preparations, as well as planning checklists, are available on the U.S. government's one-stop web site on pandemic influenza ([www.pandemicflu.gov](http://www.pandemicflu.gov)), also the World

Health Organization ([www.who.int/en/](http://www.who.int/en/)) and the Centers for Disease Control ([www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov)) websites.



### Internal Revenue Service – News and Information

**Changes to the Foreign Earned Income Exclusion:** There are three changes in the law which are effective for taxable years after December 31, 2005:

- The foreign earned income exclusion is indexed to U.S. inflation as of the 2006 tax year. U.S. taxpayers abroad will owe no tax on the first \$82,400 of earned income.
- The exclusion for housing allowance is capped at \$11,586. However, adjustments are allowed for geographic differences in housing costs. The information was published on October 23, 2006 in Notice 2006-87 (see: <http://www.irs.gov>).
- There is a change in the tax treatment of foreign income and ordinary income from U.S. sources (not including capital gains and qualified dividends). The income is taxed at rates that would apply if the exclusion did not exist. For further information on this, refer to the 2006 edition of IRS Publication 54, also available at <http://www.irs.gov>.

**IRS Announces Online Payment Agreement Application:** On October 16, the IRS announced the establishment of its Online Payment Agreement (OPA) application, accessible via <http://www.irs.gov>. OPA allows most

individuals with delinquent federal tax liabilities to apply for and set up installment agreements online and receive immediate notification of approval. This new tool will streamline the process for taxpayers and their representatives, reduce paperwork for the IRS, and encourage people to resolve their tax debts voluntarily before they become bigger problems.

It is projected that over 90 percent of taxpayers who qualify for a payment agreement will be able to initiate the agreement and secure approval via the Internet. In addition, OPA is designed to educate users, encourage electronic payments, and reduce taxpayer burden. For further information, go to <http://www.irs.gov>.

**IRS Email Phishing Scam:** Following a recent increase in scam e-mails, the Internal Revenue Service is reminding taxpayers to be on the lookout for bogus e-mails claiming to be from the IRS. The IRS does not send out unsolicited e-mails asking for personal information. The current scams claim to come from the IRS, tell recipients that they are due a federal tax refund, and direct them to a Web site that appears to be a genuine IRS site. The site asks for personal information such as PIN numbers, passwords or similar secret access information for their credit cards, bank or other financial accounts. Tricking individuals into disclosing their personal and financial information is fraudulent activity which can result in identity theft.

The IRS has established an electronic mailbox for taxpayers to send information about suspicious e-mails they receive which claim to come from

the IRS. Send the information to: [phishing@irs.gov](mailto:phishing@irs.gov).

### FBI Warning of Emails Containing Threats and Extortion

The FBI has recently received information concerning spam emails from "1wayout@myway.com." threatening to assassinate the recipient unless the individual pays several thousand dollars to the sender of the e-mail. The emailer claims to have been following the victim for some time and was supposedly hired to kill the victim by a friend of the victim. The subject threatens to carry out the assassination if the victim goes to the police and requests the victim to respond quickly and provide their telephone number. Remember: providing any personal information can compromise your identity and open you to identity theft. If you have experienced this situation, please notify your local police, and notify the FBI by filing a complaint at <http://www.ic3.gov> . If you're interested in receiving email update when the FBI's Cyber Investigation unit receives news of new email scams, visit their site at: <http://www.fbi.gov/cyberinvest/escams.html>.



### Selective Service

Also all male U.S. citizens who are 18 through 25 are required to register with Selective Service. If you are a male U.S.

citizen age 18 through 25 living outside the United States, you can register online with Selective Service at

<https://www4.sss.gov/regver/foreign1.asp>

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If you are living overseas at an APO or FPO address, please register online at

<https://www4.sss.gov/regver/register1.asp>

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### **Enlisting in the U.S. Army Reserve in Europe**

American citizens resident in Europe, with or without previous military experience, are eligible to enlist in the U.S. Army Reserve (USAR). The 7th Army Reserve Command, headquartered in Schwetzingen, Germany, is comprised of 23 units in Germany and Vicenza, Italy. For information on the time commitment involved, the training and salaries offered, and locations of the various units, visit

[http://www.7arcom.army.mil/join\\_reserve.htm](http://www.7arcom.army.mil/join_reserve.htm).



### **Reporting Crime: New On-Line service**

Certain categories of minor crimes (theft, criminal damage/vandalism, theft from a motor vehicle and damage from a motor vehicle) committed in England, Wales or Northern Ireland can be reported over the internet. In Northern Ireland, go to [www.psnipolice.uk](http://www.psnipolice.uk), click on "Online Notification of Non-Urgent Minor Crimes." This system can only

be used for the crimes specified and as long as an urgent response isn't required.

### **Culture 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:

#### ***Panarts' Nashville Songwriter's Festival – February 21- 25, 2006***

It's the third year of the internationally acclaimed Continental Airlines Nashville Songwriter's Festival and once again more than forty top artists will perform in Belfast over a five-day period. For more information, go to

<http://www.panarts.org.uk/songwriters2007/>.

### **Consulate Closure Dates**

The Consulate will be closed on the following dates:

**Monday, January 15, 2007** – Martin Luther King Jr. Day

**Wednesday, February 7, 2007** – Consular Section Only, Training

**Monday, February 19, 2007** – President's Day

**Monday, March 19, 2007** – St. Patrick's Day

### **Contact Information**

**American Citizen Services:**  
02890-386104

For all other inquires, please contact our office via email:

[consularbelfast@state.gov](mailto: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.**