



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

**Dear Fellow Americans,**

As people here often tell me, we live in interesting times. That has certainly been the case this quarter with the historic agreement between Sinn Fein and the DUP to enter into a power-sharing government on May 8. Northern Ireland has truly turned a page and is now looking squarely towards a more hopeful future. Progress on the political front offers a great opportunity to increase inward investment and tourism in Northern Ireland. The United States hopes to play a role in achieving that. We'll also be looking forward to the Smithsonian Folklife Festival in Washington, DC, this July when Northern Ireland will be featured. This will be a once in the life time opportunity for Northern Ireland to show off all it has to offer to the millions of tourists who will be in Washington during our Independence Day festivities. With so much good news coming out of Northern Ireland, this year is the perfect time for people to "rediscover" Northern Ireland.

Dean Pittman  
Consul General

### **Northern Ireland at the Smithsonian Folklife Festival**

The Smithsonian Folklife Festival is an international exposition of living cultural heritage annually produced outdoors on the National Mall of the United States in Washington, D.C., by the Smithsonian Institution's Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage. Since its inception in 1967, this free festival has featured the traditions of over 90 countries.

This summer from June 27 – July 1 and July 4-8, the Folklife Festival will feature the cultural wealth and diversity of Northern Ireland, the Mekong River and the Roots of Virginia Culture. Many of Northern Ireland's finest performers, artists, storytellers, crafts peoples, cooks and workers will be at the Festival to help explain, demonstrate and celebrate the culture of Northern Ireland. We encourage all who will be in the area to visit what will be a great event!

For more details, visit  
[http://www.folklife.si.edu/festival/2007/Northern\\_Ireland/index.html](http://www.folklife.si.edu/festival/2007/Northern_Ireland/index.html)

For security reasons we ask that **visitors to the U.S. Consulate General in Belfast** do not bring mobile phones or any electronic devices, such as Blackberries, iPods, or PDAs. Please do not bring large bags, such as backpacks, suitcases or packages. These items are not allowed on Consulate General grounds. Visitors who do not follow these instructions may experience considerable delays at the security check point.



## Keeping You and Your Passport Safe

During the summer tourist season, lost passports are a common problem for travelers. Visitors to Northern Ireland should take steps to ensure the safety of their U.S. passports. Visitors in England, Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland, and Gibraltar are not expected to produce identity documents for police authorities and thus may secure their passports in hotel safes or residences. The need to carry a passport to cash traveler's checks is also minimized by an abundance of ATMs able to access systems widely used in the U.S. and offering more favorable rates of exchange.

No matter where you're traveling this summer, be sure to read up on security, infrastructure and U.S. government services in your destination country by checking the State Department's Consular Information Sheet (CIS), available for every country in the world on-line at [http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis\\_pa\\_tw/cis/cis\\_1765.html](http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis_pa_tw/cis/cis_1765.html). Each CIS contains a general country description, entry/exit requirements, safety and security information, an outline of available medical facilities, traffic and aviation infrastructure and security, and contact information for the U.S. Embassy/U.S. Consulates in that country. A link is available to any current travel warnings associated with that country.

Even if you've already registered as resident overseas, you should update

your registration record with any travel you intend to make to other foreign countries. If you chose a username and password when you registered at <https://travelregistration.state.gov>, then you can log in and add a short-term itinerary for your vacation plans. If you didn't, you can register at the same site as a short-term traveler, providing your emergency contact information to the U.S. Embassy or Consulate in your destination country.

For further information on international travel and passports, go to the State Department website: <http://travel.state.gov>



## Hurricane Season – Know Before You Go

Hurricane season runs from the beginning of June to the end of November. The past several years have seen an overall increase in the quantity and intensity of hurricanes in the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans, the Caribbean Sea, and the Gulf of Mexico. American citizens considering travel to storm-prone regions during hurricane season should carefully consider the potential dangers and inconveniences associated with their travel before finalizing plans. Those who choose to travel should devise an emergency plan in advance of their departure. Even inland areas far from the coastline can experience destructive winds, tornadoes, and floods from tropical storms and hurricanes. For more information and a

useful traveler’s checklist check out “Hurricane Season – Know Before You Go” available at [http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis\\_pa\\_tw/hurricane\\_season/hurricane\\_season\\_2915.html](http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis_pa_tw/hurricane_season/hurricane_season_2915.html).



### Useful Tips from The State Department



**One Parent Traveling with Children -** Many governments have initiated procedures at entry and exit points to prevent international child abduction, including requiring documentary evidence of relationship and permission of the parent(s) or legal guardian not present for the child's travel. Having such documentation on hand, even if not required, may facilitate entry and departure.

**A Note on Wills -** To avoid the risk of violating foreign laws, if you own property or other assets both in the United States and overseas, consider having two wills drawn up. One should be prepared according to the legal system of the U.S. and the other according to the legal system of the other country in which you have property. Each will should mention the other. Having two wills should ensure that your foreign property is disposed of in accordance with your wishes in the event of your death.

For more tips for Americans residing abroad, visit: [http://www.travel.state.gov/travel/living/residing/residing\\_1235.html](http://www.travel.state.gov/travel/living/residing/residing_1235.html).

**How to Get a U.S. Criminal Record Check -** Individuals often contact the Consulate General for assistance in obtaining a U.S. criminal record check because they have previously resided in the U.S. The Consulate General cannot perform this service, but there are several options available, including contacting the local police where you lived in the U.S., and/or contacting the FBI. For more information, see: [http://www.travel.state.gov/travel/tips/emergencies/emergencies\\_1201.html](http://www.travel.state.gov/travel/tips/emergencies/emergencies_1201.html).



### Filing Immigration Petitions for Family Members in the UK

Immigration of family members requires the U.S. citizen petitioner to file the Form I-130, Petition for Alien Relative, on behalf of the non- American citizen family member. Generally, when the petitioner resides in the U.S., the petition is filed with the appropriate U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) Service Center in the United States. The USCIS Sub-Office at the U.S. Embassy in London accepts I-130 petitions from U.S. citizens who reside in the UK. A U.S. citizen whose principal residence is not in the UK, **and/or** who has entered the UK as a temporary visitor/student/or with limited leave to enter and remain in the UK, must file a petition with the appropriate

USCIS Service Center in the United States.

If you wish to file an I-130 with the London USCIS Sub-Office you must include one of the following:

- a photocopy of the leave to remain stamp in the petitioner's passport and a photocopy of the page of U.S. passport
- a letter from the Home Office confirming the petitioner's status in the United Kingdom;
- a copy of the petitioner's orders if he/she is a member of the U.S. military stationed in the United Kingdom.

More information about filing a petition can be found at:

<http://london.usembassy.gov/dhs/uscis/i130filing.html>.

### Avian Flu

For information and answers to frequently asked questions regarding Avian Influenza and Pandemic Influenza check out the State Department website: [http://travel.state.gov/travel/tips/health/health\\_1181.html](http://travel.state.gov/travel/tips/health/health_1181.html)



### International Financial Scams Brochure at

<http://www.travel.state.gov>

The Department of State's Bureau of Consular Affairs (CA) has now posted a brochure on many types of advance fee scams in which fraudsters disguise themselves in order to illicit funds, on its travel website at:

[http://www.travel.state.gov/travel/cis\\_paw/financial\\_scams/financial\\_scams\\_3155.html](http://www.travel.state.gov/travel/cis_paw/financial_scams/financial_scams_3155.html). The brochure contains

information on scams seen at Embassies and Consulates around the world, tips on some steps to avoid becoming a victim, and things to do if you think you've been victimized. It also includes an important reminder: if you've been contacted by someone you don't know claiming to be an American in distress overseas, don't send them money. Direct them to the Embassy or Consulate nearest them or to the Department of State for assistance (if they say they've tried and been refused assistance, it is very likely a scam).

Embassy London's February newsletter reported on such an email scam in which an emailer claims to have been hired to kill the email recipient, but will call off the contract of the recipient will pay up. A new twist on this "hitman" email scam has surfaced: the emails claim to come from the FBI and are informing the recipient that an individual arrested in London had the recipients name on their "hit list." The recipient is advised to contact the FBI in London. Remember: providing any personal information can compromise your identity and open you to identity theft. If you have experienced such a scam, please notify your local police and notify the FBI by filing a complaint at <http://www.ic3.gov>



### **USA Patriot Act and Access to US Bank Accounts While Overseas**

The Department of State has been contacted by numerous individuals alleging that, under the USA PATRIOT Act, their U.S. bank accounts have been closed or that they have been prohibited from opening an account due to foreign citizenship or a foreign address.

We would like to highlight that the USA PATRIOT Act does **not** prohibit foreign citizens or individuals with foreign residences from opening or maintaining a U.S. bank account.

The USA PATRIOT Act does require financial institutions to complete enhanced security procedures in certain circumstances. For example, under Section 326 of the Act, financial institutions must implement reasonable procedures for: (1) verifying the identity of any person seeking to open an account; (2) maintaining records of the information used to verify the person's identity and; (3) determining whether the person appears on any list of known or suspect terrorists or terrorist organizations.

If your U.S. bank has advised you that it is necessary to close your U.S. account because you are living overseas, please contact the Consulate in writing. The State Department may be able to assist you in clarifying the requirements of the USA PATRIOT Act to your bank

### **Tax Season is Here!**

Tax time is upon us. To check due dates and deadlines, go to the Embassy London's Internal Revenue Service (IRS) site at <http://london.usembassy.gov/irs/irsdue.htm>.

#### ***Speaking of Taxes: IRS Waives Estimated Tax Penalty***

The IRS recently announced that it will waive the Estimated Tax Penalty for US citizens or residents living and working abroad. This is due to the fact that the law governing the foreign earned income exclusion and housing exclusion was changed in May 2006. Because these changes are retroactive to the beginning of the taxable year 2006, persons relying on the law as it was may have underpaid their estimated 2006 tax liabilities. The IRS will waive the estimated tax penalty to the extent that the underpayment of tax is attributable to the changes in the foreign earned income and housing exclusion changes enacted in May 2006. The waiver is only available to qualified individuals who file a Form 2555 or Form 2555-EZ, Foreign Earned Income Exclusion with their timely filed Form 1040, US Individual Income Tax Return.

#### ***Speaking of Taxes: Are My Social Security Benefits Taxable?***

The answer is that it depends on your income. Your benefits are tax free, if your modified adjusted gross income (AGI), plus one-half of your Social Security benefits is below the base amount of (1) \$25,000, if single or (2) \$32,000, if married and filing a joint tax return.

If you are over the threshold, then the calculation gets more complicated. If your modified adjusted gross income exceeds the threshold, then up to 85% of your Social Security benefits are taxable. Modified AGI is the sum of your adjusted gross income (excluding Social Security benefits), tax-exempt interest, any amounts of excluded foreign earned income or housing, and any interest excluded from gross income because qualified US Series EE bonds were redeemed to pay qualified education expenses.



***U.S. Tax Obligations for Green Card Holders***

Many U.S. citizens in the UK are married to UK citizens who are now, or who have been in the past, legal permanent residents of the United States (LPRs or green card holders).

The IRS office in London has provided the following basic information on U.S. tax liability for current or former LPRs:

If you have a U.S. green card, you are a lawful permanent resident of the U.S. even if you live abroad. This means you are treated as a U.S. resident for U.S. income tax purposes and you are subject to U.S. tax on your worldwide income from whatever source derived. Accordingly, you must file a U.S. tax return unless (a) there has been a final administrative or judicial determination that your lawful permanent resident status has been revoked or abandoned, (b) your gross income from worldwide

sources is less than the amounts that require a tax return to be filed, or (c) your U.S. residence status is affected by an income tax treaty.

- **What if my green card has been taken by or given to someone in the US government?** If you have surrendered your green card, this doesn't necessarily mean that your status as a lawful permanent resident has changed. Your status will not change unless and until you get an official notice from the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Service (USCIS) that there has been a final administrative or judicial determination that your green card has been revoked or abandoned. You can contact the USCIS to check the status of your card.
- **What if I have been absent from the U.S. for a long period of time?** Your tax responsibilities as a green card holder do not change if you are absent from the U.S. for any period of time. Your income tax filing requirement and possible obligation to pay U.S. taxes continue until you either surrender your green card or there has been a final administrative or judicial determination that your green card has been revoked or abandoned. Therefore, even if the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Service (USCIS) no longer recognizes the validity of your green card because you have been absent from the United States for a certain period of time

or the green card is more than ten years old, you must continue to file tax returns until there has been a final determination that is not subject to appeal that your green card has been revoked or abandoned.

- **What if I haven't filed prior U.S Income Tax Returns?** If you have not filed a U.S. income tax return for one or more years and there is no tax liability for any of those years, you should file returns for the current year and two prior years. However, if you have not filed a U.S. income tax return for one or more years and any income tax is due for any of those years, you should file returns for the current year and five previous years.

For more information on any of these subjects, go to the IRS website at <http://www.irs.gov>. You may also contact the IRS office at the London Embassy with specific questions at <http://london.usembassy.gov/irs/index.htm>. The phone number is 0207 894 0477 and is available Monday-Friday, 9:00 am to 12:00 noon.



### Time to File for Medicare

In the good old days, life was simpler. At age 65, one could file for Social Security retirement benefits and Medicare at the same time. Since 2003, the age to receive full retirement benefits has started to rise. Thus, many individuals have decided to wait until after age 65 to contact the Embassy

London's Federal Benefits Unit. In some instances this could be a mistake.

The initial enrollment period for filing for Medicare is a seven month window. It consists of the three month period before age 65, the month of attaining age 65 as well as the three month period after age 65. In other words, an individual, who has 40 quarters of Social Security coverage (i.e. fully insured), is eligible for Medicare at age 65 even though the age to draw benefits full benefits may be many months away.

Those who visit the United States frequently or for extended periods of time or plan to repatriate back to the United States should seriously consider filing for Medicare during their initial enrollment period. Medicare Part A is free to fully insured individuals. Part A helps pay for inpatient care in a hospital or skilled nursing facility (following a hospital stay). Part B of Medicare is optional. It costs \$93.50 per month and helps pay for doctor's services and supplies that are not covered under hospital insurance. For more complete information about Medicare please visit <http://www.medicare.gov>.



### Department of Homeland Security's Traveler Redress Inquiry Program (DHS TRIP)

For those of you with family members who might be experiencing problems entering the U.S., the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) announced

the launch of the Traveler Redress Inquiry Program (DHS TRIP) on February 20, 2007. It provides a single point of contact for individuals who have inquiries or seek resolution regarding difficulties they experienced during their travel screening at transportation hubs, including being denied or delayed airline boarding; denied or delayed entry into or exit from the United States at a port of entry; or continuous referral for additional screening.

For more information, go to the Department of Homeland Security website at: [http://www.dhs.gov/xtrvlsec/programs/gc\\_1169676919316.shtm](http://www.dhs.gov/xtrvlsec/programs/gc_1169676919316.shtm)



### Closure Dates

The Consulate will be closed on the following dates:  
**Monday, May 7, 2007** - May Day  
**Monday, May 28, 2007** - Memorial Day  
**Wednesday, July 4, 2007** – Independence Day  
**Thursday, July 12 & Friday, July 13, 2007** – Orangeman’s Day



### 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:

***Belfast/Nashville Sister City Event - June 2007*** – Belfast will be welcoming Mayor Purcell of Nashville for a Civic Visit in June 2007 and a high profile public concert will be held on 29<sup>th</sup> June to celebrate the 200<sup>th</sup> Anniversary and Sister City Link. Details will be announced in May at [www.belfastcity.gov.uk](http://www.belfastcity.gov.uk).

### 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**