

# Danesfort Dispatches

A Quarterly Newsletter from the U.S. Consulate General Belfast

April 2008



Vol. 3, Issue 2

Dear American Community,

March was a busy month for the Consulate highlighted by St. Patrick's Day. I traveled to Washington DC to participate in the Saint Patrick's Day celebrations hosted by President Bush at the White House. With the new shared government in Northern Ireland, this year's White House events focused not only on the work of the political leaders but also the accomplishments of individuals involved in policing and justice, cross-border community activities, and economic development. President Bush announced that he would send a

Presidential Delegation to Northern Ireland in May to represent him at the International Investment Conference sponsored by the Northern Ireland Executive. Addressing a capacity crowd of politicians, diplomats, and leading Irish-Americans, the President said that he wanted to send, "a clear signal that we're interested in investment opportunities." The President also expressed his support for the devolution of policing and justice. The White House festivities, including a bilateral meeting with Prime Minister of Ireland Bertie Ahern, were the culmination of a week-long series of events in Washington D.C. that I attended. The events included a lunch on Capitol Hill hosted by Speaker Pelosi, a dinner hosted by the British Embassy, a reception hosted by Irish Embassy, and a breakfast organized by the Northern Ireland Bureau. It was a productive and successful week.



*Northern Ireland delegates outside the White House*

April is going to be even busier than March as we assist the Northern Ireland Executive in the preparations for the International Investment Conference that will be held in Belfast, May 7-9. Representatives from more than 40 U.S. and Canadian businesses will participate in the event which will present Northern Ireland as a great place to do business. Special Envoy Paula Dobriansky, U.S. Ambassador to the United Kingdom Robert Tuttle, and U.S. Ambassador to the Republic of Ireland Thomas Foley will be part of the Presidential Delegation attending the events. U.K. Prime Minister Gordon Brown will be the keynote speaker and New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg will also participate in the events. We anticipate that the conference will be three exciting days of information and activities highlighting the economic potential of Northern Ireland. I look forward to sharing more with you in the next newsletter on what I know will be a great conference.

Regards,

Susan Elliott,  
Consul General

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## Economic Stimulus from the U.S. Federal Government

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President Bush signed an economic stimulus bill on February 13, 2008 which will result in stimulus payments to over 130 million individuals starting in May 2008. The following is information on who may be eligible for the payment and how to file:

### Did you receive Social Security Benefits last year? What About Disability Compensation, Pension or Survivors' Benefits from the Department of Veterans Affairs?

Even if you are not otherwise required to file a tax return, you may still be entitled to an economic stimulus payment from the federal government. You could receive a payment of \$300.00 for individuals, or \$600.00 if you are married and file a joint tax return with your spouse. Eligible taxpayers who qualify for a payment may receive an additional \$300.00 for each qualifying child. To qualify, a child must be under age 17 as of December 31, 2007. This payment will not effect the amount of Social Security (SSA) or Veterans Affairs (VA) benefit you receive, and will not be taxable next year.

All you have to do to get the stimulus payment is file a 2007 IRS form 1040 or Form 1040A and report at least \$3,000.00 in qualifying income on the form. You can include the amount of your SSA or VA benefit to qualify for the stimulus payment.

In response to initiative, the IRS has developed the Tax Package 1040A-3, "Information About Economic Stimulus Payments for Social Security, Veterans, and Other Beneficiaries." The IRS will mail approximately 500,000 of these packets to individuals living outside the United States.

For more detailed information about the Economic Stimulus Plan visit the Economic Stimulus Payments Information Center on the IRS website at <http://www.irs.gov>. (click on Rebate Questions)

## UK Announces New Budget

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The UK Government budget was released on March 12, 2008. The Chancellor announced that the proposed non-domicile tax change will take effect in April as proposed in the pre-budget report and consultation paper. No further details were outlined nor was there mention on the credibility of the new taxes against U.S. tax liabilities. The Chancellor did announce that there will be no further changes during the next two Parliaments.

For comprehensive budget information, go to <http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/budget>.

For more information on UK residents and domicile tax issues, go to:

[http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/consultations\\_and\\_legislation/residence\\_domicile/consult\\_residence\\_domicile.cfm](http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/consultations_and_legislation/residence_domicile/consult_residence_domicile.cfm).

## Prepare for Summer Vacation

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**Air Travel Preparedness** - With the summer travel season upon us, air travelers are urged to plan ahead for security procedures at the airport. Because of the heavy passenger traffic expected throughout the summer, the U.S. Transportation Security Administration (TSA) advises those traveling to and within the U.S. to adhere to the latest TSA regulations to minimize delays and quicken the screening process. Following a few simple guidelines will help make your summer travel as stress-free as possible. The TSA have a helpful checklist at to <http://www.tsa.gov/travelers/airtravel/simplifly.shtm> suggesting the most efficient way to get through security screening.

**Visas to the U.S** - Do your summer travel plans include visiting the United States with a non-American family member or friend? If the answer is yes, your traveling companions should review the most up-to-date information about the Visa Waiver Program (VWP) requirements online at the Consulate's website, [http://london.usembassy.gov/cons\\_new/visa/niv/vwp.html](http://london.usembassy.gov/cons_new/visa/niv/vwp.html) prior to travel.

Travelers who do not meet the requirements of the VWP for visa-free travel should apply for a visa well in advance of the intended travel date by following the instructions at <http://london.usembassy.gov/nireland/nivisa.html>. The current wait time for a visa appointment at the Consulate is approximately five weeks and this is likely to increase as we enter the busy summer season.

## Election 2008—Register to Vote

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There is still time to register to vote for some State primaries as well as the Presidential election. Pennsylvania's primary is scheduled for April, and Indiana, North Carolina, Nebraska, West Virginia, Arkansas, Kentucky, Oregon, and Idaho are holding their primaries in May.

Each State has its own respective deadline for requesting an absentee ballot. Request your ballot today in order to make your vote count. Even if your State's primary has passed, you should still submit your ballot request so you can receive an absentee ballot to vote in the November 2008 Presidential election.

Please consult your State-specific instructions on the Federal Voting Assistance Program (FVAP) website at <http://www.fvap.gov/pubs/vag.html#ch3> for more information on how to submit your request for an absentee ballot. Remember that many States, but not all, allow for electronic submission (via either fax or e-mail) of the Federal Post Card Application (FPCA) which can be a great time saver.

As always, the U.S. Consulate General stands ready to help guide you through the absentee voter registration process. You can fill out and mail your FPCA by going to voting website at [www.fvap.gov](http://www.fvap.gov) or contact the U.S. Consulate General via email at [consularbelfast@state.gov](mailto:consularbelfast@state.gov).

If you do not have access to the Internet, you can send a written or fax request for a FPCA to: U.S. Consulate General Belfast, American Citizen Services, Danesfort House, 223 Stranmillis Road, Belfast BT9 5GR, fax number 02890 6810301. Please provide your name, full UK mailing address, your current or last State of residence in the United States, and the number of application forms you require. U.S. citizens may also contact the Federal voting ombudsman for help with absentee voting problems and issues. If dialing from the UK, the toll-free number is 0800-169-8035.

## Update: Avian/Pandemic Influenza - Prepare and Stay Healthy

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The U.S. Government recently updated guidance to Americans living, working and/or traveling overseas about how to prepare for a pandemic. Private American citizens should be aware that it may not be possible to travel during an outbreak. Governments may close borders suddenly and without advance warning; commercial air, land and sea carriers could curtail or cancel service; and restricting travel may be the best way to reduce the risk of exposure to the virus. These developments could impede a return to the United States or travel to another country or region. Therefore, Americans who are overseas during a pandemic may need to remain where they are until conditions improve, a situation which could last several months. For further information, please see the State Department website at [http://www.travel.state.gov/travel/tips/health/health\\_1181.html](http://www.travel.state.gov/travel/tips/health/health_1181.html)

Americans overseas should be prepared to take responsibility for their safety and well-being. Please remember that U.S. embassies, consulates and military facilities lack the legal authority, capability and resources to dispense medications, vaccines, or medical care to private American citizens overseas. For information updated daily as well as excellent planning checklists for home, workplace, school, etc. please visit [www.pandemicflu.gov](http://www.pandemicflu.gov)

## Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative - Final Rule

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On March 27, 2008 the Department of State and Department of Homeland Security (DHS) announced the final rule for the land and sea portion of the Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative (WHTI), a core 9/11 Commission recommendation. The WHTI final rule requires travelers to present a passport or other approved secure document denoting citizenship and identity for all land and sea travel into the United States. WHTI establishes document requirements for travelers entering the United States who were previously exempt, including citizens of the U.S., Canada and Bermuda. These document requirements will be effective June 1, 2009. DHS is publishing the WHTI land and sea final rule more than a year in advance of its implementation to give the public ample notice and time to obtain the WHTI-compliant documents they will need to enter or re-enter the United States on or after June 1, 2009. The Department of State is

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## Spotlight : Passport Renewals for Adults

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You may renew your passport by mail in the following circumstances:

- You are 18 years of age or more; and
- your most recent passport was issued when you were at least 16 years of age; and
- your most recent passport was issued within the last 15 years; and
- you are recognizable from the photograph in the expired/expiring passport; and
- your most recent passport was not limited, i.e., it was issued for its full validity; and
- you are able to submit the passport with the application; and
- you are not requesting a change in the passport data (other than a name change through marriage where you must submit the original or a certified copy (not a photocopy) of your marriage certificate).

If you are eligible to apply for passport renewal by mail, gather the following items:

- Completed application form DS-82 ([http://London.usembassy.gov/cons\\_new/acs/forms/DS-82.pdf](http://London.usembassy.gov/cons_new/acs/forms/DS-82.pdf)); and
- Two passport photographs that conform to required specifications ([http://London.usembassy.gov/cons\\_new/acs/passports/ni\\_photographers.pdf](http://London.usembassy.gov/cons_new/acs/passports/ni_photographers.pdf))
- The expired or expiring passport; and
- The fee for passport renewal by mail is \$75. You may submit a bank draft, an international money order in dollars made payable to the "U.S. Disbursing Officer" or a completed and signed Credit Card Authorization Form ([http://London.usembassy.gov/nireland/ni\\_passport\\_fee.pdf](http://London.usembassy.gov/nireland/ni_passport_fee.pdf)) and
- A self-address, prepaid Royal Mail Special Delivery envelope for the return of your passport.

Send the documents by Royal Mail Special Delivery envelope to:

Passport Services  
U.S. Consulate General  
Danesfort House  
223 Stranmillis Road  
Belfast, BT9 5GR

Allow a minimum of ten working days for passport processing.

You may also renew your passport by applying in person:

To schedule an appointment to submit the above application in person, please telephone 02890-386104 or email [consularbelfast@state.gov](mailto:consularbelfast@state.gov).



## Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative - Continued

(Continued from page 3)

already accepting application for the new Passport Card and additional states and Canadian provinces will be issuing WHTI-compliant Enhanced Driver's Licenses (EDLs) in the next several months— all of which are options specifically designed for land and sea border use.

Upon implementation of WHTI, travelers will be required to present a single WHTI-compliant document denoting both citizenship and identity when seeking entry into the United States through a land or sea border. This will enable Customs and Border Protection officers to quickly and accurately identify travelers at port of entry.

Specific information on documentation requirements may be found at <http://www.cbp.gov/xp/cgov/travel/vacation/>.

For general information on WHTI or other travel-related programs visit [www.travel.state.gov](http://www.travel.state.gov) or [www.dhs.gov](http://www.dhs.gov).

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## American Citizen Services - FAQ's

*Q. I am eligible to acquire British citizenship. Can I hold both a British and a U.S. passport?*

The concept of dual nationality means that a person is a citizen of two countries at the same time. Each country has its own citizenship laws based on its own policy. Persons may have dual nationality by automatic operation of different laws rather than by choice. For example, a child born in a foreign country to U.S. citizen parents may be both a U.S. citizen and a citizen of the country of birth.

A U.S. citizen may acquire foreign citizenship by marriage, or a person naturalized as a U.S. citizen may not lose the citizenship of the country of birth. U.S. law does not mention dual nationality or require a person to choose one citizenship or another. Also, a person who is automatically granted another citizenship does not risk losing U.S. citizenship. However, a person who acquires a foreign citizenship by applying for it may lose U.S. citizenship. In order to lose U.S. citizenship, the law requires that the person must apply for the foreign citizenship voluntarily, by free choice, and **with the intention to give up U.S. citizenship**.

Intent can be shown by the person's statements or conduct. The U.S. Government recognizes that dual nationality exists but does not encourage it as a matter of policy because of the problems it may cause. Claims of other countries on dual national U.S. citizens may conflict with U.S. law, and dual nationality may limit U.S. Government efforts to assist citizens abroad. The country where a dual national is located generally has a stronger claim to that person's allegiance.

However, dual nationals owe allegiance to both the United States and the foreign country. They are required to obey the laws of both countries. Either country has the right to enforce its laws, particularly if the person later travels there. Most U.S. citizens, including dual nationals, must use a U.S. passport to enter and leave the United States. Dual nationals may also be required by the foreign country to use its passport to enter and leave that country. Use of the foreign passport does not endanger U.S. citizenship. Most countries permit a person to renounce or otherwise lose citizenship.

Information on losing foreign citizenship can be obtained from the foreign country's embassy and consulates in the United States. Americans can renounce U.S. citizenship in the proper form at U.S. embassies and consulates abroad.

Information flyers on related subject and exceptions to these rules are available via the Department of State, Bureau of Consular Affairs home page on the internet at <http://www.travel.state.gov>. These flyers include:

Advice About Possible Loss of U.S. Citizenship And Seeking Public Office in a Foreign State -

([http://www.travel.state.gov/law/citizenship/citizenship\\_779.html](http://www.travel.state.gov/law/citizenship/citizenship_779.html))

Advice About Possible Loss of U.S. Citizenship And Foreign Military Service -

([http://www.travel.state.gov/law/citizenship/citizenship\\_780.html](http://www.travel.state.gov/law/citizenship/citizenship_780.html))

Renunciation of United States Citizenship -

([http://www.travel.state.gov/law/citizenship/citizenship\\_776.html](http://www.travel.state.gov/law/citizenship/citizenship_776.html))

## Social Security and You

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The U.S. Social Security program provides insurance against the loss of income due to retirement, death or disability. The U.S. system is relatively new compared to many European national pension systems.

The Social Security system was created in 1935 and has since undergone many changes. Several significant events in history have shaped it such as population shifts from the countryside into big cities, longer life expectancy and the steady decline in the practice of extended families. Lastly, it's a fact that more and more workers are spending their careers in more than one country.

To become eligible for a Social Security benefits, a worker generally has to work at least 10 years in the United States. However, social security agencies from around the world have recognized that there are a growing number of workers who have spent their careers working in more than one country. Thus, many of these workers have found that they do not qualify for benefits under the normal rules. For this group of workers, social security agencies have entered into "totalization agreements" whereby each country can use another country's work record to qualify the worker for benefits from one or both countries. For a list of countries that have an agreement with the United States please go to <http://www.ssa.gov/international/status.html>

For workers who fall under the totalization agreement, only 1 ½ years of work in the United States is needed to qualify for benefits. In addition, the worker's spouse and young children, under certain conditions, may also qualify for benefits. Lastly, the worker and/or dependents do not have to be U.S. citizens to qualify for benefits. For further information or to apply for benefits, contact the Federal Benefits Unit, Embassy London at 0207 499 9000, option 2, then option 6.

## U.S. Tax Refunds and Direct Deposits

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Whether you file electronically or on paper, direct deposit gives you faster access to your refund than a paper check. To request direct deposit of your refund into one account, enter your bank or financial institution's nine-digit routing number and your account number on the direct deposit line of your tax return. If you do not have these numbers or are unsure of them, contact your bank or financial institution. (A word of caution: Some financial institutions do not allow a joint refund to be deposited into an individual account. Check with your bank or financial institution to make sure your direct deposit will be accepted.) With split refunds, you have a convenient option for managing your money — sending some of your refund to an account for immediate use and some for future savings. Use Form 8888, Direct Deposit of Refund to More Than One Account, to divide your refund among two or three different accounts. Note: If you fail to request direct deposit on your return, you will receive your refund as a paper check in the mail. Go to <http://www.irs.gov> for more information.

## Postmarks for Mailing to the Internal Revenue Service (IRS)

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Federal tax returns, claims for refund, and other documents mailed to the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) are treated as filed on the date of the domestic or foreign postmark. However, payments are not considered as made until the date of actual receipt rather than the postmark date. This includes payments submitted with tax returns. Accordingly, you should take this into consideration when mailing a payment to the IRS in order to avoid late payment penalties and interest charges.

Payments for 2007: Most international taxpayers who owe tax on their 2007 return pay by check, money order or credit card. You may not pay by cash. Checks or money orders must be issued in U.S. dollars and made payable to the "United States Treasury." Credit card payments may be made using any major credit card, including Visa, Mastercard, and American Express, through the following providers:

Official Payments Corporation (<http://www.officialpayments.com>) - 1-800-272-9829 or 1-877-754-4413

Links2Gov Corporation (<http://www.pay1040.com>) - 1-888-729-1040 or 1-888-658-5465

For more information on this any many other tax issues, go to <http://www.irs.gov> or contact the IRS office at Embassy London at 0207-894-0477 Monday through Friday from 9:00 am to 12:00 noon.

## Earth Day 2008



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In 1970, Gaylord Nelson, a United States Senator from Wisconsin, called for an environmental teach-in or Earth Day in light of widespread environmental degradation he witnessed around him, such as cities buried under their own smog and polluted rivers catching fire. On April 22, 1970, 20 million people across America celebrated the first Earth Day. Now Earth Day is celebrated annually around the globe. Through the combined efforts of the U.S. government, grassroots organizations, and citizens around the world, what started as a day of national environmental recognition has evolved into a world-wide campaign to protect our global environment.

Learn about the history of Earth Day on the U.S. Government Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) web-site at <http://www.epa.gov/earthday/history.htm>. The EPA's Earth Day Web site <http://www.epa.gov/EarthDay/> offers you many tips and fun ways to protect the environment and your health every day.

Other resources on Earth Day and the importance of environmental issues can be found at:

<http://www.EarthDay.gov> - a cooperative effort across the U.S. Government highlighting ways to protect our environment.

<http://ww2.earthday.net> - Founded by the organizers of the first Earth Day in 1970, Earth Day Network (EDN) promotes environmental citizenship and year round progressive action worldwide.



## 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. This quarter, we encourage you to check out:

***Belfast Film Festival - April 10-19, 2008*** - Belfast Film festival has been at the forefront in championing cultural film exhibitions in Northern Ireland. The festival is now one of the key annual events in the city. Each year a range of films, speakers and seminars provide a platform for debate and engagement between diverse sections of the audience. For program information and a schedule of events go to <http://www.belfastfilmfestival.org>.

***18th Annual Holywood International Jazz Festival - June 7-8, 2008*** - This year's program looks set to hit all the right notes. The best of jazz and swing will descend on the County Down town in a weekend of fun for everyone. Go to <http://www.hollywoodjazzfestival.com> for more information

### American Citizen Services:

**In the event of a genuine emergency involving a U.S. Citizen in Northern Ireland, our after-hours phone number is 0870 238 5428.**

## Consular Closure Dates

The U.S. Consulate General will be closed on the following dates:

Monday, May 5, 2008 - May Day Holiday

Monday, May 26, 2008 - Memorial Day/Spring Bank Holiday

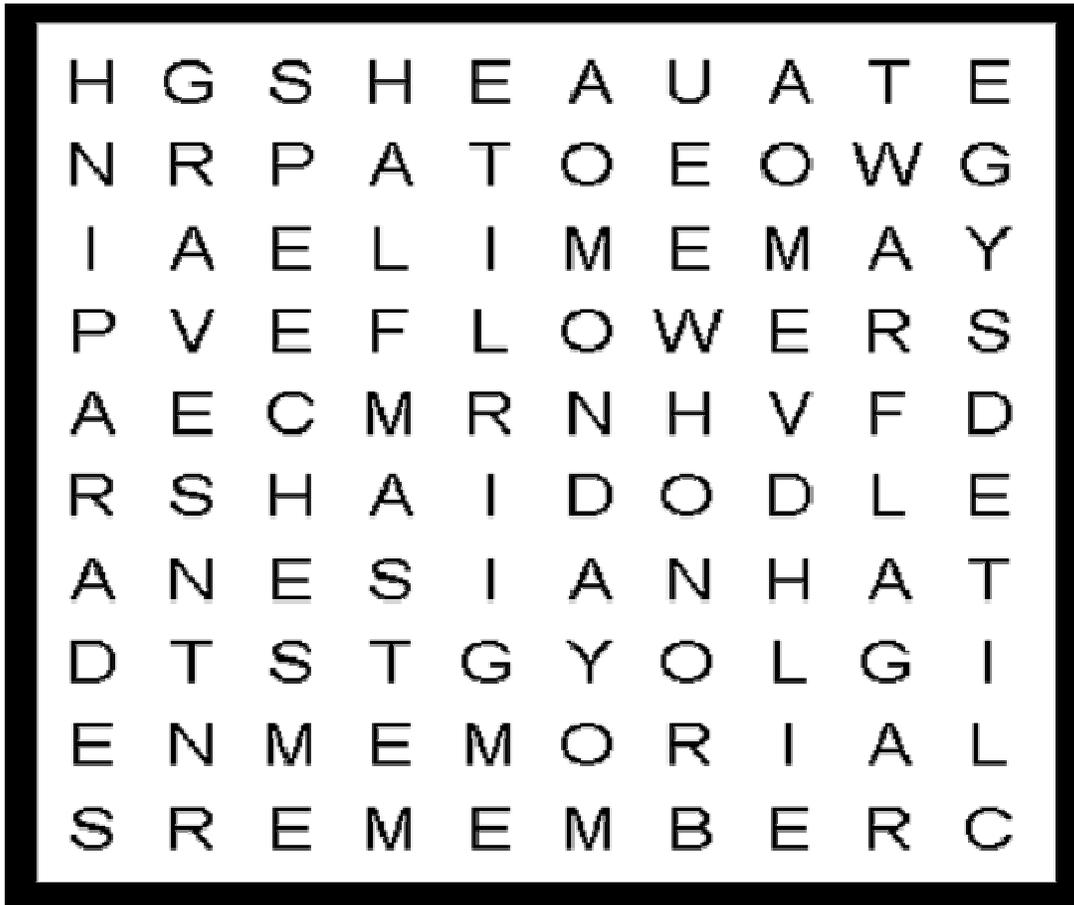
Friday, July 4, 2008 - Independence Day

Monday, July 14, 2008 - Orangeman's Day

Tuesday, July 15, 2008 - Orangeman's Day

# Kids Corner

## Memorial Day Kids Word Search



MAY	MONDAY	PARADES	GRAVES
FLAG	MEMORIAL	REMEMBER	HONOR
WAR	FLOWERS	SPEECHES	HALFMAST