

**Webchat Moderator:** The U.S. Consulate in Guangzhou invites you to an online discussion with Anne Debevoise and Conrad Wong who will discuss the topic of Overseas Voting Assistance with audiences in the Guangzhou Consular District (Guangdong, Guangxi, Fujian, Hainan).

**Webchat Moderator:** To submit a question, type into the space provided below.

**Webchat Moderator:** We are about to start the discussion. Anne and Conrad, Welcome!

**ACS Officer Anne Debevoise:** Hi everyone! We're here to answer any questions you have about voting overseas, especially in the November presidential election. I work in the American Citizen Services section of the consulate.

**IPR Officer Conrad Wong:** Good afternoon! My name is Conrad Wong. I serve as one of the officers here at the U.S. Consulate, as the Intellectual Property Rights Officer. Feel free to ask questions about voting from overseas.

**Ding Hua:** What form should I fill out to register to vote?

**ACS Officer Anne Debevoise:** It's a pretty straightforward process. The first step is to fill out the Federal Postcard Application—it's the only form you need, both to register to vote and to request an absentee ballot. Then you send it by mail to your local election office. You can come into the consulate to pick up a paper version and we'll mail it in free of charge for you. Or you can download the form on the Federal Voting Assistance program website, at [www.fvap.gov](http://www.fvap.gov), print it out, and mail it in yourself. Once they've received and approved your application, your local elections office will mail you an absentee ballot. When you get the absentee ballot, you fill it out and return it by mail. The consulate can mail it for you postage-free using military mail, or you can mail it yourself using China Post or another service.

**Tabatha Nikita:** Can I register on line?

**ACS Officer Anne Debevoise:** Tabatha, you can find an online version of the registration form at [www.fvap.gov](http://www.fvap.gov), but you still need to print it out from the website and mail it in. Some states will let you fax or email it if you're getting close to the registration deadline, so check your state's requirements on the FVAP website. But even if you fax or email it, you will still need to follow up by mailing in the hard copy with your signature.

**Jack Lee:** If I have never registered with your office, can your office still help with my voting this time?

**IPR Officer Conrad Wong:** First, I would start by completing the Federal Postcard Application, which allows you to request an absentee ballot. Go to [www.fvap.gov](http://www.fvap.gov). Then, mail it to your election office.

**xxx:** We live in Hainan. We registered in Colorado and have verified that registration. WHEN should we expect to receive our ballots, mailed to our Chinese address? Thanks.

**ACS Officer Anne Debevoise:** You should double-check with your elections office, but most elections offices mail out absentee ballots 30-45 days before the election. So given that it takes a few weeks to get mail from the US, you should expect that you'll get your ballot pretty close to Election Day. The important thing is that you get your ballot postmarked and mailed in before your state's deadline-- every state has different deadlines so check the FVAP website for Colorado's.

**Regina:** What is the latest I can register to vote? How does that work?

**ACS Officer Anne Debevoise:** Each state has its own deadline for registering, so be sure to check for your state's deadline. You can find the deadlines for every state at [www.fvap.gov](http://www.fvap.gov). For the November election, most states have registration deadlines in October for civilians living overseas—but it's a good idea to register as soon as possible, given the length of time needed to send mail to and from China. The Federal Voting Assistance Program recommends doing it at least 45 days before the election, but there's no time like the present!

**brian reilly:** It's irritating that the login instructions for this webchat are displayed in Chinese. Three years ago, my wife and I registered in King County, Washington State for what they called "submarine ballots". We have never received a ballot in the mail. King County elections has never responded to my email questions. What are the chances of our getting a ballot for the November elections?

**IPR Officer Conrad Wong:** Hi, Brian. I just answered a very similar question from Mr. Jack Lee. The website [www.fvap.gov](http://www.fvap.gov) contains a lot of information about absentee voting. You can click on your state, and it will give you specific instructions that your state has written. Another alternative is to inquire about the specific web site for your electoral board, in your case, King County, Washington, and determine what exactly they require you to do in terms of registering for an absentee ballot. As you know, requirements vary from state to state. You could give the King County electoral board a call to, though I know that it is a 15-hour time difference. My experience with my home jurisdiction of Arlington County, Virginia is that they are very responsive to e-mail inquiries. I would give the King County electoral-board folks another try.

**Regina:** How can you assure me my voting information will be properly counted i.e. no problems with losing my ballot?

**ACS Officer Anne Debevoise:** Regina, if you're worried about your ballot getting lost in the mail, your best bet is to bring it into the Consulate in Guangzhou. We're happy to mail it for you using APO/FPO mail. After it gets to the US, then it's up to your elections officials to make sure it gets counted...

**Regina:** Is electronic ballot an option for overseas voters?

**ACS Officer Anne Debevoise:** Thanks for all the questions, Regina! Some states will let you email or fax in your absentee ballot, which is known as electronic transmission. If your state allows that, and you want to do it because you're

concerned about missing the voting deadline, that's a great solution. But you still have to follow up by mailing in the hard copy. Keep in mind that if you send your absentee ballot by fax or email, you are waiving your right to privacy, because you have to fill out and sign a cover sheet. Be sure to check your state's requirements on the FVAP website first. There's a section called "Electronic Transmission," and it includes a toll-free fax number you can use from China if you want to fax your ballot.

**brian reilly:** We are registered voters and have requested absentee ballots in the past and never received one. King County elections in Washington State website will not process absentee ballot requests until 90 days before an election. I have no confidence I will receive an absentee ballot from King County based on past experience. Do I have any other options for voting, or do I just miss another election?

**IPR Officer Conrad Wong:** Brian, ask King County if they will send your ballot electronically, so that you can print it out, mark it, then return it by mail. That is how I am receiving my ballot from Arlington County, Virginia. As my colleague Anne Debevoise points out, if you're concerned about your ballot being lost in the mail, bring it to the Consulate in Guangzhou. We will mail it via the military mail service.

**Jenny Ng:** I am leaving to China on July 5th 2008. I need to get a single paper to marry my husband in China

**ACS Officer Anne Debevoise:** Hi Jenny, you can come to the American Citizen Services unit at the consulate in Guangzhou to get a single statement notarized. We're open Monday-Friday, 9:00 to 11:30 AM and 1:30 to 3:00 PM. You can make a free appointment on the consulate's website.

**Nora Yang:** I was registered to vote in the US last time I was living there, but that's been quite a few years. How do I find out if I'm still registered?

**IPR Officer Conrad Wong:** Nora: I would send an inquiry by e-mail to your local electoral board to determine whether you are still registered in your last-known jurisdiction. Note: For privacy reasons, they may not accept an e-mail inquiry, and you may need to submit the inquiry in writing. If you are not still registered, go to [www.fvap.gov](http://www.fvap.gov), and complete the application to register to vote and a request for an absentee ballot.

**Jade W.:** My daughter Jasmine was born in China, but she is an American citizen. Can she be elected president?

**ACS Officer Anne Debevoise:** Hi Jade, the Constitution says you need to be a "natural-born citizen" of the United States in order to be President. This is generally understood to mean that you were a citizen at birth. There are two ways to be a natural-born citizen: you can be born on U.S. soil, or you can be born abroad, but be eligible for US citizenship because one or both of your parents are US citizens. For example, John McCain was born in the Panama Canal Zone, outside of US territory,

but he's considered to be a natural-born citizen because both of his parents were American citizens and he was eligible for American citizenship from birth. So if your daughter was born in China and then later immigrated to the US and became a naturalized American, unfortunately she's not eligible to be President. But if she was born in China, and one of her biological parents is an American citizen, and she was eligible for a US passport from birth because of your citizenship--then she's a natural-born citizen and can be elected president as soon as she turns 35 years old!

**Wang Xing Dong:** Hello. I don't have a home in the States anymore-- I moved to China and my whole life is here now. I don't own any property in the US, and probably I'll never move back there. Am I still eligible to vote? If so, what state would I vote in?

**IPR Officer Conrad Wong:** Good afternoon. I would go to [www.fvap.gov](http://www.fvap.gov), and complete the federal post-card application, which allows you to register to vote and request an absentee ballot. The application will request your last legal residence in the U.S., so you should be prepared to have this information. Whichever state in which you last lived would be the state in which you would be registered to vote.

**brian reilly:** Okay, I will try again, but after three years of failure I don't hold out much hope. Ballots mailed by the military mail service have been rejected in some states for the lack of an official postmark. The military has had problems getting overseas ballots counted for numerous reasons, and this has been the subject of several Congressional investigations.

**ACS Officer Anne Debevoise:** Brian, I understand your concern about your ballot getting there and getting counted. Conrad and I are both planning to send in our ballots by FPO mail--and mail sent FPO from Guangzhou does have an official postmark. I hope you're able to bring in your absentee ballot to the consulate to be mailed in. Or perhaps you could use an express mail service if you'd be more comfortable doing that.

**GZLucy:** Hi, I've always voted in California--but I'm going to be in Guangzhou for this election and I'm afraid they have my old mailing address on file. How do I change it to my Guangzhou address?

**ACS Officer Anne Debevoise:** Lucy, you can just submit a Federal Postcard Application. That way you're killing two birds with one stone: you'll make sure you're still registered, and also that the elections office has the right mailing address for your absentee ballot.

**Lynne:** Hi, I am living in Taishan. Can I come into the consulate on election day to vote?

**ACS Officer Anne Debevoise:** Yes, Lynne, but only if you've already registered to vote and requested an absentee ballot, and the ballot never arrived. In that case, you can come to the consulate, either on Election Day or before, and fill out a Federal Write-In Absentee Ballot. But bear in mind: this will only work if you've already

registered to vote and requested an absentee ballot, and you never got the ballot.

**Rachel:** Can I drop off voter registration form at the Consulate? And are there going to be any election events at the consulate?

**IPR Officer Conrad Wong:** Hi, Rachel. Yes, you can bring in your voter-registration form to the Consulate. We will mail it, free of charge, for you. As for election-related events, the Consulate is planning on holding events that coincide with the five presidential debates and possibly other events as well. Please check the Public Affairs Section web site for updated information.

**Cutey Zhang:** So we can use the same form to apply for the absentee ballot no matter what state we vote in?

**ACS Officer Anne Debevoise:** Yes, the Federal Postcard Application form works to register to vote in any state. But you have to mail it in to your local elections office. You can find their mailing address on the FVAP website.

**brian reilly:** I'd be more than happy to come to Guangzhou and meet you fine folks if I can indeed obtain an absentee ballot. It would be well worth the train ride from Nanning. Thanks for your optimism!

**IPR Officer Conrad Wong:** Try going to the [www.fvap.gov](http://www.fvap.gov) website first, so that you don't have to schlepp over to Guangzhou, unless you want to do so. I printed information from that site in preparation for today's webchat, and it contains a fair amount of information. For that site, you can click on your specific state to obtain detailed information and requirements for Washington State. By the way, I was just in Nanning last week. Guangxi Province is beautiful. The air is much cleaner, and it is so verdant and green out there.

**Kathleen:** I'm an English teacher in Nanning and want to vote in the election--but the mail in China is so slow and unreliable! I'm really afraid I won't get my ballot in time. What should I do if it never shows up?

**ACS Officer Anne Debevoise:** Kathleen, you're not the only one worried about mailing ballots! If you've already registered and requested an absentee ballot before your state's deadline, and you haven't gotten the absentee ballot two weeks before the election—then you can still vote, using the Federal Write-In Absentee Ballot. You can get a paper version of the FWAB at the consulate, fill it out, and we can mail it in for you free of charge. Or you can get an online version on the [www.fvap.gov](http://www.fvap.gov) website, print it out, fill it in, and mail it. If it's getting really close to your state's deadline, check to see if you can fax or email it.

**Circle:** Is there any deadline for my ballot to be received in the US to be counted for the election?

**IPR Officer Conrad Wong:** Circle, the deadline for receipt of a ballot varies from state to state. In Virginia, my home voting jurisdiction, an absentee ballot must be received by 7:00 p.m. on Election Day. Polls across the Commonwealth of Virginia

close at the exact same time: 7:00 p.m. Check with your state's elections board to determine when the ballot must be received in order to be counted.

**Linda Poon:** I heard that after next week American citizens will have to make appointment to visit the consulate. Is that true?

**ACS Officer Anne Debevoise:** Hi Linda, that's right. For routine things like renewing your passport, adding visa pages, and getting documents notarized, starting on Monday the 14th you'll need to make an appointment. It's pretty quick, and you can do it online on our website. If you have an emergency, though, like a stolen passport, you can still come in without an appointment.

**IPR Officer Conrad Wong:** To all: From 2004 to 2006, I served as a poll worker and election judge in Arlington County, Virginia. I can tell you, first-hand, that election workers really try very hard to ensure that everyone is able to vote, so long as the person is properly registered. Even when people's voting registration was lapsed, we allowed people to vote provisional ballots, so that, if the person's residency could be proven, his or her vote would be counted. It isn't a perfect system, trying to keep track of hundreds of thousands of voters in my one precinct, let alone across an entire state. Still, I witnessed first-hand, over a number of years, the professionalism and dedication of Virginia's electoral boards. Remember too, election workers usually are your neighbors, who allocate one day out of the year to make sure that our voting franchise is properly conducted. The system isn't perfect, but it really does work.

**ACS Officer Anne Debevoise:** We're out of time for now. Thanks for all your questions! If you have any other concerns, please feel free to call or email American Citizen Services, or drop by--no appointment is needed to register to vote! I also want to encourage everyone to register as American citizens living in our consular district. You can do that on our website-- and if you give us your email address we'll send you updates on security issues in our area and other news about the consulate. It's also really important in case of an emergency like the Sichuan earthquake to have an accurate list of the Americans living in our district, so we can reach everyone and make sure they're safe. So please register with us! Have a good afternoon.