

A Letter From Douglass Benning, U.S. Consul General in Honduras

The Consular Section here at Embassy Tegucigalpa recently took a day off from our usual work to step back and look at an important issue for us: communication. This “Consular Leadership Day,” as we call it, gave us the chance to unplug for a few hours to see how we help others understand our mission, and how we listen to each other to encourage innovation in our work. We talked a lot about some things we’re doing right, like sending out a periodic newsletter like this one and our recent webchats on American issues and Immigrant Visas, worked on our internal communication styles and strategies, and came up with some ideas for how we can get information out to you better.



Douglass Benning, Consul General

To keep our lines of communication open with the American community here, we’ll be holding more American “Town Hall” meetings, more webchats for Americans, and passing messages via our wardens on the big issue of the year: absentee voting. In this newsletter you’ll find important information on how to register to vote during this year’s election, and how to cast your vote for the candidate of your choice. Remember: living abroad is not a reason not to exercise your democratic right to vote! You can find all the information you need, including a schedule of primaries and other important dates, at the FVAP website, www.fvap.gov, including a list of frequently asked voting questions at <http://www.fvap.gov/pubs/faq.html>. If you run into difficulties with registration, our American Citizens Services (ACS) staff can help you out. Just send us an email at usahonduras@state.gov with your questions. Or you can contact the U.S. voting ombudsman via phone at (703) 693-5527 or 1-800-438-VOTE (8683) (not toll-free from Honduras).

One question that might be put to the ombudsman is “what if I’ve never lived anywhere in the U.S. before?” Since voter registration is usually based on your last place of residence in the U.S., problems arise for Americans born abroad who’ve never lived in the country. Currently, only 16 states have provisions for such a situation (see <http://www.fvap.gov/vao/citnvrinus.html> for the list), usually basing registration on the last place the voter’s parents lived. But local election officials in any state can allow registration in individual cases based on many factors, so, if you’re in this situation, don’t let an initial “no” discourage you. Even if you’re unsuccessful this election, the more lobbying done with U.S. state governments, the more likely a state law change will be implemented before the next election.

Finally, please take our offer to include input from you for this newsletter seriously. As Supreme Court Chief Justice John Marshall once said, “To listen well is as powerful a means of communication...as to talk well,” so we’re listening. The American community here in Honduras is diverse, vibrant, and full of tips for living here. So give us your ideas for articles, write a letter for us to include, and let us know what issues are important to you.

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Next
American Citizen
Town Hall Meeting
to be held on
April 10 at the
Twisted Tanya’s
Restaurant
at Barrio El Centro,
Copan Ruinas

Voting Information for American Citizens

Presidential Primary Election Season Still in Process

Many states have already held their primary elections for the upcoming presidential election. Be sure to check the list below to see if your state is one of the remaining states that has yet to hold its primary.

REGISTERING TO VOTE AND REQUESTING A BALLOT:

If you have not done so, all members of the U.S. Uniformed Services and their family members and citizens residing outside the U.S. should request a ballot by completing and submitting a registration and ballot request a Federal Post Card Application (FPCA), SF-76, as soon as possible. The online version of the FPCA is available from the FVAP website at www.fvap.gov/pubs/onlinefpc.html.

REMAINING EARLY PRIMARY ELECTIONS:

The following are the states that have yet to hold Primary elections in 2008:

Pennsylvania	April 22, 2008	Oregon	May 20, 2008
Indiana	May 6, 2008	Idaho	May 27, 2008
North Carolina	May 6, 2008	Montana	June 3, 2008
Nebraska	May 13, 2008	New Mexico (R)	June 3, 2008
West Virginia	May 13, 2008	South Dakota	June 3, 2008
Kentucky	May 20, 2008		

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:

The FVAP can be contacted via 1-800-438-8683. Citizens may reach the FVAP toll-free from 67 countries using the toll-free numbers listed on the FVAP website, www.fvap.gov.

Questions regarding the above may also be referred to the Director, Federal Voting Assistance Program, Department of Defense, 1155 Defense Pentagon, Washington DC 20301-1155, and email at

vote@fvap.ncr.gov.

Federal Voting Assistance Program

Absentee Ballot

THE FEDERAL WRITE-IN ABSENTEE BALLOT (FWAB)

The most common barrier that citizens covered under the Uniformed and Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting Act (UOCAVA) encounter when voting absentee is insufficient ballot transit time. Many citizens are located in remote areas around the world where mail is not delivered or picked up on a regular basis (such as sailors and marines aboard ship, and Peace Corps workers, missionaries, airmen, sailors and soldiers at remote sites).

The FWAB is pre-positioned overseas as a "back-up" ballot should a citizen not receive his or her regular ballot from the state or territory in enough time to meet state deadlines for counting. Under federal provisions, a U.S. citizen may use the Federal Write-In Absentee Ballot to vote for federal offices in the general election if that citizen meets all three of the following conditions:

1. The citizen must be either an absent uniformed services voter absent from his/her voting residence or be a citizen outside the U.S.
2. The citizen must make a timely ballot request, and submit the FPCA or other state accepted form to their state of legal voting residence requesting a state absentee ballot. The appropriate Local Election Official receives their request at least 30 days before the election or before the ballot request deadline, whichever is later.
3. The citizen has not received the regular state absentee ballot.

HOW TO USE THE FWAB

If eligible to use this ballot, the citizen may indicate their election choices for federal offices in the general election. To vote this blank write-in ballot, citizens may vote for a candidate by writing in the candidate's name or writing in the name of a party affiliation (if the intention of a voter can be ascertained, the candidate/party choices will be accepted). The FWAB is similar to the regular state

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Voting Information for American Citizens

Absentee Ballot cont'd.

absentee ballot as it includes a security envelope and a mailing envelope.

Complete the voter's declaration/affirmation according to the instruction on the front cover sheet, sign, date and include witness if needed by your state. Vote the official federal write-in ballot by writing in the candidate's name or political party designation. Some states permit you to vote for other offices in the space provided. Place only the voted ballot in the security envelope and seal.

FWABs are available worldwide at U.S. embassies and consulates, military installations and overseas organizations and corporations with U.S. citizens.

Contributed by the Federal Voting Assistance Program

Important Update: Changes to the FVAP

The Federal Voting Assistance Program (FVAP) has added a series of new features to the FVAP website, the first of which was launched in December of 2007. These new features help facilitate the absentee voting process for military and overseas citizens through the use of electronic solutions.

The first feature, made available this past December, is an automated version of FPCA tailored to state-specific requirements and guide users through the process of completing and submitting the form. In addition, this new feature allows voters to securely transmit the completed form to their local election office through a Department of Defense server.

This spring, in preparation for the 2008 General Election, the FVAP will be adding two additional features to the FVAP website. The first will allow the local official to provide a blank ballot to the voter through the secure Department of Defense server, and the second will allow citizens to digitally sign their FPCA.

The FVAP can be contacted via 1-800-438-8683 and by using the toll-free numbers from 67 countries listed on the FVAP website, www.fvap.gov. Questions regarding the above may also be referred to the Director, Federal Voting Assistance Program, Department of Defense, 1155 Defense Pentagon, Washington, DC, 20301-1155, and at vote@fvap.ncr.gov.

Federal Voting Assistance Program

The Embassy would like to remind all American visitors and residents in Honduras to register with the Embassy at:
<http://travel.state.gov>

Security Update

Given steady increase in the reported cases of armed robberies, muggings, murders, and other violent crimes throughout Honduras, the Regional Security Office has offered the following safety tips:

- Be aware of your surroundings at all times. Awareness is not about being fearful or paranoid; rather, it is about anticipating the probability of violence before it happens.
- Constantly scan your surroundings. Be cognizant of what/who is around you. Be especially wary when stopped in traffic or when entering/leaving your home.
- Be ready to take evasive action. The sooner you detect and recognize a threat, the more options you have to respond to it and the more successful your actions are likely to be.
- Always be suspicious of two persons on a motorcycle. Robberies by criminals on motorcycles (usually two men on one bike) have been a common problem throughout Tegucigalpa and San Pedro Sula. Do not openly display cell-phones, cameras, i-pods, or anything else of value while in public. If walking in the streets with valuable items in plain view, you will be a target.
- Keep a low profile - Do not carry large sums of cash; Do not wear expensive jewelry or watches.
- If your security awareness is not enough to avoid trouble and you do find yourself face to face with would-be robbers – do NOT resist. Give them what they want. In most cases, robbers simply want your cell phone and money. Give it to them. Do not risk your life by refusing the demands of an armed assailant.

For additional general security information and tips: <http://honduras.usembassy.gov/english/mission/sections/RSO/index.htm>.

Contributed by: RSO

Honduran Permanent Residency and Special Permanent Residency

U.S. citizens who wish to live legally in Honduras for extended periods must receive permission from the Honduran government. There are two options: **Permanent Residency** and **Special Permanent Residency**. The Ministry of Government and Justice (Secretaria de Gobernacion y Justicia) is the Honduran governmental entity that oversees immigration issues (<http://www.gobernacion.gob.hn>).

Remember, foreigners who are in the country illegally can be subject to fines or other penalties and may be denied the right to leave until those penalties are satisfied.

Permanent Residency is available for people who wish to live in Honduras for the long term. Special Permanent Residency is for those people who are in Honduras for a limited amount of time and for a specific reason, like employment or missionary work.

On the U.S. Citizen Services webpage, we have detailed a few of the requirements to obtain residency, but we caution you that obtaining residency can be a complicated and lengthy process.

To be successful, we recommend the following:

- 1) Hire a Honduran lawyer with expertise and experience in residency requirements.
- 2) Make sure all of the required documents are in order before submitting your residency request. Delays in gathering the documents may result in having your petition dismissed and you will have to start over.
- 3) All supporting documents need to be translated into Spanish. Official documents from U.S. governmental agencies need to be authenticated (through apostilles) in the U.S.
- 4) Initiate the process in Honduras. Applications are only accepted in Tegucigalpa, the capital of Honduras. Some Honduran consulates in the states may offer some residency services, but generally the work has to be redone. For more information please visit <http://honduras.usembassy.gov> and click on the U.S. Citizens services link. Information regarding Honduran Permanent Residency and Special Permanent Residency is located under the section entitled General Information.

For more information regarding Honduran Permanent Residency and Special Permanent Residency, please visit <http://honduras.usembassy.gov> and click on the U.S. Citizens services link. Information is located under the section entitled General Information.

Contributed by: American Accent Staff

Seeking Warden Volunteers Around Honduras

As part of our effort to serve citizens living or traveling abroad, the U.S. Embassy has a warden system to assist us, especially in times of emergencies. Wardens are volunteers who are designated to serve the particular geographic zone where they live. In these days of cell phones and email, we are able to communicate easily when needed with most of the registered Americans in the country. However, when there is an emergency, either a natural disaster or a personal crisis, we look to the wardens for help.

We are proud to say that over the past year over thirty American citizens around Honduras have volunteered to serve their communities as wardens. We are encouraged by this turnout, and are hoping to continue to recruit more volunteers in coming month:

Within their communities, the Embassy may ask a warden to:

- Forward messages from family members who have lost contact with an American citizen living in Honduras.
- Check on the welfare of citizens in their region during natural disasters or other times of crisis.
- Notify the Embassy of American citizens who are in need of assistance.
- Assist the Embassy in communicating important information or warnings.

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Seeking Warden Volunteers cont'd.

The American Embassy is looking for volunteers who:

- ✓ Are American citizens over the age of 21
- ✓ Have access to an e-mail account and a telephone
- ✓ Willing to help a fellow American citizen

We are especially looking for volunteers in **Puerto Cortes, Tela, and Siguatepeque**

Interested volunteers should contact the American Citizen Services Unit at:
usahonduras@state.gov

While we are very excited by the number of volunteers we have recently received, we are still looking for more volunteers. We are particularly interested in American citizens living in the under-represented areas of Puerto Cortes, Tela, and Siguatepeque.

Americans citizens, over the age of 21, who live in these areas and are eager to help the American citizen community can e-mail usahonduras@state.gov to volunteer.

Contributed by the American Citizen Services Unit



Upcoming Holidays

Please Note: The Consular Section will be closed all day on:

- **April 14 Day of the Americas**
- **May 1 Honduran Labor day**
- **May 26 U.S. Memorial Day**

Routine American citizen services will not be available on these days. Only emergency services will be provided. Visa services will be closed all day.

FYI: Please be aware that the Consular Section is closed to the public every first Tuesday of the month for administrative purposes.

American Accent is Seeking Reader Input

We continue to hope that through this newsletter, Americans can stay in better contact with the Embassy and the rest of the American community throughout Honduras. In our effort to improve this newsletter and make it more useful to our American community, the *American Accent* staff is seeking your submissions of:

Letters to the Editor: In order to more adequately address the concerns that members of the American community have, we welcome contributions to the "Letters to the Editor" section of the newsletter. Any American who has questions or concerns that they think could also benefit the American community as a whole, are encouraged to submit letters. The *American Accent* staff will try to print and respond to those letters that deal with issues affecting the entire American community.

Organizational Profiles: In past editions we have highlighted a number of charity and non-profit organizations through which Americans are working to assist Honduras. We welcome other organizations to submit a short (150-300 word) description of their group to the newsletter. In each future edition, we will highlight a different group.

Other Articles: If you have another topic that you believe would be of interest to the American community, feel free to submit your ideas to the *American Accent* staff. Articles should be between 150 to 300 words in length.

Contributed by: American Accent Staff

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Please register with us at:
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