



# Newsletter for American Citizens in Norway

5th Edition

April 2012

## What's Inside

2012 U.S Elections  
Page 1

Educate Yourself about  
the Candidates  
and Issues  
Page 2

Is Your Passport Ready  
for Summer Travel?  
Page 2

Ambassador Speaks  
about the Elections  
Page 2

The Social Security  
Number  
Page 3

Mailing your Voting  
Materials to the U.S.  
Page 4

Bringing the Embassy  
to You: Consular  
Service Visits  
Page 4

COLA: Cost of Living  
Adjustments  
Page 4

## Editors Corner:

We welcome your questions or comments about this Newsletter or other topics. We like to hear from you.

Please e-mail us at:  
[osloamcit@state.gov](mailto:osloamcit@state.gov)

## 2012 ELECTIONS-REGISTER NOW



**Be an active voter. Start thinking about your participation in the U.S. 2012 elections today!**

The Consular Section staff at U.S. Embassy Oslo is ready to assist with completing your Federal Post Card Application (FPCA) -- the form you need to complete **this year** to participate in the 2012 elections as an overseas absentee voter.

**New absentee voting laws are in effect for the 2012 elections. You will no longer automatically receive ballots based on a previous absentee ballot request. All U.S. citizens outside the United States who want to vote by absentee ballot in the 2012 primary and general elections must complete a new Federal Post Card Application (FPCA) every year if they wish to vote from abroad. States are now required to send out ballots 45 days before an election. No matter what state you vote in, you can now ask your local election officials to provide your blank ballots to you electronically (by email, internet download, or fax, depending on your state). You can now also confirm your registration and ballot delivery on-line. Be sure to include your email address on the form to take advantage of the electronic ballot delivery option. This is the fastest and most reliable way to receive your ballot on time, and we strongly recommend every overseas voter take advantage of it. Learn more at the Federal Voting Assistance Program's (FVAP) website [www.FVAP.gov](http://www.FVAP.gov).**

You can obtain a Federal Post Card Application (FPCA) at [FVAP's website](http://www.FVAP.gov). The FPCA is accepted by all local election officials in all U.S. states and territories. It allows you to register to vote and request absentee ballots for all elections for federal offices (presidential and state primaries, run-off, special, and the November general elections) during the course of the year. An online wizard will help you complete the form. Depending on your state's voting requirements, you then either send in the FPCA electronically or mail it to your local election officials.

Even if your state does not have a presidential primary in the early months of 2012, it is important that you submit a new Federal Post Card Application this and every January to receive all absentee ballots for which you are eligible. By applying early, you also allow enough time for election officials to contact you and resolve any questions or problems with your registration/ballot request.

Remember that your vote counts, and that many U.S. elections within the past ten years have been decided by a margin of victory of less than 0.1%. All states are required to count every absentee ballot as long as it's valid and reaches local election officials by the absentee ballot receipt deadline.

If you have any questions about registering to vote overseas, please contact U.S. Embassy Oslo's Voting Assistance Officer at 21 30 87 87 (between 3:00-4:30), or at [voteOslo@state.gov](mailto:voteOslo@state.gov).



## Educate Yourself about the Candidates and Issues

Be an Educated Voter. Check out the FVAP links page for helpful resources that will aid your research of candidates and issues. Non-partisan information about candidates, their voting records, and their positions on issues are widely available and easy to obtain via numerous websites such as [Project Smart Voter](#). You can also read national and hometown newspapers on-line, or search the Internet to locate articles and information. For information about election dates and deadlines, subscribe to FVAP's Voting Alerts ([vote@fvap.gov](mailto:vote@fvap.gov)). FVAP also shares Voting Alerts via [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#).



## Is Your Passport Ready for the Summer Holidays?

Get a jump start on the holiday season. Be sure to check the validity of your passport and you family's. Starting in May, processing time will increase. Get your application in early and beat the rush before the summer travel season.

[Please see our website for application instructions.](#)

## Ambassador and Embassy Staff Inform about the U.S. Election



One of the Embassy's main public outreach objectives over the coming year is to inform the Norwegian public about the U.S. Presidential election. After the [Iowa caucus](#) and [New Hampshire primary](#), NRK's morning news TV show Morgennytt interviewed Ambassador White and he explained the U.S. primaries system and the U.S. political landscape.

[Watch the Ambassador on NRK Morgennytt on January 4, 2012 \(18.49 min into the clip\)](#)

[Watch the Ambassador on NRK Morgennytt on January 11, 2012 \(18.52 min into the clip\)](#)

**Are you are interested in an interview, presentation or informal talk with an Embassy representative about the election? Feel free to contact us!**

### Members of the Media:

[oslopress@state.gov](mailto:oslopress@state.gov) / 21308662

### Schools, Universities, Businesses and Organizations:

[osloirc@state.gov](mailto:osloirc@state.gov) / 21308996 (Monday-Friday 14.00 – 16.00)



# The Social Security Number



The Social Security number (SSN) was created to keep an accurate record of each person's Social Security earnings. This is important since benefit payments are based on a person's earnings over their lifetime. There are about one billion possible SSN combinations. Over 466 million SSNs have been assigned since 1936. Approximately 111 million SSNs will never be assigned. These are deemed unusable due to various reasons, such as containing the numbers 666.

There are approximately 420 million unassigned SSNs and the current system will provide enough new numbers for several generations into the future. The Social Security card is not an identification document; it serves only as an official verification of the SSN assigned by the Social Security Administration (SSA) to the person whose name is on the card. The SSN consists of nine digits. The following section describes the significance of the number assigned prior to June 2011:

- The first three digits are the area numbers. They originally indicated the state where the person applied for the SSN. Now they denote the ZIP code in the mailing address on the application. (Note: Immigrants applying for SSNs as part of the immigration process at the time of entry to the U.S. are assigned an SSN from a special "700" series.)

- The middle two digits are the group numbers. They have no special significance, but merely serve to break the numbers into blocks of convenient size.

The last four digits are the serial numbers. They represent a straight numerical progression of assigned numbers. Effective June 2011, SSA is changing the way we assign SSNs. We will assign all numbers randomly from one general pool of SSNs. This is referred to as "randomization." SSN randomization will affect the SSN assignment process in the following ways:

- It will eliminate the geographical significance of the first three digits of the SSN, currently referred to as the area number, by no longer allocating the area numbers for assignment to individuals in specific states.

- It will eliminate the significance of the highest group number and, as a result, the High Group List will be frozen in time and can be used for validation of SSNs issued prior to the randomization implementation date.

Previously unassigned area numbers will be introduced for assignment excluding area numbers 000, 666 and 900-999. There are three types of Social Security cards:

- The card most people have shows only their name and SSN. It is issued to U.S. citizens and non-citizens lawfully admitted for permanent residence to the U.S.

- Cards with the legend, "NOT VALID FOR EMPLOYMENT" are issued to non-citizens without Department of Homeland Security (DHS) work authorization who are entitled to certain federally financed benefits (such as Social Security benefits), or if they are legally in the U.S. and are entitled to a State benefit that requires them to have an SSN to receive the benefit.

Cards with the legend, "VALID FOR WORK ONLY WITH DHS AUTHORIZATION" are issued to non-citizens lawfully admitted to the U.S. with temporary DHS authorization to work.

There is never a charge for a new or replacement Social Security card or Social Security number or to change your name with Social Security. Don't deal with middlemen who offer to get a Social Security card or number or change your name on your Social Security card and records. All Social Security services are available free of charge directly from SSA. Middlemen just delay the process and cost you money!



## U.S. Embassy Assists with Mailing Voting Materials Back Home



Did you know that the U.S. Embassy can assist you with getting your voting materials back to the U.S.A? If you would like for us to fax or mail your voting materials please print out the completed Federal Post Card Application (FPCA) and the U.S. postage-paid envelope containing the address of your local election official and send them to us. You can alternatively bring them to the Embassy if it is more convenient between the hours of 8:30-12:00 and 2:30-3:00. We will mail or fax them back home for you at no cost. If it's easier for you to use Norway's postal system, be sure to affix sufficient postage and allow enough time for international mail delivery. Voting materials can be sent to the U.S. Embassy at: Henrik Ibsens gt. 48, 0224 Oslo. Attention: Voting Officer.

## Bringing the Embassy to You

Each year the U.S. Embassy travels to Stavanger, Bergen and Trondheim to meet with American citizens. The main purpose of these visits is to make it more convenient for parents living far from Oslo to apply for their children's passports and for citizenship. Minor passports applications and Consular Reports of Birth Abroad for children usually require a trip to the Embassy in Oslo for the whole family so that the officer can witness signatures. To make the application process easier we try to make these regional consular service visits as often as we can. This year we have been to Stavanger, Bergen and most recently Trondheim. If you are interested in taking advantage of one of our visits please register with the Embassy on our website through the [STEP program](#).



## Cost of Living Adjustment (COLA)

For the first time in two years, the U.S. Social Security Administration has announced a cost of living increase of 3.6% for its beneficiaries in 2012. Based on the increase in the Consumer Price Index (CPI) from the third quarter of 2008 through the third quarter of 2011, Social Security and Supplemental Security Income (SSI) beneficiaries will receive a 3.6 percent COLA for 2012. Other important 2012 Social Security information is: Employee contributions will be 7.65% for Social Security and Medicare and for the self-employed it will be 15.30% for combined Social Security and Medicare contributions. Maximum Taxable Earnings: For Social Security \$110,100. For Medicare (Hospital Insurance only) NO LIMIT. Quarter of Coverage: In 2012 You will need to earn \$1,130 to gain one Social Security Credit.



For more information visit [www.socialsecurity.gov](http://www.socialsecurity.gov).

For specific information on benefits, please contact Oslo's Federal Benefits Unit at [fbu.oslo@ssa.gov](mailto:fbu.oslo@ssa.gov)