

Red Seas, White Sands, Blue Skies: An American Citizens Services Newsletter

Happy New Year! We hope all of you had a wonderful holiday season and that you have returned safely from your travels. Since January is traditionally a time for evaluating goals and making plans for the new year, this may be a good time to look at any services you may need from your Embassy and take care of them before deadlines are reached or they become an emergency. We offer appointments between 1:00pm and 3:30pm on most business days for a wide variety of services, including first time passports, passport renewals, additional pages for existing passports, notary services, and Consular Reports of Birth Abroad. Appointments can be made online by following this link: <https://evisaforms.state.gov/acs/default.asp?postcode=RID&appcode=1>.

We are planning some events in the new year that may be of interest to you. As we noted in November, we plan to hold an additional town hall meeting later this year. We also hope to travel to some communities outside Riyadh to talk with and provide services to U.S. citizens living in these locations. Please watch this space for further information on dates, places and times.

January is also the beginning of tax season. We have provided some information below that we hope will be helpful in your tax preparation plans. For further information, the IRS 2013 Tax Guide for Individuals is now available on the IRS website at <http://www.irs.gov/pub/irs-pdf/p17.pdf>.

As a final note, we will be publishing this newsletter quarterly from now on. We hope this will allow us to provide you with timely, relevant information that will be of real use to you in your lives.

We wish you a great 2014 and we look forward to seeing you at our events over the coming year.

Best Wishes,

Donald H. Steele



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Upcoming Holiday Closures

February 16 - Washington's Birthday

May 25 - Memorial Day

How to Reach Us

The US Embassy is located in the Diplomatic Quarter, in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia.

Public hours: Saturdays, Sundays, Tuesdays, Wednesdays, 1:00pm-3:30pm
Schedule an Appointment:
<https://evisaforms.state.gov/acs/default.asp?postcode=RID&appcode=1>
Phone: (966)(11)488-3800

US Consulate Jeddah
Public hours: Saturday/Monday/Tuesday/Wednesday, 1:00-3:00pm
Schedule an Appointment:
<https://evisaforms.state.gov/acs/default.asp?postcode=JDD&appcode=1>
Phone: (966)(12)667-0080

US Consulate Dhahran
Public hours: Saturday through Wednesday, 1:00-3:30 pm
Schedule an Appointment: <https://evisaforms.state.gov/acs/default.asp?postcode=dhr&appcode=1>
Phone: (966)(13) 330-3200

Be a Trusted Traveler - Sign Up for Global Entry



U.S. Customs and Border Protection's Global Entry Program provides expedited travel for pre-approved, low risk travelers through dedicated lanes and kiosks.

If you are a frequent traveler, this could greatly smooth your entry to the US. Check out the [U.S. Customs and Border Protection \(USCBP\) website](http://www.uscbp.gov) for information on this program.

Please see Saudi Arabia's updated Country Specific Information - Oct 2013
<http://www.travel.state.gov/content/passports/english/country/saudi-arabia.html>

Please see the updated Travel Warning for Saudi Arabia dated 25 July 2013
<http://www.travel.state.gov/content/passports/english/alertswarnings/saudi-arabia-travel-warning.html>

2014 Tax Season to Open Jan. 31; e-file and Free File Can Speed Refunds

WASHINGTON (Dec 18, 2013) — The Internal Revenue Service today announced plans to open the 2014 filing season on Jan. 31 and encouraged taxpayers to use e-file or Free File as the fastest way to receive refunds.

The new opening date for individuals to file their 2013 tax returns will allow the IRS adequate time to program and test its tax processing systems. The annual process for updating IRS systems saw significant delays in October following the 16-day federal government closure.

“Our teams have been working hard throughout the fall to prepare for the upcoming tax season,” IRS Acting Commissioner Danny Werfel said. “The late January opening gives us enough time to get things right with our programming, testing and systems validation.



It’s a complex process, and our bottom-line goal is to provide a smooth filing and refund process for the nation’s taxpayers.” The government closure meant the IRS had to change the original opening date from Jan. 21 to Jan. 31, 2014.

The 2014 date is one day later than the 2013 filing season opening, which started on Jan. 30, 2013, following January tax law changes made by Congress on Jan. 1 under the American Taxpayer Relief Act (ATRA). The extensive set of ATRA tax changes affected many 2012 tax returns, which led to the late January opening.

The IRS noted that several options are available to help taxpayers prepare for the 2014 tax season and get their refunds as easily as possible. New year-end tax planning information has been added to IRS.gov this week.

Free File Opens Today, Offers Free Tax Prep and E-filing

WASHINGTON (Jan 17, 2014) — To help people get a jump on their taxes before the Jan. 31 filing season opens, the Internal Revenue Service today announced the immediate availability of Free File brand-name software for most taxpayers.

Fourteen commercial software companies that provide their Free File tax prep products at no cost began offering their products today -- available only at IRS.gov/freefile.

Although you can complete and e-file your tax return now, the Free File companies will hold it until Jan. 31 when the IRS begins accepting returns. As previously announced, the IRS delayed the filing season due to critical system testing following the federal government closure.

“Many tax preparers and tax software companies are now open for return preparation, including Free File. If you plan to get a head start on your taxes, remember to e-file. Electronic filing will allow software companies to hold your return and to automatically send it to the IRS on Jan. 31.

There is absolutely no advantage to filing by paper,” said IRS Commissioner John Koskinen. “If you want to save money and time, just use Free File to prepare and e-file your federal return at no charge.”

In addition, many software companies are expected to begin accepting tax returns in January and hold those returns until the IRS systems open on Jan. 31. More details will be available in January.

The IRS cautioned that it will not process any tax returns before Jan. 31, so there is no advantage to filing on paper before the opening date. Taxpayers will receive their tax refunds much faster by using e-file or Free File with the direct deposit option.

The April 15 tax deadline is set by statute and will remain in place. However, the IRS reminds taxpayers that anyone can request an automatic six-month extension to file their tax return. The request is easily done with Form 4868, which can be filed electronically or on paper. IRS systems, applications and databases must be updated annually to reflect tax law updates, business process changes and programming updates in time for the start of the filing season.

The October closure came during the peak period for preparing IRS systems for the 2014 filing season. Programming, testing and deployment of more than 50 IRS systems is needed to handle processing of nearly 150 million tax returns. Updating these core systems is a complex, year-round process with the majority of the work beginning in the fall of each year.

About 90 percent of IRS operations were closed during the shutdown, with some major work streams closed entirely during this period, putting the IRS nearly three weeks behind its tight timetable for being ready to start the 2014 filing season. There are additional training, programming and testing demands on IRS systems this year in order to provide additional refund fraud and identity theft detection and prevention.

As Jan. 31 approaches, Koskinen reminded taxpayers that IRS.gov has a range of information and services to help taxpayers prepare their tax returns. “Free File is just one of the many services available through IRS.gov to help people with their taxes,” Koskinen said. “Additional services include Where’s My Refund for timely updates on refunds, YouTube videos with quick tax tips, and many other ways of getting information. We encourage taxpayers to explore IRS.gov as tax season approaches.”

Free File, a public-private partnership, is the free way to do your federal tax returns either by using brand-name software or online fillable forms. Free File software is available now to more than 100 million individuals and families that earn \$58,000 or less, which is 70 percent of taxpayers.

Starting Jan. 31, Free File Fillable Forms will be available to accept tax returns for free e-filing from any taxpayer who is comfortable preparing their own tax return.

Nearly 40 million taxpayers have used Free File since it debuted in 2003. These taxpayers have saved more than an estimated \$1.2 billion by using Free File.

Learn more at freefile.irs.gov/partners.



Suspicious e-Mails and Identity Theft

The IRS office would like to warn taxpayers of an email scam requesting readers to complete and fax in a W-8BEN form.

It is helpful to note that the IRS does not initiate contact with taxpayers to request personal or financial information - this includes email, text messages, or social media.

If you receive an email requesting that you complete and return a W-8BEN, it is a scam, please do not respond to it. All unsolicited email claiming to be from the IRS (or any other IRS-related components such as the Office of Professional Responsibility or EFTPS) should be reported to phishing@irs.gov, and then deleted.

For further instructions on what to do if you receive a suspicious IRS-related communication, please see our website here: www.irs.gov/uac/Report-Phishing or here: www.irs.gov/uac/Suspicious-e-Mails-and-Identity-Theft.

Social Security Announces 1.5 Percent Benefit Increase for 2014

Monthly Social Security and Supplemental Security Income (SSI) benefits for nearly 63 million Americans will increase 1.5 percent in 2014, the Social Security Administration announced today.

The 1.5 percent cost-of-living adjustment (COLA) will begin with benefits that more than 57 million Social Security beneficiaries receive in January 2014. Increased payments to more than 8 million SSI beneficiaries will begin on December 31, 2013.

Some other changes that take effect in January of each year are based on the increase in average wages. Based on that increase, the maximum amount of earnings subject to the Social Security tax (taxable maximum) will increase to \$117,000 from \$113,700. Of the estimated 165 million workers who will pay Social Security taxes in 2014, about 10 million will pay higher taxes as a result of the increase in the taxable maximum.

Information about Medicare changes for 2014 is available at www.Medicare.gov.

The Social Security Act provides for how the COLA is calculated. To read more, please visit www.socialsecurity.gov/cola.

Get Covered: A one-page guide to the Health Insurance Marketplace

Here's a quick rundown on the most important things to know about the Health Insurance Marketplace, sometimes known as the health insurance "exchange." Follow the links for more information on each topic.

The new Health Insurance Marketplace helps uninsured people find health coverage. When you fill out the Marketplace application we'll tell you if you qualify for:

Private health insurance plans. We'll tell you whether you qualify for lower costs based on your household size and income. Plans cover essential health benefits, pre-existing conditions, and preventive care. If you don't qualify for lower costs, you can still use the Marketplace to buy insurance at the standard price.

Medicaid and the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP). These programs provide coverage to millions of families with limited income. If it looks like you qualify, we'll share information with your state agency and they'll contact you. Many but not all states are expanding Medicaid in 2014 to cover more people.

No matter what state you live in, you can use the Marketplace. Some states operate their own Marketplace. In some states, the Marketplace is run by the Federal government. Find the Health Insurance Marketplace in your state.

You may have more time to pay: Many health insurers have decided to give you more time to pay your first month's premium. Not all issuers are extending their payment deadline so check with your insurance company to confirm the date your premium is due. Learn how to complete your enrollment.

Most people must have health coverage in 2014 or pay a fee. If you don't have coverage in 2014, you'll have to pay a penalty of \$95 per adult, \$47.50 per child, or 1% of your income (whichever is higher). The fee increases every year. Some people may qualify for an exemption to this fee. If you enroll by March 31, 2014, you won't have to pay the fee for any month before your coverage began.

You're considered covered if you have Medicare, Medicaid, CHIP, any job-based plan, any plan you bought yourself, COBRA, retiree coverage, TRICARE, VA health coverage, or some other kinds of health coverage.

If you're eligible for job-based insurance, you can consider switching to a Marketplace plan. But you won't qualify for lower costs based on your income unless the job-based insurance is unaffordable or doesn't meet minimum requirements. You also may lose any contribution your employer makes to your premiums.

If you have Medicare, you're considered covered and don't have to make any changes. You can't use the Marketplace to buy a supplemental or dental plan.

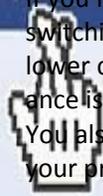
Marketplace open enrollment for 2014 ends March 31, 2014. The proposed open enrollment period for 2015 is from November 15, 2014 to January 15, 2015.

Questions? Call 24 hours a day, 7 days a week: 1-800-318-2596 (TTY: 1-855-889-4325)

For more information visit www.HealthCare.gov

HealthCare.gov

APPLY ONLINE





Federal Election Deadlines Illinois and Texas State Primary

	Registration	Ballot Request	Ballot Return	Registration	Ballot Request	Ballot Return
State Primary March 18, 2014	Uniformed Services and eligible family members Not required Overseas Citizens February 18, 2014	March 10, 2014	Postmarked by March 17, 2014 Received by April 1, 2014	February 3, 2014	February 25, 2014	Within U.S. 8 PM, March 4, 2014 Outside U.S. Received by March 10, 2014 Outside U.S. Placed in delivery 8 PM, March 4, 2014
				April 28, 2014	May 20, 2014	Within U.S. 8 PM, May 27, 2014 Outside U.S. Received by June 2, 2014 Outside U.S. Placed in delivery 8 PM, May 27, 2014
General Election November 4, 2014	Uniformed Services and eligible family members Not required Overseas Citizens October 6, 2014	October 27, 2014	Postmarked by November 3, 2014 Received by November 18, 2014	October 6, 2014	October 28, 2014	Within U.S. 8 PM, November 4, 2014 Outside U.S. Received by November 10, 2014 Outside U.S. Placed in delivery 8 PM, Nov 4, 2014



The **XXII Winter Olympic Games** and XI Paralympic Games will take place in and around Sochi, Russia, from February 7 to February 23, 2014, and March 7 to March 16, 2014. A few important things to remember when looking for tickets...

Be aware of scams, fake Olympic ticket websites, and unlicensed ticket resellers.

Tickets must be purchased from an authorized reseller. Spectators may be refused entry for tickets purchased from someone other than an authorized reseller. Spectators may transfer tickets only through an official ticket exchange. It is illegal to resell Olympic tickets outside of an authorized exchange. Please consult the Official Sochi 2014 website for more details as they become available.

Under Russian law, ticket scalping is punishable by an administrative fine. For individuals, the fine can range from five to ten times the cost of admission; for officials, from ten to twenty times the cost of admission; and for legal entities, from five hundred thousand to one million rubles, or administrative suspension of activity for up to ninety days.

Spectator Passes: In addition to a valid ticket, fans will also be required to obtain a "Spectator Pass." A Spectator Pass is required to visit the Olympic Park and competition venues. Applying for the Spectator Pass is part of the security regime for the Games and will subject the ticket holder to a background check administered by the Russian Federal Security Service. Detailed information on procedures for obtaining a Spectator Pass is available on the official 2014 [Sochi website](#). Only ticket holders will be able to obtain a Spectator Pass.

For more information, please click the following link: [Russian Federation Travel Alert \(January 10, 2014\)](#)



Until the mid-1970s, the February 22 birthday of George Washington, hero of the Revolutionary War and first president of the United States, was a national holiday. In addition, the February 12 birthday of Abraham Lincoln, the president during the Civil War (1861-1865), was a holiday in most states.

In the 1970s, Congress declared that in order to honor all past presidents of the United States, a single holiday, to be called Presidents' Day, would be observed on the third Monday in February. In many states, however, the holiday continues to be known as George Washington's birthday.

Are you or is someone you know new to KSA?

Help newcomers to the Kingdom by reminding them to register with the Embassy or nearest Consulate using STEP online at: <https://step.state.gov/step/>

This free service offers registered U.S. citizens updates on important regional issues, travel warnings and alerts, and provides a point of contact for citizens and their families in case of emergency.





Facts About the U.S. Flag



The U.S. flag has undergone many changes since the first official flag of 1777. On June 14, 1777, the Continental Congress passed the first Flag Act, which said that the flag would be made up of thirteen alternating red and white stripes and thirteen white stars on a blue field. Stars have been added to the flag as new states join the union. Currently, the flag contains 50 stars.

Ever wonder why the flag is red, white, and blue? While the flag's colors did not have a specific meaning at the time, the colors were significant for the Great Seal of 1782.

White: Signifies purity and innocence; **Red:** Signifies valor and bravery; **Blue:** Signifies vigilance, perseverance, and justice

There are 50 stars representing the 50 states and there are 13 stripes representing the 13 original states.



Sudoku

	9	8	7					
1				2	3	4		
2							6	
3							2	
	6			7			8	
	7							4
	8							9
		4	5	6				7
					8	5	1	

Fill the grid so that every row, every column and every 3x3 box contains the numbers 1 to 9.

History of the Cherry Blossom Trees and Festival

Each year, the National Cherry Blossom Festival commemorates the 1912 gift of 3,000 cherry trees from Mayor Yukio Ozaki of Tokyo to the city of Washington, DC.

Today, more than 1.5 million people visit Washington, DC each year to admire the blossoming cherry trees and participate in diverse programming that heralds spring in the nation's capital.

Did You Know?

The first cherry trees were ceremonially planted by First Lady Helen Taft and Japanese Viscountess Iwa Chinda on March 27, 1912. 3,020 trees were planted throughout the modern National Mall and Memorial Parks as a gift from Yokohama, Japan to Washington, D.C.

