

Danesfort Dispatches

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

April 2010



Vol. 5, Issue 2

Dear American Community,

Happy Spring!! Hopefully, the long winter is now over and we can celebrate with longer days, more sun, and the appearance of flowers. (Newly arrived in Belfast this fall, I was particularly confused by the concept of frozen fog.) I also want to wish all of you a Happy St. Patrick's Day (a bit late). I was in Washington, D.C. for St. Patrick's Day events. First Minister Peter Robinson and deputy First Minister Martin McGuinness met with Secretary Clinton at the State Department on March 16 and then met President Obama, Vice President Biden, and Secretary Clinton at the White House on March 17. President Obama and Secretary Clinton both congratulated the two leaders and the Northern Ireland Assembly on the successful March 9 cross-community vote and looked forward to implementation of devolution of policing and justice on April 12. They also reaffirmed the United States' strong links and support for Northern Ireland's peace process and economic development. President Obama and the First Lady hosted the traditional St. Patrick's Day reception at the White House on the evening of March 17 for Taoiseach Brian Cowen and his delegation, the Northern Ireland delegation, and many prominent Irish-Americans. The First and Deputy First Minister, SDLP leader and Minister Margaret Ritchie, UUP leader and Minister Reg Empey, Alliance deputy leader and Lord Mayor Naomi Long and PUP leader and MLA Dawn Purvis all attended as well as other representatives of Northern Ireland's government and civil society.

The following is the link to the remarks that President Obama, Vice President Biden, and Taoiseach Cowen made at the White House reception this year: <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/remarks-president-vice-president-and-taoiseach-ireland-st-patricks-day-reception>.

Sincerely,
Kamala Lakhdhir
Consul General

Proposed Passport Fee Changes

New passport fees have been proposed and were published in the Federal Register on February 9, 2010 (Public Notice 6887, Federal Register, February 9, 2010, Volume 75, No. 26, beginning at page 6321). Publication of the proposed rule in the Federal Register will be followed by a public comment period of at least 30 days. For more information go to http://travel.state.gov/passport/get/fees/fees_4734.html. The public will be notified of the date the new fees go into effect.

Here are some of the proposed fee changes:

- The total charge for a first-time passport book for an adult, including the application fee, security surcharge and execution fee, will increase from \$100 to \$135.
- The total charge for an adult passport book renewal, including the application fee and security surcharge, will increase from \$75 to

\$110.

- The total charge for a minor passport book (age 16 and under), including the application fee, security surcharge and execution fee, will increase from \$85 to \$105.
- The fee will also change for a Report of Birth Abroad of a Citizen of the United States. The fee will increase from \$65 to \$100.
- The proposed fee for adding extra pages will be \$82.00.

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Travel Tips from Department of State Blog



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Many of you will be arranging holiday travel for the Easter and summer breaks. Here is some advice from the U.S. Department of State blog (<http://blogs.state.gov/>) that applies to year around travel.

Sign up so the State Department can better assist you in an emergency: Record your travel plans with the State Department through a free online service at <https://travelregistration.state.gov>. This will help us contact you if there is a family emergency in the United States, or if there is a crisis where you are traveling. You'll also receive updated travel information for countries you plan to visit. In accordance with the Privacy Act, information on your welfare and whereabouts will not be released to others without your express authorization.

Sign your passport and fill in the emergency information: Make sure you have a signed, valid passport, and a visa, if required, and fill in the emergency information page of your passport. Most passports are valid for ten years. Write the contact information in pencil so you can change it as needed over time.

Check your overseas medical insurance coverage: Ask your medical insurance company if your policy applies overseas and if it covers emergency expenses such as medical evacuation. If it does not, consider supplemental insurance. Medical treatment and evacuations can cost thousands of dollars – some countries won't allow you in through customs unless you can show proof of medical insurance!

Contact us in an emergency: We are here to help you. Consular personnel at U.S. Embassies and Consulates abroad and in the Consular Affairs in the United States are available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, to provide emergency assistance to U.S. citizens. Contact information for U.S. Embassies and Consulates appears on the Bureau of Consular Affairs website at <http://www.usembassy.gov>, or you can call the Office of Overseas Citizen Services in the State Department's Bureau of Consular Affairs for assistance with emergencies at 1-888-407-4747 (if calling from the U.S. or Canada), or 202-501-4444 (if calling from overseas).



TSA Guidance Following December 25 Incident

As a result of the incident on Northwest Airlines on December 25, the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) has worked with airline and law enforcement authorities, as well as federal, state, local and international partners to put additional security measures in place to ensure aviation security remains strong. Passengers traveling domestically and internationally to the U.S. destinations may notice additional screening measures.

TSA encourages passengers to remain observant and aware of their surroundings and report any suspicious behavior or activity to law enforcement officials.

For more information, please visit the following websites:

- TSA FAQa - http://www.tsa.gov/press/happenings/dec25_guidance.shtm
- President Obama Announces Enhanced Airline Security Measures - <http://www.america.gov/st/peacesec-english/2010/January/20100107172817dmslahrellek0.8160822.html?CP.rss=true>
- Department of State Travel Website - <http://www.travel.state.gov>



Spotlight : Entry Into the United Kingdom

The U.S. Consulate General Belfast is contacted regularly by American citizens who have been refused entry into the United Kingdom, many of them because they did not acquire the appropriate entry clearance - commonly referred to as a visa - before traveling. Entry into the United Kingdom by foreign nationals, including American citizens, is regulated by the UK Border Agency (UKBA). If you are coming to the United Kingdom for any purpose other than a tourist or business visit of less than six months in duration, you must have entry clearance/visa prior to your arrival at a UK port of entry.

You must apply for entry clearance/visa online at <http://visa4uk.fco.gov.uk/> via a commercial service contracted by the UKBA and the British Consulates General in the United States. More information is available on the British Embassy's website at <http://ukinusa.fco.gov.uk/en>. The UK entry clearance/visa application wizard can be found at: <http://www.ukvisas.gov.uk/en/howtoapply/wheretosapply/unitedstates>.

The United Kingdom has very specific definitions of tourism and business. Interns, students, prospective students, spouses, parents, fiancés/partners, charity and religious workers/volunteers, those coming to the United Kingdom to work (unpaid or paid), those coming to the United Kingdom to marry, and all dependents in the preceding categories require entry clearance/visa irrespective of duration of stay.

Students and prospective students who intend to stay longer than six months, and those coming for less than six months but who wish to work while studying, are required to obtain a student or prospective student visa in advance of traveling to the United Kingdom. Failure to do so will result in the student or prospective student being refused entry to the United Kingdom. Note, too, charity workers and religious workers, even those performing unpaid duties, are required to obtain a visa prior to traveling to the United Kingdom. Please visit <http://www.ukba.homeoffice.gov.uk/workingintheuk/tier5/> for more information. If travelers or sponsors have any questions about requirements for a visa please refer to the website of the UKBA: <http://www.ukba.homeoffice.gov.uk/>.

Travelers must be outside the United Kingdom, the Channel Islands, and the Isle of Man when they make an application for a visa. It is the traveler's personal responsibility to ensure that he/she has the appropriate permission to enter the United Kingdom. If you do not have the required entry clearance/visa, you will be refused entry to the United Kingdom. You risk being held in an immigration removal center until a return flight becomes available, and you may be returned to the country from where you arrived, not necessarily the United States. The U.S. Consulate General Belfast cannot intervene in such matters. If you need professional assistance from qualified UK immigration practitioners, you may wish to contact:

U.K. Immigrants Advisory Service (UKIAS)

<http://www.iasuk.org>

Office of Immigration Services Commissioner (OISC)

<http://www.oisc.gov.uk>



Under the provisions of the Immigration (Biometric Registration) Regulations 2008, the UKBA also has begun mandatory issuance of identity cards to American citizens who apply for an extension of their stay in the United Kingdom as students or as the husbands, wives, or partners of permanent residents. Further information regarding the identity card is available at http://www.ips.gov.uk/cps/rde/xchg/ips_live/hs.xsl/index.htm

New Law Makes Absentee Voting Easier for Overseas Americans



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On October 28, 2009, Congress enacted the Military and Overseas Voter Empowerment (MOVE) Act. This legislation amends existing law regarding overseas voting in federal elections and should make voting easier for overseas Americans.

New Procedures for 2010 Elections - Beginning with the November 2010 general election and for all subsequent general, special, and primary elections, states will be required to mail out ballots at least 45 days prior to an election for a federal office. This requirement may cause some states to select earlier primary dates in order to comply with the 45 day mailing deadline, or to request waivers due to special circumstances.

In addition to mailing ballots to overseas voters, the states will be required, at the voter's request, to provide registration forms, absentee ballot request forms and blank ballots via fax or email. However, each state's laws determine whether ballot requests or voted ballots can be returned via fax or email. The new law prohibits states from rejecting marked ballots based on notarization, paper size, or paper weight requirements. The witnessing requirements of individual states remain in place.

Overseas Absentee Ballot Requests - Effective immediately, states will no longer be required by federal law to continue to mail election materials to overseas addresses (even when they are determined to be invalid) for two complete general election cycles on the basis of a single ballot request. It will now be up to each state to determine how long to continue to send out election materials before requiring overseas voters to submit new ballot requests. This change, sought by local election officials, should greatly decrease the volume of voting materials sent abroad to addresses where Americans no longer reside.

State Department Recommendations - In light of these changes, the Department of State recommends that all U.S. voters residing abroad request absentee ballots from their local election officials at the start of each calendar year and whenever there is a change of address, change of e-mail address, or change of name, by completing and sending in a Federal Post Card Application (FPCA). To locate information on your specific state's requirements and to obtain an on-line version of the FPCA, please visit www.fvap.gov. Voters may also pick up a hard copy of the FPCA from any U.S. embassy or consulate. FPCAs may be mailed to your local voting officials in the United States via international mail or from any U.S. embassy or consulate. Many states allow U.S. citizens overseas to submit the FPCA by e-mail or fax.

The Department of State strongly encourages all U.S. overseas voters to provide email addresses or fax numbers on their FPCAs to enable local election officials to transmit election materials in the fastest manner available, which should then allow sufficient time for the return of voted ballots. For information regarding your specific state, please visit www.fvap.gov.

Emergency Ballots - The Federal Write-In Absentee Ballot (FWAB) serves as an emergency ballot for the November general elections for federal offices, although some states also permit its use for elections for state and local offices. Beginning in January 2011, the new law allows use of the FWAB for primary, special, and runoff elections for federal offices. Voters who request an absentee ballot in advance of their state's ballot request deadline, but who fail to receive an official ballot from local election officials in time to vote, should complete the Federal Write-In Absentee Ballot and send it back to local election officials in time for it to be counted. An on-line version of the FWAB, together with instructions for its use, is available at www.fvap.gov.

Questions?

The Voting Assistance Officer at the U.S. Consulate General Belfast is always available to answer questions about absentee voting. To contact the Voting Assistance Officer phone 02890 386104 or send an e-mail to consularbelfast@state.gov.



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U.S. Tax Season in Here!

Tax season is in full swing. To check due dates and deadlines, go to the Embassy London's Internal Revenue Service (IRS) site at <http://london.usembassy.gov/irs/inindex.htm>

Consumer Alert -

The IRS warns taxpayers to be on the alert for e-mails and phone calls they may receive which claim to come from the IRS or other federal agency and which mention their tax refund or economic stimulus payment. These are almost certainly a scam whose purpose is to obtain personal and financial information — such as name, Social Security number, bank account and credit card or even PIN numbers — from taxpayers which can be used by the scammers to commit identity theft. The e-mails and calls usually state that the IRS needs the information to process a refund or stimulus payment or deposit it into the taxpayer's bank account. The e-mails often contain links or attachments to what appears to be the IRS Web site or an IRS "refund application form." However genuine in appearance, these phonies are designed to elicit the information the scammers are looking for.

The IRS does not send taxpayers e-mails about their tax accounts. Additionally, the way to get a tax refund or stimulus payment, or to arrange for a direct deposit, is to file a tax return. For more information on consumer scams, see [Suspicious e-Mails and Identity Theft](#).

Launch of U.S. Consulate General Belfast Facebook Page

The U.S. Consulate General has joined the social media wave and has recently launched our very own Facebook page. We hope you enjoy it and find it a great way to stay in touch with the U.S. Consulate's mission here in Northern Ireland.

Have a look and become a fan!



Electronic System for Travel Authorization (ESTA)

Please advise any non-American family and friends traveling to the U.S. to be sure to have the correct documentation before they travel.

We suggest non-American travelers follow these steps:

- 1) To determine if you and your passport meet the criteria for visa-free travel under the Visa Waiver Program, use the Visa Waiver Wizard at http://london.usembassy.gov/cons_new/visa/visa_wizard.html.
- 2) 2) If you and your passport meet the criteria for visa-free travel, apply online for ESTA travel clearance at <https://esta.cbp.dhs.gov>. You should apply at least 72 hours in advance of travel but ideally before you even book your ticket. Authorization once granted is good for two years.

Please Note: The U.S. government does not employ outside consultants or private services to operate the ESTA program. Any intermediaries or others who offer their services or assistance to prepare or submit ESTA applications on your behalf do so without the authority or consent of the U.S. government. There is only one official U.S. government website for applying for ESTA travel clearance: <https://esta.cbp.dhs.gov>. There is no fee to apply for ESTA travel clearance at this time. Any website charging a fee to prepare and submit an ESTA application on your behalf is not operating on behalf of the U.S. government.

If you and/or your passport **do not meet** the criteria for visa-free travel, you will need to apply for a visa before you travel. Please see over for information about the visa application process.

Web-based Non-Immigrant Electronic Visa Application Form

If you need to apply for a visa for travel to the U.S., you will find detailed information about the visa application process at Consulate General Belfast on our website at <http://london.usembassy.gov/nireland/nivisa.html>.

The Department of State recently introduced a new non-immigrant visa application form DS-160. The form DS-160 is web-based and once completed, transmits the applicant's data to the post where s/he will apply for the visa. As the data is collected electronically, it means that the Consulate/Embassy will be able to conduct various forms of pre-processing and pre-screening in advance of the applicants appearance, which should reduce processing delays. It also means that applicants who apply for visas on a frequent basis can save their original application and simply submit the updated form.

For more information on the DS-160, see the Department of State, Frequently Asked Questions website at http://travel.state.gov/visa/frvi/forms/forms_4401.html.

To view a Youtube video on the new DS-160, go to <http://www.youtube.com/user/USEmbassyLondon#p/u/1/LSd6gYr-aSs>



Department of State Foreign Service Officer Test (FSOT)

Many wonder how to become a diplomat. Others pursue this noble mission through Foreign Service Officer careers at the U.S. Department of State — strengthening peace and supporting prosperity as they promote our business interests and protect American citizens throughout the world.

Since the work of the U.S. Department of State affects the world and is carried out in every country around the globe, Foreign Service Officers (FSOs) are posted at any one of over 265 embassies, consulates and other diplomatic missions in The Americas, Africa, Europe and Eurasia, East Asia and Pacific, Middle East and North Africa and South Asia.

The next available opportunity to take the FSOT overseas is June. Go to <http://www.careers.state.gov/officer/employment.html> to register for the exam and obtain FSOT information.

For information on jobs with U.S. Government agencies visit the USA Jobs website at <http://usajobs.opm.gov/>



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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:

Titanic –Made in Belfast Festival - April 3 –11, 2010 - Take a step back in time and celebrate Belfast's Maritime heritage through a week of activity featuring storytelling, re-enactments, films, speakers and artifacts at City Hall. For more information visit <http://www.belfastcity.gov.uk/events>.

10th Annual Belfast Film Festival - April 15 - 30, 2010 - Northern Ireland's leading film event, Belfast Film Festival is renowned for its bold mix of arthouse, cult and socio-political films as well as fun movie events, industry talks and masterclasses. For details go to <http://www.belfastfilmfestival.org>.

11th Annual Cathedral Quarter Arts Festival– April 29 - May 9, 2010 - This years festival will have some major musical highlights to include artists from around the world. The CQAF is quickly becoming one of Belfast's premier music festivals! Visit <http://www.cqaf.com> for information and tickets.

Belfast City Carnival - June 18 - 20, 2010 - Come along and enjoy music and entertainment at Belfast City Hall as it welcomes Belfast's new Lord Mayor. The procession will start at Custom House Square and finish in the grounds of City Hall. For information visit <http://www.belfastcity.gov.uk/events> or go to <http://www.belfastcarnival.com> to get involved in puppet making for the carnival!

Disclaimer: This listing of events, performances and other activities is for information purposes only and does not constitute an endorsement by the U.S. Consulate General Belfast. All opinions expressed by the artists, writers, and performers participating or contributing to the events listed are those solely of the participants and contributors and not the U.S. Government or its designated representatives. Listing information is believed to be correct at the time it is listed but the U.S. Consulate General accepts no liability for subsequent changes to these details and no reliance should be placed upon them.

American Citizen Services: In the event of a genuine emergency involving a U.S. Citizen in Northern Ireland, contact our after-hours phone number at 07545 507738.

Consular Closure Dates

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

- Friday, April 2, 2010 - Good Friday
- Monday, April 5, 2010 - Easter Monday
- Tuesday, April 6, 2010 - Easter Tuesday
- Monday, May 3, 2010 - May Bank Holiday
- Monday, May 31, 2010 - Memorial Day



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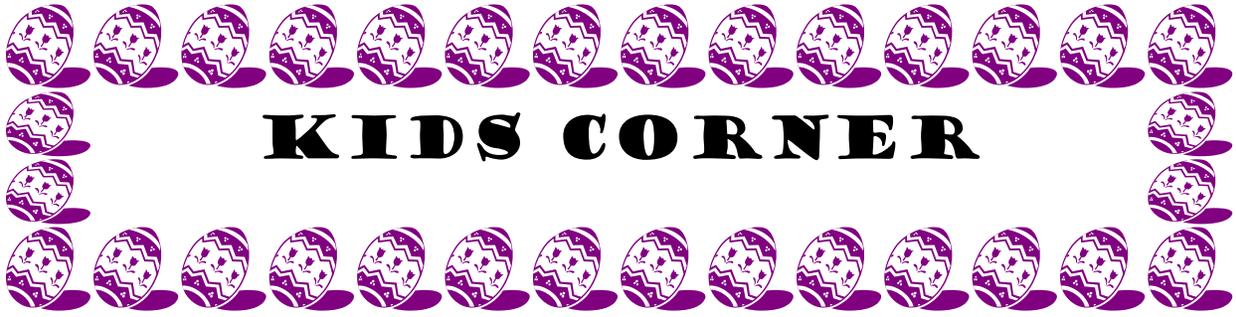
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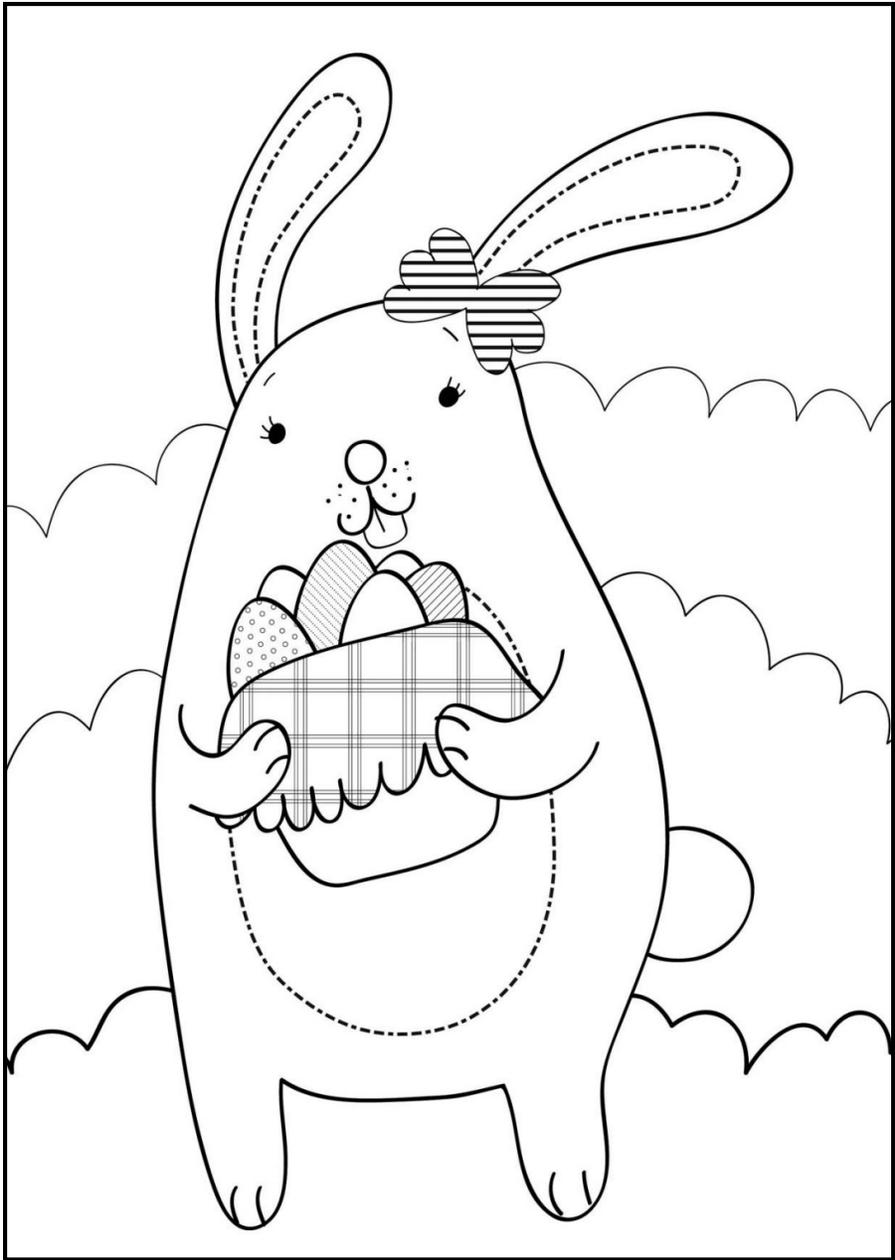
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KIDS CORNER



Enjoy an Easter Coloring Project!