

# Danesfort Dispatches

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

January 2009



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Dear American Community,

New Year's Greetings for 2009! Consulate General Belfast had a busy and productive 2008 highlighted by the visit of President Bush in June, the US-NI Investment Conference in May, and our well attended Election Day breakfast in November. The coming year promises to be just as exciting with the inauguration of a new president and the confirmation of a new Secretary of State. While President Obama and Secretary of State Clinton face many problems both at home and abroad, I anticipate that support for peace and economic prosperity in Northern Ireland will not diminish. As we all know, Secretary Clinton has taken an interest in Northern Ireland for many years and I look forward to working with her and the new Special Envoy in the coming year.

Best regards,  
Susan Elliott  
Consul General

## New Staff at the U.S. Consulate General Belfast

Two new Foreign Service Officers join the team at the U.S. Consulate General Belfast.

Prasenjit Gupta arrived last summer and will serve as Management Officer. This is his second tour of duty with the Department of State. He was previously posted to the U.S. Consulate in Chennai, India, where he served in the Consular Section. Mr. Gupta is a graduate of the Iowa Writers Workshop and holds a doctoral degree in Comparative Literature from the University of Iowa.

Michael Troje arrived in October and will serve as the Chief of the Consular Section. Mr. Troje has been a Foreign Service Officer since 2000. Most recently he served as Refugee Coordinator at the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad, Iraq. Previously, he served as Consular Chief at the Embassy in Malta and as American Citizens Services Chief at Embassies Dublin and Port au Prince. Before joining the Foreign Service he worked for the U.N. High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) in Hong Kong, Cuba and Haiti.

The U.S. Consulate General extends a warm welcome to both officers and wishes them every success in their new post!

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## Traveling to the United Kingdom? Check UK Visa Requirement First

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As the major overhaul of the United Kingdom's immigration rules continues, more Americans may find they require a visa, or entry clearance, as well as a work permit, to enter the country. These changes affect, but are not limited to, **spouse/fiancés/partners/children of UK citizens, student (current, future, and prospective), interns, and business people**. If you fall into one of these categories and do not have a visa from a UK consulate prior to traveling, **you will not be allowed to enter the United Kingdom**. UK immigration authorities can hold you in a detention facility until the next available flight back to the United States. The U.S. Consulate General cannot interfere with or influence the decisions of UK immigration authorities. If you are denied entry, you **may also** face a 10-year ban from re-entering the United Kingdom.

Please remind your family and friends visiting the United Kingdom to check with the UK Border Agency (UKBA) before travelling, or consult with the nearest British consulate in the United States for information. The UKBA website is: <http://www.ukba.homeoffice.gov.uk>. The website for the British consulates in the United States is: <http://ukinusa.fco.gov.uk/en>.



## Passport Cards Now In Production!

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On June 22, 2008 the U.S. Department of State and the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) announced that the new U.S. Passport Card is in full production and is now being distributed. The Passport Card is a convenient, wallet-sized document for land and sea travel between the United States and Mexico, Canada, the Caribbean, and Bermuda. It is not valid for international travel by air.

Beginning in June 2009, travelers will be required to present a single Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative (WHTI) compliant document denoting both citizenship and identity when entering the United States through a land or sea border. The U.S. Passport Card is a WHTI compliant document.

Find more information at [http://travel.state.gov/passport/ppt\\_card/ppt\\_card\\_3926.html](http://travel.state.gov/passport/ppt_card/ppt_card_3926.html).

## Prepare for Spring Time Travel

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Spring and summer months are peak travel times for many U.S. citizens. Spring Break, St. Patrick's Day and Easter holidays offer great opportunities to travel with family and friends. This can mean an increased demand for U.S. passport services. U.S. citizens requiring consular services are thus requested to plan accordingly and apply for passport services well in advance of their expected travel date. Specifically, if you anticipate requiring passport services from the U.S. Consulate in Belfast this summer, we strongly encourage you to contact us as early as possible to ensure you receive documents and services in time. Remind U.S. citizens family or friends traveling from the U.S. to Northern Ireland to apply as early as possible for their passports. Now is a great time to apply for your U.S. passport, as demand is traditionally lower.

For more information on passport services at the Consulate visit our website at: <http://london.usembassy.gov/nireland/nipass.html>



## Spotlight : Electronic System for Travel Authorization (ESTA)

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American citizens may be asked by family, friends, colleagues, and/or neighbors about the new Electronic System for Travel Authorization program (ESTA), which became mandatory on January 12, 2009. British and Irish citizens and citizens of other Visa Waiver Program (VWP) countries, who travel to the United States under the VWP, are required to register on line with ESTA prior to boarding the plane.  Holders of U.S. visas do not need to register with ESTA.

ESTA is a **free** Internet-based application administered by the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) at <https://esta.cbp.dhs.gov>, a U.S. government website. The information that travelers provide is the same as what they complete on the I-94W forms on board the plane, the same data that most countries already collect at their borders. ESTA will eventually replace those forms.

Currently, more than 30,000 British citizens are registering with ESTA each day. All UK citizens planning to travel to the United States in the future are encouraged to apply now. Travelers don't need to have specific travel plans in order to register. Registration is valid for two years or the life of the traveler's passport, whichever is shorter. So far, 99.6% of those registering have been approved – most within four seconds.

We recognize that there will be a number of travelers who, for one reason or another, may not be able to access the Internet to complete an ESTA application. In those cases, we recommend that travelers call a friend, family member, colleague or travel agent – all of whom can fill out an ESTA application on behalf of the traveler. Public libraries and their helpful staff are also excellent resources. In those cases, travelers should make sure that anyone submitting an ESTA application for them has accurate information. Travelers are responsible for the content of any ESTA application submitted on their behalf.

VWP travelers should be aware that third-parties have established Web sites, which charge visitors seeking to travel to the United States under the VWP, for information about ESTA and for submitting ESTA applications on behalf of the traveler. These Web sites are not endorsed by or affiliated in any way with the U.S. government. **The U.S. Government does not charge a fee for ESTA.** Use of a private service to apply for travel authorization via ESTA **will not** expedite the granting of approval.

### **Additional Information on ESTA:**

Department of Homeland Security - <http://www.cbp.gov/esta>.

U.S. Embassy London, General Information on ESTA - [http://london.usembassy.gov/dhs/esta\\_info.html](http://london.usembassy.gov/dhs/esta_info.html)

U.S. Embassy London, Visa Waiver Program and ESTA - [http://london.usembassy.gov/cons\\_new/visa/niv/esta.html](http://london.usembassy.gov/cons_new/visa/niv/esta.html)



## The Current Financial Crisis and Social Security



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Over the last few weeks, there has been a noticeable increase in the number of inquiries asking whether the failure of some financial institutions and the \$700 billion dollar "bailout plan" that was recently passed by the US Congress will have any affect on current Social Security benefit payments. In addition, members of the public are calling regarding the solvency of the Social Security program. Here are some examples of the types of questions being asked:

- How will the \$700 Billion Bailout Bill affect my benefits?
- Will the recent collapse of financial institutions affect my Social Security?
- If my bank closes will I get my Social Security check?
- Will Social Security be able to pay my benefits when I am ready to retire?

The answer is: The current financial crisis will not have any impact on Social Security benefit payments. We expect all Social Security beneficiaries to receive their payments as scheduled. If your bank closes, Social Security will make arrangements for you to receive your benefit payment.

As far as the Solvency of Social Security is concerned: According to the Social Security Administration's Trustees Report dated March 25, 2008, the Social Security Trust fund can pay benefits through 2041.

If you'd like to learn more about the future of Social Security, you can visit our website at [www.socialsecurity.gov](http://www.socialsecurity.gov).

### **Federal Benefits Information, Embassy London, is just a phone call away!**

FBU personnel are available from 8:30 a.m. to 1 p.m. Monday to Friday to answer inquiries on two dedicated phone lines:

IF your SSN terminal digits are 00-49 OR your surname begins with letter A-M - call 0207 499 9000 ext **2926**

IF your SSN terminal digits are 50-99 OR your surname begins with letter N-Z - call 0207 499 9000 ext **2927**

## Latest Internet Scam: Posing As The FBI

Special Agents from the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) at the U.S. Embassy London are working closely with UK law enforcement officers on various scams asking for money, targeting both UK and U.S. citizens. The most recent scheme uses the name of the FBI and its Director, Robert Mueller.

The new mass e-mailing, allegedly from the "Anti-Terrorist and Monitory Crimes Division of the FBI," is hitting in-boxes belonging to computer-users in the UK.

The e-mail, purportedly from Robert Mueller, states that the recipient has been involved in a scam to steal their money. The poorly worded message goes on to explain that the person is the beneficiary of an \$800,000 inheritance, and only through the efforts of the FBI has this scam to steal their money been prevented.

The imposters then direct potential victims to contact an individual "approved by the FBI" to process their claim to inheritance. A payment of \$300 is requested to process the claim.

The scam not only lures \$300 into the hands of con artists, but also provides valuable credit card information to thieves who then drain the credit of those sending off sensitive information.

Scams like this work on the basis of millions of e-mails flooding cyberspace, targeting those few who are not wary enough to sense trouble.

British and American citizens alike should be aware of this scam. The FBI – the real one – requests anyone who receives this email, or any other they believe to be a scam, to go to their website, [www.fbi.gov](http://www.fbi.gov) and fill out an investigation form. To avoid financial loss, authorities recommend keeping tabs on family members who might be more trusting or susceptible to scams.

# A Note From the Internal Revenue Service (IRS)



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## Identity Theft and Your Tax Records

How can someone steal your identity? Identity theft occurs when someone uses your personal information such as your name, social security number, or other identifying information, without your permission, to commit fraud or other crimes.

Identity theft is a serious crime. People whose identities have been stolen can spend months or years - and their hard-earned money - cleaning up the mess thieves have made of their good name and credit record. In the meantime, victims may lose job opportunities, have loans refused, or even get arrested for crimes they didn't commit.

Generally, identity thieves use someone's personal data to steal his or her financial accounts and run up charges on the victim's existing credit cards, but the IRS has identified other potential areas where this type of fraud may occur as they relate directly to your tax records.

Undocumented workers or other individuals may use your social security number to get a job. That person's employer would report W-2 wages earned using your information to the IRS so it might appear that you did not report all of your income on your return.

An identity thief may file a tax return using your social security number to receive a refund or stimulus payment. If the thief already filed a return using your social security number, the IRS will believe that you already filed and received your refund, and the return you just submitted is a second copy or duplicate. If you do receive a notice from the IRS that leads you to believe someone may have used your social security number fraudulently, please notify the IRS immediately by responding to the name and number printed on the notice or letter.

Be alert to possible identity theft if the notice or letter states that more than one tax return for you was filed, or IRS records indicate you received wages from an employer unknown to you.

If you receive a notice, contact the IRS either by phone or in writing as directed in that notice. IRS tax examiners will work with you and other agencies, such as the Social Security Administration, to help resolve the problem.

IRS Identity Theft and Your Tax Records - <http://www.irs.gov/individuals/article/0,,id=136324,00.html>

## Phishing for Taxpayer Information

Phishing is the act of sending an email to a user falsely claiming to be an established, legitimate enterprise in an attempt to scam the user into surrendering private information that will be used for identity theft. **Be aware that the IRS does not initiate taxpayer communications through email.** The IRS **does not** request detailed personal information through email. The IRS **does not** send emails requesting your PIN numbers, passwords or similar access information for credit cards, banks or other financial accounts.

If you receive an email from someone claiming to be the IRS or directing you to an IRS site, do not reply and do not open any attachments or links. Attachments may contain malicious code that will infect your computer. Do not click on any links.

Identity Theft Email Scams a Growing Problem - <http://www.irs.gov/newsroom/article/0,,id=17062,00.html>

## Protect Your Social Security Number

Don't carry your social security number with you; leave it in a secure place. Only give your social security number when absolutely necessary. Your employer or financial institution may need your social security number for wage and tax reporting purposes, but for others, your social security number may not be essential. Ask why your number is needed and if other types of identifiers can be used.

Additional Information:

Social Security Administration, Identity Theft - <http://www.ssa.gov/pubs/idtheft.htm>.

## Food and Drug Administration: Tainted Diet Pill Warning



On December 22, 2008, the U.S. Food & Drug Administration (FDA) alerted consumers not to buy or use more than 25 different weight-loss pill products because the products may be harmful to their health. The article appears on FDA's Consumer Health Information Web page at <http://www.fda.gov/consumer>, which features the latest updates on FDA-regulated products. Other helpful sites are:

<http://www.fda.gov/bbs/topics/NEWS/2008/NEW01933.html>

[http://www.fda.gov/cder/consumerinfo/weight\\_loss\\_products.htm](http://www.fda.gov/cder/consumerinfo/weight_loss_products.htm)

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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:

***Belfast Nashville Songwriters Festival—February 18 - 22nd, 2009*** This is the 5th year of this popular and unique event. Belfast and its sister-city, Nashville, Tennessee, bring together internationally acclaimed writers and musicians. This year's event will include 30 concerts, 100 songwriters, 20 seminars and workshops. For more ticket and program information, go to [www.belfastnashville.com](http://www.belfastnashville.com).

**American Citizen Services:  
In the event of a genuine emergency involving a U.S.  
Citizen in Northern Ireland, our after-hours phone number is  
0870 238 5428.**

### Consular Closure Dates

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

Monday, January 19, 2009 - Martin Luther King's Birthday

Monday, February 16, 2009 - President's Day

Tuesday, March 17, 2009 - St. Patrick's Day

## Kids Corner

### George Washington Activity

*Fill in the blanks in the text below.*

George Washington was the \_\_\_\_\_ President of the United States of America. George Washington was born on February 22, \_\_\_\_\_, in \_\_\_\_\_.

Washington wore false teeth made from \_\_\_\_\_ ivory.

During Washington's presidency, the Bill of Rights (the first 10 amendments to the US Constitution) was adopted. In Washington's cabinet were Thomas \_\_\_\_\_ (Secretary of State), Alexander \_\_\_\_\_ (Secretary of Treasury), Henry Knox (Secretary of War), and Edmund Randolph (Attorney General).

Washington died on December 14, 1799, at his home called \_\_\_\_\_, located in Fairfax County, Virginia.

After his death, the nation's capital was moved from Philadelphia to an area on the border of Virginia and Maryland near Washington's home, and was named Washington, District of \_\_\_\_\_ in his honor.

