



EMBASSY OF THE UNITED STATES

**SPAIN**

**AMERICAN CITIZENS SERVICES (ACS)**

**MADRID NEWSLETTER**

**March 2007**

Dear Fellow U.S. Citizen,

I would like to welcome you to the latest edition of the U.S. Embassy - Madrid's Consular Section quarterly newsletter. We hope that this publication will give you insight and helpful information on common concerns that U.S. citizens have while living or traveling abroad. In this issue you will find articles regarding Seasonal / Holiday Closures, Passports and Citizenship, Social Security and other Federal Benefits Unit (FBU), Overseas Citizens Frequently Asked Questions, Voting Overseas, Driving and Automobiles, and Security Advisories.

As the U.S. Ambassador to Spain and Andorra my work brings me in daily contact with senior Spanish government officials, Ministers, policy makers, military personnel, business leaders and cultural icons as we work to foster a strong bilateral relationship between the United States and Spain. During the last 21 months, I have had the opportunity to travel outside of Madrid to better understand this culturally rich country and its people. I take an interest in all Embassy activities including political affairs, cooperation between the armed services, trade promotion, cultural exchanges, international collaboration on crime and terrorism prevention, visa applications, and U.S. citizen services.

The U.S. Embassy in Madrid or the Consulate General in Barcelona can be your source of assistance and information while traveling or living in Spain. I would also encourage you to register with the Department of State at the following website: <https://travelregistration.state.gov> in order to stay in touch with the U.S. government in the event of an emergency. Registration is voluntary and free.

Please let us know if there is anything that we can do and I hope that you are able to enjoy Spain and Andorra as I have.

Sincerely,

Eduardo Aguirre

U.S. Ambassador to Spain and Andorra

## **SEASONAL INFORMATION/ HOLIDAY CLOSURE**

Below are the dates for the various holiday observances throughout Spain, which affect the Embassy, the Consulate General in Barcelona and the six Consular Agencies. We close for all U.S. and most Spanish holidays. In addition, the diplomatic and consular offices in Spain are closed for the official local holidays which vary according to region. Please confirm office openings before an intended visit, particularly if you are travelling a significant distance to see us.

- **April 5** Holy Thursday/Jueves Santo
- **April 6** Good Friday/Viernes Santo
- **April 9** Lunes de Pascua Florida Catalonia and Palma de Mallorca, Coruña
- **May 1** Labor day/Fiesta del Trabajo
- **May 2** Comunidad de Madrid (Madrid only)
- **May 15** San Isidro (Madrid only)
- **May 17** Coruña
- **May 28** Memorial Day
- **May 30** Las Palmas, Seville
- **June 4** Segunda Pascua Catalonia
- **June 7** Sevilla
- **June 25** Las Palmas
- **June 30** Sevilla
- **July 25** Coruña

## **PASSPORTS & CITIZENSHIP NEWS**

The Department of State issues state-of-the-art passports incorporating a photo-digitized image and other enhanced security features to all American citizens, whether they apply in the US or overseas. The Department of State achieves this goal by issuing all full-validity passports at a domestic U.S. passport facility. The processing time to receive a full validity passport from the US issuing facility is approximately one to two weeks. American citizens are encouraged to apply early when renewing expiring passports. In most cases, a full validity passport will be issued for the following lengths of time: Minor under 16 years of age – 5 Year Passports and 16 years of age and older – 10 year Passports. American citizens are encouraged to apply early when renewing expiring passports.

To apply for a Consular Report of Birth Abroad for your baby born in the Madrid consular district you may request an appointment by contacting us at:

Phone: 91 5872240

E-Mail: [consularmadrid@state.gov](mailto:consularmadrid@state.gov)

Fax: 91 5872243

*“Many individuals have decided to wait until after age 65 to contact us. In some instances this could be a mistake”*

## SOCIAL SECURITY

### Time to File for Medicare

In the good old days, life was simpler. At age 65, one could file for benefits and Medicare at the same time. Since 2003, the age to receive full retirement benefits started to rise. Thus, many individuals have decided to wait until after age 65 to contact us. In some instances this could be a mistake.

The initial enrollment period for filing for Medicare is a seven month window. It consists of the three months period before age 65, the month of attaining age 65 as well as the three months period after age 65. In other words, an individual, who has 40 quarters of Social Security coverage (i.e. fully insured), is eligible for Medicare at age 65 even though the age to draw full benefits may be many months away.

Those who visit the United States frequently or for extended periods of time or plan to repatriate back to the United States, should seriously consider filing for Medicare during their initial enrollment period. Medicare Part A is free to fully insured individuals. Part A helps pay for inpatient care in a hospital or skilled nursing facility (following a hospital stay). Part B of Medicare is optional. It costs \$93.50 per month and helps pay for doctor's services and supplies that are not covered under hospital insurance.

If you do not enroll in Medicare Part B during your initial enrollment period, you have another chance each year to sign up during a “general enrollment period” from January 1 through March 31. Your coverage begins the following July. However, your monthly premium increases 10 percent for each 12-month period you were eligible for, but did not enroll in, Medicare Part B.

For more complete information about Medicare please visit [www.medicare.gov](http://www.medicare.gov). To make an appointment to file for Medicare or for benefits, please contact the Federal Benefits Unit by phone 34 91 587 2261, fax 34 91 587 2260, or email [fbu.madrid@ssa.gov](mailto:fbu.madrid@ssa.gov).



*“At the present time, there are no provisions for in-person voting or on-site registration at U.S. embassies or consulates”*

## OVERSEAS CITIZENS: 3 FAQs ABOUT VOTING OVERSEAS.

### **If I do not maintain a legal residence in the U.S., what is my "legal state of residence?"**

Your "legal state of residence" for voting purposes is the state or territory where you last resided immediately prior to your departure from the United States. This right extends to overseas citizens even though they may not have property or other ties in their last state or territory of residence and their intent to return to that state or territory may be uncertain. When completing the FPCA's Voting Residence section, be sure to enter the entire mailing address of your last residence, including street or rural route and number. The address determines your proper district, ward, precinct or parish for voting purposes. Family members of citizens residing overseas, who are U.S. citizens and who have never resided in the U.S. may claim one of their U.S. citizen parent's legal state or territory of residence as their own if allowed by the state. Check Chapter 3 of the Guide.

### **Will I be taxed by my last state or territory of residence if I vote absentee?**

Exercising your right to vote in elections for Federal offices only, does not affect the determination of residence or domicile for purposes of any tax imposed under Federal, state, or local law. Voting in an election for Federal office only, may not be used as the sole basis to determine residency for the purpose of imposing state and local taxes. If you claim a particular state or territory as your residence and have other ties with that state or territory in addition to voting, then you may be liable for state and local taxation, depending upon the laws of that particular state or territory. Consult legal counsel for information on probable tax obligations.

### **Can I register or vote in person at the embassy or consulate?**

At the present time, there are no provisions for in-person voting or on-site registration to be conducted at U.S. embassies or consulates. U.S. embassy and consular officials will assist U.S. citizens in completing FPCA forms for their state, witness or notarize FPCA forms and ballots (if required), and provide other absentee voting information. U.S. embassy and consulate locations serve also as a mailing point. FPCA forms and other election materials may be mailed back, postage-paid, from these locations to your local voting jurisdiction in the U.S. where absentee registration and ballot requests are processed.

## **IMPORTANT NOTICE: GEORGIA TO HOLD A SPECIAL ELECTION ON JUNE 19, 2007 FOR REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS FROM THE 10TH DISTRICT**

On Tuesday, June 19, 2007 there will be a special election in Georgia's 10th Congressional District to fill the seat of Congressman Charlie Norwood. To determine your legal residence is in the 10th Congressional District, you can click on Communicating With Your Elected Officials, then "Who is my Representative?" at the Federal Voting Assistance Program (FVAP) website, [www.fvap.gov](http://www.fvap.gov).

If no candidate receives a majority of the votes (50% plus 1) in this special election, a runoff election will be held on July 17, 2007.

For further information, please visit the Federal Voting Assistance Program Website at [www.fvap.gov](http://www.fvap.gov), [www.democratsabroad.org](http://www.democratsabroad.org) or [www.republicansabroad.com](http://www.republicansabroad.com)

## DRIVING & AUTOMOBILES

Spanish regulations regarding automobiles are complex and subject to changing interpretations. You must consult Spanish Government resources for the latest correct information. To drive while temporarily in Spain, an American tourist must possess either: (1) an international driver's permit (usually from AAA in the US) with your valid state license or (2) a valid US driver's license with an official Spanish translation or a translation notarized by the American Embassy. The Embassy can not perform the translation for you.

An American citizen with Spanish residency is required to have a Spanish driver's license. Spain will only validate driver's licenses issued in countries signatory to a reciprocity treaty, and there is no such agreement between the US and Spain. Therefore, to obtain a Spanish driver's license you will be required to take both a written test and a driving test. Questions regarding this Spanish government regulations should be directed to the Traffic Authorities ("Dirección General de Tráfico"), tel. 913-018-500 or 900-123-505, or through the web page: <http://www.dgt.es/index.html>.

Automobile insurance is required to drive in Spain. Car rental agencies offer insurance with their vehicles to tourists. Americans bringing their own cars into Spain must bring proof of car insurance with them, since local companies do not insure foreigners without a residence permit. AAA's affiliate in Spain is the Royal Automobile Club of Spain (RACE - Real Automóvil Club de España) on Calle Eloy Gonzalo, 32, tel. 915-947-400

## SECURITY ADVISORIES

The Consular Affairs Bureau at the Department of State receives daily calls about international scams involving Internet Dating, Inheritance, Work Permits, Overpayment, and Money-Laundering. Many scams are initiated through the Internet; victims range in age from 18 to 81 and come from all socio-economic backgrounds.

If you feel you have been a victim of an Internet scam, please consult our consular publications for help and send all direct reports of Internet fraud to the Federal Bureau of Investigation at: <http://www.ic3.gov>. If the scam originated through a particular website, notify the administrators of that website. If you are concerned about an American in distress overseas, but you are not sure if it is a legitimate case, call our office of Overseas Citizens Services at 888-407-4747 (from overseas: 202-501-4444).

- [International Financial Scams Brochure](#)- for information on Internet Dating, Inheritance, Work Permits, Overpayment, and Money-Laundering
- [Spanish Lottery Scam](#)
- [Help for American Victims of Crime Overseas](#)
- [Tips for Business Travelers to Nigeria](#)
- [Advance Fee Business Scams](#)

## TOPICS OF INTEREST: International child abduction

### **What is the State Department's position on International Parental Child Abduction?**

The Department of State has no higher priority than the welfare of U.S. citizens overseas. This is particularly true for our smallest citizens, who cannot speak for themselves. Assisting the victims of international parental child abduction has long been an important activity of the Bureau of Consular Affairs. In 1994, the Office of Children's Issues was created (CI). The abduction unit of this office is devoted to working with parents to resolve the cases of their abducted children.

The United States is party to the Hague Convention on the Civil Aspects of International Child Abduction. The Hague Convention is a civil legal mechanism available to parents seeking the return of, or access to, their child. Its focus is prompt return of children to their homes for adjudication of custody.

The State Department views the Hague Convention as a template of how to proceed in an International Parental Child Abduction case, despite the fact that some countries cannot or will not participate in the Hague process (Spain is also a party to the Hague Convention).

### **How can the Hague Convention help?**

The countries that are party to the Convention have agreed that a child who is habitually resident in one party country, and who has been removed to or retained in another party country in violation of the left-behind parent's custodial rights, shall be promptly returned to the country of habitual residence for a custody hearing. Habitual residence is usually determined by the country in which a child was residing and is considered to have been settled prior to his/her removal. The Convention can also help parents seek visitation rights abroad.

The treaty obligates a member to return an abducted child below the age of 16 if application is made within one year from the date of the wrongful removal or retention, unless one of the exceptions to return apply. If the application for return is made after one year, the court may use its discretion to decide that the child has become resettled in his or her new country and refuse return of the child.

Although CI's obligation to assist under the Convention may end at age 16, our interest in international parental child abduction cases continues until the child's 18th birthday. Even after the child turns 18, the Office of American Citizens Services will continue to take all possible steps to assure the well-being of the now-adult U.S. citizens, until he or she informs us that no further assistance is required.

### **What does the Office of Children's Issues do?**

When a U. S. citizen child is abducted abroad, the State Department's Office of Children's Issues (CA/OCS/CI) works with U. S. embassies and consulates abroad, state and Federal agencies, and –most importantly–the left behind parent. We help the child and parent in a number of ways and make every effort to ensure that the child returns to his or her place of habitual residence using available, lawful means. Consular officers overseas are dedicated to responding to the best of their ability, within the procedures and laws available, to requests for assistance by U.S. citizens.

### **How many International Parental Child Abduction cases of U.S. citizen children are there?**

At any given time, the Office of Children's Issues is aware of approximately 1,100 cases of children internationally

abducted to or from the United States by a parent.

### What resources or literature are available to left-behind parents?

The Bureau of Consular Affairs website <http://travel.state.gov/abduct.html> provides general information on International Parental Child Abduction. On the site, we also have country-specific flyers on this topic. The National Center for Missing and Exploited Children website at [www.missingkids.com](http://www.missingkids.com) also provides extensive information.

### Meet the Consular staff!



*"The Consul General is the "Supervisory Consular Officer" in Spain"*

**Consul General, Daniel F. Keller**

**Hometown: St. Louis Park, Minnesota**

**Graduate of Creighton University, Omaha, Nebraska**

**Joined the Foreign Service in January, 1980**

**Previous assignments: Mexico, Japan, Taiwan, China, Washington, DC, Russia, Nigeria, Philippines, Chile and Venezuela.**

**Married, 3 grown children living in Austin and Texas City, Texas**

### What does a Consul general do?

**"The Consul General is the "Supervisory Consular Officer" in Spain. In Madrid, he supervises the American Citizen Services Unit which provides passports and emergency assistance to Americans, the Federal Benefits Unit, which provides SSA services, and the visa unit. The Consul General also supervises the Consular Agencies which are located around Spain, and the provision of Consular services at the Consulate General in Barcelona."**

### What do you like best about Spain?

**"The History. There is so much to learn about this country."**





