

President Obama nominates Robert Stephen Ford as Ambassador to the Syrian Arab Republic

On February 16, 2010, President Obama [announced his intent to nominate](#) Robert Stephen Ford, as Ambassador to the Syrian Arab Republic. Mr. Ford is presently Deputy Chief of Mission at the U.S. Embassy Baghdad, Iraq. Mr. Ford is a career member of the Senior Foreign Service. He was confirmed by the U.S. Senate as Ambassador to Algeria on May 27, 2006, and sworn in on August 11, 2006. Mr. Ford served from 2004 until 2006 and again from 2008 until 2009 as the Political Counselor to the U.S. Embassy Baghdad, Iraq and was Deputy Chief of Mission in Bahrain from 2001 until 2004. Mr. Ford has also served in a number of other posts since entering the Foreign Service in 1985, including Izmir, Cairo, Algiers, and Yaoundé. Mr. Ford earned a Master of Arts in 1983 from Johns Hopkins University. He is a recipient of a number of Department of State awards, including the 2005 James Clement Dunn Award for outstanding work at the mid-level in the Foreign Service as well as three Superior Honor Awards and two Meritorious Honor awards. Mr. Ford speaks German, Turkish, French, and Arabic. The nomination was [sent to the Senate on February 22](#) where it is [pending Senate confirmation](#).

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Consular Warden Luncheon in Homs



The Chargé d'affaires and other Embassy representatives met with the Consular Wardens in the old city in Homs in mid-January.

The Chargé d'affaires and a group of Embassy representatives from the Public Affairs, Political and Consular sections had lunch with our [wardens](#) in Homs to say thank you for their continued service in helping safeguard the welfare of American citizens abroad. We hope to visit Latakia and Tartous in the near future!

New Law Makes Absentee Voting Easier for Overseas Americans

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.

“Voting Assistance Officers at the U.S. Embassy in Damascus are available to answer questions about absentee voting. .”

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. 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.

Emergency Ballots (continued from Page 2)

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. Embassy in Damascus is also always available to answer questions about absentee voting. To contact the Voting Assistance Officer, please send an e-mail to VoteDamascus@state.gov.



Travel Warning for Syria cancelled

In mid-February, the Department of State, withdrew the travel warning for Syria. Travel Warnings are issued to describe long-term, protracted conditions that make a country dangerous or unstable. A Travel Warning is also issued when the U.S. Government's ability to assist American citizens is constrained due to the closure of an embassy or consulate or because of a drawdown of its staff. The most recent series of travel warnings for Syria had been in place since September 2006 following an attack against the Embassy and renewed in the aftermath of the demonstrations that took place towards the end of 2008 and beginning of 2009.

While the security situation in Syria no longer warrants a country-specific Travel Warning, Americans living abroad should be aware of the [Worldwide Caution](#) released by the Department of State on February 12, 2010 and read the revised Country Specific Information for Syria (available online at http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis_pa_tw/cis/cis_1035.html) which was updated on February 18, 2010.

Recall for certain lots of Tylenol, Motrin, Benadryl, and Rolaid's (McNeil products)



In consultation with the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA), McNeil Consumer Healthcare, is voluntarily recalling certain lots of "over the counter" products in the Americas, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), and Fiji (Full recall list available at the following weblink: www.tylenol.com).

The company is initiating this recall following an investigation of consumer reports of an unusual moldy, musty, or mildew-like odor that, in a small number of cases, was associated with temporary and non-serious gastrointestinal events. These include nausea, stomach pain, vomiting, or diarrhea. Consumers are advised to discontinue use of any of these products and discard them immediately.

The most common McNeil products included in the recall include children and adult Tylenol, Motrin, Benadryl, Rolaid's, Simply Sleep and certain lots of St. John's brands.

You can also find out about other U.S. government product recalls online. To provide better service in alerting the American people to unsafe, hazardous or defective products, six federal agencies with vastly different jurisdictions have joined together to create www.recalls.gov – a "one stop shop" for U.S. Government recalls.

Proposed changes to fees for Consular Services



It has been proposed that the Department of State adjust the consular fees charged at its Embassies overseas in light of an independent cost of service study's (CoSS') findings that the U.S. Government is not fully covering its costs for providing these services under the current fee structure. The primary objective of the adjustments to the Schedule of Fees is to ensure that fees for consular services reflect costs to the United States of providing the services.

There is a 30 day period for **public comment** which will end on March 9, 2010. The date that the new schedule of fees will be announced after public comments regarding the new fees are considered.

The full text of the proposed changes to the fee schedule, and a facility for public comment is available online at <http://www.regulations.gov/>

Marriage in Syria

So you've met the right person – and you want to get married in Syria but don't know what is required?

Here is a quick checklist, drawn from the [Syrian Ministry of Civil Affairs website](#), to make sure you have all the right documents.

The Syrian spouse shall submit:

1. A record from the appropriate secretariat of the civil register;
2. A marriage license from the appropriate recruitment section;
3. Photocopy of the Syrian identity card; and
4. An application written on a white sheet of paper, with a financial stamp valued at 3 Syrian Pounds attached.

The Foreign spouse shall submit:

1. A birth certificate or record from his/her country, translated into Arabic and endorsed by the Syrian embassy in that same country and by the Syrian Foreign Ministry; or from the Patriarchate in Damascus accredited by the birth country if the foreign spouse is Christian;
2. Documented results of a negative test for HIV/AIDS;
3. Photocopy of the passport OR a translation of the foreign name (the original name before marriage should be written in block capital Latin letters); and
4. Photocopy of the marriage deed translated into Arabic and endorsed by the Syrian embassy in the country where the deed was issued and by the Syrian Foreign Ministry.

Note:

Syrians or Palestinians registered with the Establishment of Palestinian Refugees in the Syrian Arab Republic shall not be allowed to marry a foreign (non-Arab) spouse except by prior permission from the Minister of the Interior (legislative Decree No.272, dated Nov.3, 1969).

The Legal Period to Record Marriage and Divorce Documents:

Marriage and divorce documents shall be submitted to the secretary of the civil register where the event has taken place within 15 days of becoming effective in the center of the secretariat of the civil register, and 30 days if the event has occurred outside that center (Article 22/amended by legislative Decree 102 of 1969). After the expiry of the legal period, the person concerned shall pay 10 Syrian Pounds in the form of a stamp.

The day when the document becomes effective is not calculated within the legal period.

If a document is submitted within the legal period, but its registration was delayed because of the process of verification, it shall be registered without a fine. The secretary of the civil register must mention the date of reference very clearly to prove that it has been submitted within the legal period, and record it in the file of letter summaries.

As for marriage and divorce rulings, the legal period shall start as of the date when these rulings become final.

Immigrant Visas Frequently Asked Questions

I'm an American citizen living in Syria and I want my new spouse to return with me to the U.S. – what do I do?

If you are an American citizen residing in Syria and you would like to return to the U.S. with your non-American spouse, the first thing to do is file an official request (a petition) for your spouse to immigrate. Information about filing a petition at the Embassy in Damascus is available online at <http://damascus.usembassy.gov/petitions.html>. Spouses of American citizens are generally able to immigrate to the U.S. within a few months of the petition having been filed. Additional information about the immigration process is available online from the [Citizenship and Immigration Service \(USCIS\)](#) and from the [Department of State](#).

Why are immigrant visa applications refused?

The vast majority of immigrant visas are issued, and in cases of visas based on marriage, we hope that the couple live happily ever after. There are, however, a number reasons why an immigrant visa application might be refused. Sometimes there is inadequate evidence of the family relationship. Sometimes, the applicant may be ineligible for having previously attempted to obtain a visa by fraud, or for having been in the U.S. illegally for more than six months, or for any of the other [ineligibilities listed in Section 212\(a\) of the Immigration and Nationality Act.](#) In some cases, it may be possible to apply for a [waiver of the ineligibility](#).

One of the most common reasons for which immigrant visas are refused is because of the applicant's failure to provide an [Affidavit of Support](#) .

The Affidavit of Support is legally required for the petitioning sponsor for many family-based and some employment based immigrants to show the intending immigrant will have adequate means of support, when planning to immigrate to the U.S. The purpose of the process is to prove that the intending immigrant has adequate means of financial support and is unlikely to become a [public charge](#). A “petitioning sponsor” is a person who has filed an immigrant petition.

The I-864 Affidavit of Support is a contract between a sponsor and the U.S. Government. The legal basis for the I-864 Affidavit of Support is Section 213A of the Immigration and Nationality Act (INA).

**Interested in applying to an American university?
Don't forget certain tests are required for entrance.**

For further information, please contact the Education and Advising Testing Center at the American Cultural Center: Tel: (+963-11) 3391-4444 (ext.4171) or online at <http://damascus.usembassy.gov/eato2.html>

Testing Dates from the Education and Advising Testing Office				
Test	March 2010	April 2010	May 2010	June 2010
ITP	Wednesday, March 10 Tuesday, March 23	Thursday, April 8 Tuesday, April 13 Wednesday, April 28	Wednesday, May 12 Sunday, May 23	Wednesday, June 2 Tuesday, June 22
GRE	N/A	Subject Test Saturday, April 10	N/A	N/A
SAT	N/A	N/A	Saturday, May 1	Saturday, June 5
TOEFL	Friday, March 5	N/A	Saturday, May 8	N/A
TSE	Friday, March 5	N/A	N/A	N/A
TOEIC	Wednesday, March 24	Thursday, April 29	Tuesday, May 25	Wednesday, June 23

ITP: Institutional TOEFL

TOEIC: Test of English for International Communication

Academy Award-nominated American filmmakers in Syria

Academy Award-nominated American filmmakers DA Pennebaker and Chris Hegedus will be in Syria to participate in the 2010 DOX BOX documentary film festival later this week.

All screenings are open to the public and free of charge. All films will have Arabic subtitles.

[THE WAR ROOM](#)

DAMASCUS (Wednesday, March 3 @ 1830. Al Hamra Theater. Screening + Q&A session with directors)

HOMS (Saturday, March 6 @ 1800. Location Al Kindi Theater)

TARTOUS (Sunday, March 7 @ 1800. Location Al Kindi Theater)

The War Room was the name of Bill Clinton's campaign center in Arkansas. Though the press wasn't usually permitted inside this small warren of chaos, filmmakers DA Pennebaker and Chris Hegedus managed to secure partial access and shot nearly 35 hours of footage there. At the center of The War Room are the two men who guided Clinton's ship from the beginning: James Carville, the fiery, charismatic, expletive-spewing Cajun who manages the campaign with a mixture of Southern charm and unrelenting passion, and George Stephanopoulos, the brilliant, handsome Rhodes Scholar who, as communications director, calmly but surely mobilizes his staff to take the presidency.

Hegedus and Pennebaker's camera follow these two masterminds as they organize and execute strategies for events including the Democratic National Convention and the final, nail-biting days leading up to the election itself, when it seemed less and less certain whom the voters would choose. The War Room, which was nominated for an Academy Award, is a compelling and enlightening adventure story about two remarkable men, and about the monumental effort and determination that is required to conduct and win a political campaign in the modern age.

[DONT LOOK BACK](#)

Thursday, March 4 @ 1630. Al Hamra Theater. Screening + Q&A session with directors

DONT LOOK BACK is about the Sixties and Bob Dylan - more than the folk singer touted by the record industry, more than the song writer and his poetry, more than the Kerouac-kid who haunts our best writing. He is the force that blew us out of one era and into another. His words are ambiguous, his style constantly changing and his avoidance of publicity obsessive. DONT LOOK BACK was filmed during a three week concert tour of England in the Spring of 1965. Not only a view of an extraordinary concert tour, Dont Look Back is an intimate portrait of one of the most influential songwriters of our times.

[Startup.com](#)

Friday, March 5 @ 1630. Al Hamra Theater. Screening + Q&A session with directors

An intimate, behind-the-scenes view of the dot com mania, Startup.com follows the adventures of childhood friends Kaleil Isaza Tuzman and Tom Herman as they create govWorks.com, an award winning website that lets citizens interact with their local governments.

Within a year, the two young entrepreneurs raise 60 million dollars, hire hundreds of employees and rub shoulders with President Clinton. But as the stock market tests the strength of their business, they wrestle with growing pains, tackle technical difficulties, charter the unpredictable venture capital waters and outsmart copycat competition. But in the end, none of these challenges prepare Kaleil and Tom for their own conflict over the management of govWorks.com, a conflict that will not only endanger their company and their jobs but irrevocably endanger their lifelong friendship. Startup.com is a classic story about friendship and values at the dawn of the Internet Age.

[KINGS OF PASTRY](#)

Saturday, March 6 @ 1630. Al Hamra Theater. Screening + Q&A session with directors

The most recent film by Chris Hegedus and DA Pennebaker, KINGS OF PASTRY (2009) brings to the screen a scene never before witnessed: 16 French pastry chefs gathered for three intense days of mixing, piping and sculpting everything from delicate chocolates to six-foot sugar sculptures. This is the MOF (Meilleur Ouvrier de France) competition, the ultimate recognition for every pastry chef; it is a dream and an obsession. The film follows Jacquy Pfeiffer, founder of The French Pastry School in Chicago, as he returns to France to compete in this competition of extraordinary skill, nerves of steel, and luck, in hopes of being declared by President Sarkozy one of the Kings of Pastry.

A few words from American Citizens services...

It's been an extremely busy month for us here in ACS, as we adapt and change our internal processes in order to better serve our American community in Syria. We hope that as the month's progress, that you continue to find the content of our newsletter informative and helpful. We like to think of this as a dialogue, and we welcome your input. If you have any ideas or suggestions for topics to be covered in future editions, we'd like to hear from you at acsdamascus@state.gov.



Karen Wiebelhaus
American Citizen Services Chief
U.S. Embassy Damascus, Syria

Stay tuned in Next Month's issue:

- Emergency Preparedness
- A look at interfaith marriage in Syria



American Citizen Services Hours and Contact Information

For appointments, please visit our website at :
<http://damascus.usembassy.gov/service.html>

U.S. Embassy Damascus
American Citizen Services
Consular Section
2, Al-Mansour Street, Abu Roumaneh
PO Box 29
Damascus, Syria
Phone: 963-11-3391-4444
Fax: 963-11-331-9678

UPCOMING HOLIDAY CLOSURES

Monday, March 08: Revolution Day
Sunday, March 21: Mother's Day
Sunday, April 04: Easter

"Assisting approximately 4 million Americans who reside overseas and nearly 60 million who travel abroad remains a top priority for the U.S. Government.

Though consular work is punctuated by extraordinary acts to help U.S. citizens during times of crisis or urgent need, it is built upon a foundation of services provided to an American public that increasingly lives, works, and learns in the global community."

-- Department of State and USAID Strategic Plan.