



# American Citizen Services News

*Whether one is celebrating Eid al Adha, Thanksgiving, Christmas, Kwanza, Hanukkah or the New Year,* this is a period filled with holidays and festivity as people travel to visit family and friends, or just to see how a holiday is celebrated elsewhere. We wish everyone a safe and joyous holiday season, wherever they may be, and are focusing this issue on travel and travel safety.

## Smart Traveler Enrollment Program launches

The Department of State is upgrading its computer-based system for citizens to keep in touch with their embassy. The enhanced system is called the Smart Traveler Enrollment Program (STEP). There is no need to update any bookmarks you may have to the existed Travel Registration web site, as the address will not change. Enrolling with STEP whenever you travel will help ensure that the Embassy is able to assist you with individual or large-scale emergencies.

When you sign up, you will automatically receive the most current information we have about the country where you will be traveling or living. You will also receive updates, including Travel Warnings and Travel Alerts (where appropriate). You only need to sign up once, and then you can add and delete trips from your account based on your

current travel plans!

### Stay Connected

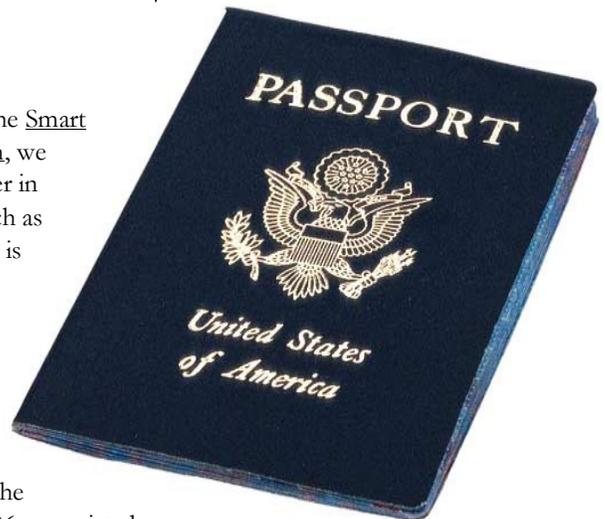
By connecting with us on the Smart Traveler Enrollment Program, we will be able to assist you better in the case of an emergency, such as if you lose your passport or it is stolen while you are abroad.

We also assist U.S. citizens in other emergencies, such as in natural disasters. For example, after the earthquake in Haiti, we evacuated over 16,700 U.S. citizens. During the civil unrest in Lebanon in 2006 we assisted nearly 15,000 U.S. citizens, and in 2004 we helped thousands more during the tsunami.

The travel and contact information you enter into our Smart Traveler Enrollment Program will make it easier for consular officers in U.S. embassies and consulates around the world to contact you and your loved ones during an emergency — including situations where your family or friends in the U.S. are having problems trying to contact you with important news.

### Stay Safe

We believe that a well-informed traveler is a safer traveler. Our consular officers around the world compile country-specific information, travel alerts, travel warnings, fact sheets and warden messages to provide you with timely and accurate travel information about



every country where you may travel.

We include reports on possible risks and security threats so that you can make informed decisions about your travel plans and activities.

Stay informed by connecting with us via our Smart Traveler Enrollment Program so you can have safe and enjoyable travels!

### Your Privacy Is Paramount

All the personal information you provide to us is protected under the Privacy Act of 1974. This law prohibits us from sharing the information with anyone without your written authorization. Certain exceptions exist, such as when we need to share information on a limited basis in order to protect your safety and welfare in extreme circumstances.

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# *New airport screening measures*

*From the Transportation Security Administration*

You may have read about the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) implementing enhanced pat-downs as part of our layered approach to security. Using the latest intelligence, TSA constantly updates screening procedures to stay ahead of those who wish to do us harm and keep the skies safe for the flying public. When developing our security procedures, we use input from across the agency, including our Offices of Intelligence, Privacy, and Civil Rights and Liberties.

So, what might cause you to receive a pat-down? Passengers may receive a pat-down in a number of circumstances: to resolve an alarm at a walk-through metal detector; if an anomaly is detected during screening with advanced imaging technology (AIT); or during random screening. Passengers who opt out of enhanced screening such as advanced imaging technology will receive an equivalent level of screening to include a thorough pat-down. Remember, you can always request to be screened in a private area.

In fact, fewer than 3% of passengers receive pat-downs. Only passengers who alarm a walk-through metal detector or AIT machine or opt out of the AIT receive a pat-down. It is one layer in our tool kit to address the nonmetallic explosives threat.

In [a Congressional] hearing, [TSA] Administrator Pistole said: “The bottom line is few people in the overall scheme of things will actually receive those pat-downs. Now, we've heard some examples, and obviously, there's a vocal group out there who have experienced this for the first time, and, rightfully so, raising concerns, what's behind this. And the bottom line is we, the transportation security officers in particular, are trying to work in partnership with the traveling public to say we want to ensure that you are safe on this flight. Work with us in a partnership to provide the best possible security. And that's what it comes down to.”



*There has been a great deal of discussion in the media of new airport security measures in the United States. The Transportation Safety Administration is providing information to help separate fact from rumor.*

TSA began deploying state-of-the-art advanced imaging technology in 2007. This technology can detect a wide range of threats to transportation security in a matter of seconds to protect passengers and crews. Imaging technology is an integral part of TSA's effort to continually look for new technologies that help ensure travel remains safe and secure by staying ahead of evolving threats.

TSA uses two types of imaging technology, millimeter wave and backscatter. Currently, there are 385 imaging technology units at 68 airports. In March 2010, TSA began deploying 450 advanced imaging technology units, which were purchased with American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) funds. Advanced imaging technology screening is safe for all passengers, and the technology meets national health and safety standards.

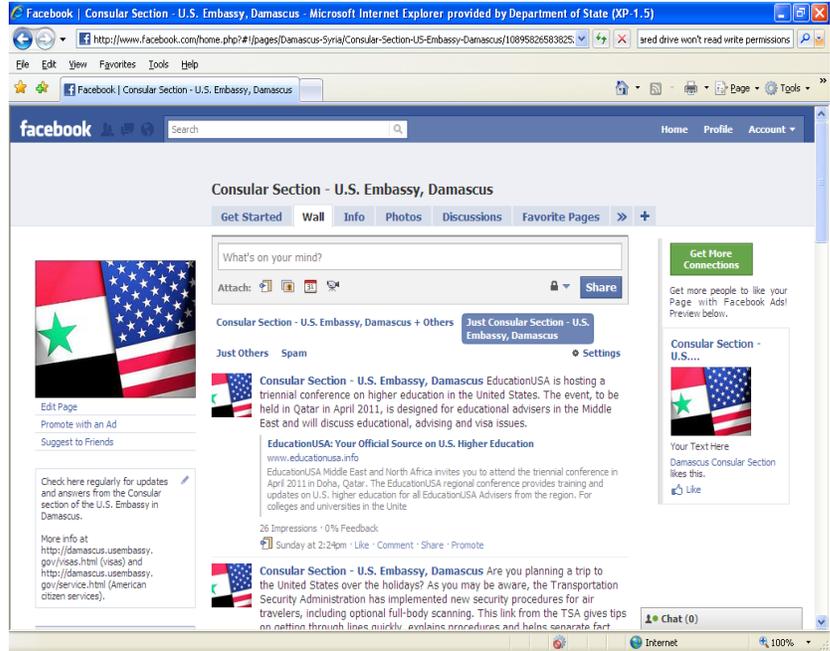
TSA has implemented strict measures to protect passenger privacy, which is ensured through the anonymity of the image. Additionally, advanced imaging technology screening is optional to all passengers.

Since imaging technology has been deployed at airports, over 99 percent of passengers choose to be screened by this technology over alternative screening procedures. According to a new CBS poll, 4 out of 5 Americans support the use of advanced imaging technology at airports nationwide.

# Consular Section Facebook page goes live

The US Embassy's Consular Section has opened up a Facebook page. The page is a great place to engage with consular officers. In addition to responding to questions or participating in online discussions, we will regularly post updates on news of interest to American citizens living in Syria, and also to Syrian residents interested in travel to the United States.

The Facebook page can be accessed at: <http://www.facebook.com/pages/Damascus-Syria/Consular-Section-US-Embassy-Damascus/108958265838252>. The response so far has been welcoming, with many people signing up to "like" or "friend" the Facebook page shortly after it went up. By clicking the "like" button at the top of the page, you will automatically receive news updates and have the ability to post comments or questions. Our purpose in opening the page is to continue making consular officers and information more accessible.



## Tips on residing overseas

You can find advice for Americans living abroad at [http://travel.state.gov/travel/living/residing/residing\\_4993.html](http://travel.state.gov/travel/living/residing/residing_4993.html). This includes specific information on:

- Marriage abroad
- Birth or death of U.S. citizens abroad
- Divorce
- Federal benefit services
- Driver's licenses
- Absentee voting
- Selective service registration
- Emergency preparedness

## Forgot to vote? Don't despair

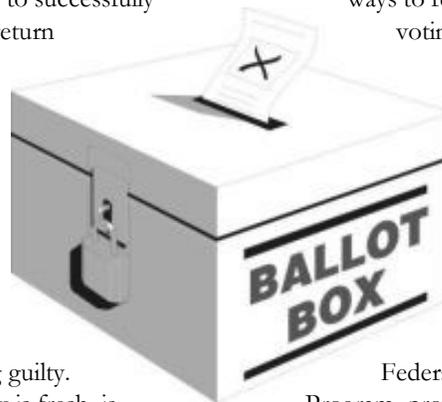
True, the November elections have come and gone. Although many American citizens living in Syria were able to successfully request, complete and return an absentee ballot before the deadline, some inevitably miss the chance.

Whether you missed your chance to vote out of forgetfulness or due to circumstances beyond your control, there is no point feeling guilty. Now, while the memory is fresh, is the time to make sure it doesn't happen again next election season.

The federal government has established rules to facilitate remote voting. There are ways to register, request absentee voting, and receive and submit ballots electronically or through the mail.

If you want to make sure you are ready to vote next time, please visit [www.fvap.gov](http://www.fvap.gov). That web site, run by the

Federal Voting Assistance Program, provides information and forms to help you vote absentee according to the specific requirements of all 50 states.



## Consular visit to Homs and Aleppo

U.S. Embassy Consular officers visited the cities of Homs and Aleppo in late October to meet with Embassy wardens and American citizens and to provide immigrant visa and citizen services. The visit was part of the Embassy’s ongoing efforts to be as accessible as possible to the public throughout Syria.

Officers were hosted at the ICARDA school in Aleppo, where they provided a range of services, including accepting immigrant visa petitions and applications as well as applications for passports, birth records and other citizen services.

The officers also met with Embassy wardens in both Homs and Aleppo to discuss ways the Embassy might most effectively serve American citizens outside the Damascus area. In addition to regular visits to American communities throughout Syria and making it possible for Americans to renew their passports (via DHL) without having to travel to the Embassy, we are looking at other options for making consular services more accessible and convenient.



*Right: officers and Embassy wardens had a dinner meeting in Homs to share ideas for how they could most effectively serve the American citizen community.*

## U.S. Marine Corps Ball returns to Syria

The U.S. Marine Corps celebrated its 235th birthday on November 10th. In addition to having one of the finest reputations among the branches of the U.S. armed forces, the Marine Corps Embassy Security Group provide security to U.S. embassies around the world, including the U.S. Embassy in Damascus. In honor of the founding of the Marine Corps 235 years ago, the Marines in Damascus sponsored a ball, highlighting the Marines’ sacrifices and contributions to national and global security . The guests included American and Syrian members of the general public, diplomats, and military attaches representing countries with diplomatic or military presences in Syria.



## American Language Center Test Dates

Test	January 2011	February 2011	March 2011	April 2011	May 2011	June 2011
ITP	Thursday, January 13 Thursday, January 27	Thursday, February 10 Wednesday, February 23	Wednesday, March 9 Thursday, March 24	Wednesday, April 6 Monday, April 18 Thursday, April 28	Wednesday, May 4 Monday, May 23	Wednesday, June 8 Thursday, June 30
GRE	N/A	General Test Saturday, February 12	N/A	Subject Test Saturday, April 9	N/A	N/A
SAT	Saturday, January 22	N/A	N/A	N/A	Saturday, May 7	Saturday, June 4
TOEFL	Saturday, January 15	N/A	Friday, March 4	N/A	Saturday, May 7	N/A
TSE	No longer offered	No longer offered	No longer offered	No longer offered	No longer offered	No longer offered
TOEIC	Wednesday, January 26	Tuesday, February 22	Wednesday, March 23	Wednesday, April 27	Tuesday, May 24	Wednesday, June 29

## High school studies or equivalency exams abroad

The Embassy often receives questions from American citizens and some non-citizens who are interested in university studies in the United States.

Whether you are originally from the United States, Syria, or somewhere else, if you did not graduate from an accredited American-curriculum high school such as the Damascus Community School, the ICARDA school in Aleppo, or other schools based on the American system and curriculum, you will most likely need to complete a high school equivalency exam before universities will consider your application.

General Educational Development (or GED) tests are a group of five subject tests which, when passed, certify that the taker has American or Canadian high school-level academic skills. The GED is also referred to as a General Education Diploma, General Equivalency Diploma, or Graduate Equivalency Degree.

To pass the GED Tests and earn a GED credential, test takers must score higher than 60 percent of graduating high school seniors nationwide. Some jurisdictions require that students pass additional tests such as an English proficiency exam or civics test.

The American Council on Education is the sole developer for the GED test. The test is always taken in person and never available online. Jurisdictions award a "Certificate of General Educational Development" or similarly titled credential to persons who meet the passing score requirements.

Only individuals who have not earned a high school diploma may take the GED tests. The tests were created to help veterans after World War II return to civilian life.

Common reasons for GED recipients not having received a high school diploma include immigration to the United States or Canada, homeschooling, leaving high school early, the inability to pass required courses or mandatory achievement tests, the need to work, personal problems, and wanting to get into college early.

More than 15 million people have received a GED credential since the program began. One in every seven Americans with high school credentials received the GED, as well as one in 20 college students. Seventy percent of GED recipients complete at least the 10th grade before leaving school, and the same number are over the age of 19, with the average age being 24.

If you take and pass the GED, you will receive the equivalent of a high school diploma from an accredited school. The testing location nearest to residents of Damascus, Syria who wish to study in the US is in [Beirut, Lebanon through AMIDEAST](#).

If you are interested in completing high school studies but are unable to attend an American-curriculum high school, you may also take advantage of some private schools that offer full courses of high school study online.



## Embassy now accepts credit cards for citizen services

The Consular Section of the U.S. Embassy in Damascus is pleased to announce that we now accept payment for American citizen services by credit card! All credit card transaction charges are in U.S. dollars. If cardholders are billed in local currency it is the card issuer that determines the rate of exchange.

Credit cards are not accepted for the payment of non-immigrant or immigrant visa fees at this time. The following cards are accepted: Visa, MasterCard, American Express, Discover, Diners Club. For your protection, appropriate identification will be required to confirm identity of the card holder.

Although at this time credit card payment is available for American citizen services only, the Embassy will evaluate the effectiveness of accepting credit card payments in the near future and determine whether to begin accepting credit card payments for other consular services.

### Current fee schedule (in US dollars)

Passport application	25.00
Passport issuance (adult)	70.00
Passport issuance	40.00
Report of birth abroad	65.00
Passport surcharge	40.00
Notarial	50.00
Certified copy	50.00
Authentication	50.00

For more information, or to schedule an appointment, visit:  
<http://damascus.usembassy.gov/service.html>



## American Citizen Services Hours and Contact Information

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

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### ***UPCOMING HOLIDAY CLOSURES***

December 26, Sunday	Christmas
January 2, Sunday	New Year's
January 16, Sunday	Martin Luther King Day

“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.