

Intensive Overseas Americans Week 2008

During the week of April 14th, Americans Resident Overseas (AARO), American Citizens Abroad (ACA) and the Federation of American Women's Clubs Overseas (FAWCO) in Washington joined forces in Washington under the auspices of Overseas Americans Week 2008 (OAW). With an ambitious agenda, OAW wound up a successful week, bringing the voice of Americans abroad to Washington DC and promoting the interests of Americans working and living abroad.

Over 200 Congressional offices were visited with emphasis on voting rights and the burdensome tax situation of Americans overseas. Bills have been introduced into Congress on both issues.

On the voting issue, two members of the Americans Abroad Caucus, Representatives Carolyn Maloney and Michael Honda, introduced legislative bills to amend the UOCAVA legislation which regulates the voting procedures for Americans overseas and military personnel who register and vote by absentee ballot in federal elections. Hearings on the proposed amendments were held by the House Administration Committee during OAW 2008 so that the OAW delegation could attend. The hearings confirmed the need to streamline voting procedures and to expand eligibility under UOCAVA. OAW 2008 submitted official written testimony to the hearings.

Concerning the issue of the heavy tax burden on Americans overseas, targeted meetings were held with offices of members of the House Ways and Means Committee and the Senate Finance Committee as well as with the Joint Tax Committee to inform Congress of the serious tax increase on Americans overseas since 2006 due to the passage of the TIPRA legislation and to seek redress in the tax reform legislation in preparation for 2009. OAW seeks reversal of the TIPRA legislation and supports the Working Americans Competitiveness Act, introduced by Senator Jim DeMint (R-SC) and by Representative Gregory Meeks (D-NY). This legislation would eliminate the cap on the Foreign Earned Income Exclusion and would allow Americans to work overseas on a competitive basis. OAW undertook efforts to encourage co-sponsorship of these bills.

OAW 2008 also reinforced its relationships with the Americans Abroad Caucus. OAW held a special morning information session for staffers of members of the Americans Abroad Caucus. The week's highlight was the successful OAW reception for members of the Americans Abroad Caucus. Representatives Carolyn Maloney and Joe Wilson highlighted the role of the caucus and Congressman Michael Honda spoke on the need to ensure that Americans residing overseas are not disenfranchised by antiquated voting procedures. Michael Caudell-Feagan, Project Director of the Pew Foundation's "Make Voting Work" initiative, provided a key note speech on their activities to encourage modernization of the entire voting process.

The week was crowned with immediate success as nine new members of the House of Representatives joined the Americans Abroad Caucus during OAW, bringing the total to

24 members. The Americans Abroad Caucus was founded in 2007 by Representatives Carolyn Maloney (D-NY) and Joe Wilson (R-SC). This caucus is vital in providing focal point in Congress for overseas Americans issues.