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Sent: Thursday, 15 May 2008 9:04 AM
To: Committee, EM (REPS)
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Subject: Submission

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Message:

To: The Committee Secretary, JSCEM

Dear Sir,

Please accept this submission for the JSCEM's Inquiry into the 2007 Federal Election. I Married a US citizen and migrated to America in 1996. I had lived in Claremont, Western Australia and was an enrolled voter in the electorate of CURTIN. Since leaving Australia I have returned on numerous occasions to visit family and friends. My husband I intend to return to Australia to live permanently in the near future. Thanks to the recent changes in the laws governing Australian citizenship I was able to become a dual citizen. This process has made me very aware of the importance of my ties to Australia and my ability to vote is one of the few chances I get, as an expat to make my voice heard. Mostly through the internet and conversations with friends and family I feel I have kept well informed of Australian political issues, living outside Australia I can also form an opinion about how we are seen by foreign countries. I am an informed voter and should have the opportunity to vote should I desire. I was distressed to find that I had been dropped from the electoral roll in 2004 and had thought that I was off it until I returned to Australia permanently. I was unaware of the process I had to go through to remain on the Roll whilst living overseas or that I was even eligible to reestablish my name on the electoral roll. Thanks to the information provided by the Southern Cross Group I was able to re enroll and vote in the 2007 Federal Election. I found Government websites quite unclear, it was only after reading the simplified versions I could work out how I should go about it.

Voting and enrolling overseas is difficult, particularly if you live in a remote location as I do. The Chicago Consulate was very helpful but the identification requirements are not easy to meet if there are no other Australians living in the area. I understand you need to identify me correctly, but there must be a simpler way than the ones that exist now.

I do not think it should be mandatory for Australians living overseas to vote, I cannot see a way of policing it fairly and keeping up with our politics whilst overseas takes concerted effort not every one can do it. I don't see the point in forcing an uninformed individual to vote. In summary I think there are many things to improve the way expatriated Australians are allowed to vote. Methods of identification could be improved and an online registry established so we can order voting materials and vote in a timely fashion. Voting should not be mandatory for overseas residents. We all, as citizens should be allowed to vote and never have our names removed from the electoral roll. Failing that, at the very least we should be informed of the fact that removal is imminent and how to rectify it. As a citizen the United States one of our fundamental rights, as a member of a democratic society is our freedom to vote for our government whether we reside here or not. That right is never rescinded unless you commit a felonious act. As a citizen of Australia we should have that same right. I appreciate your consideration in these matters Yours Sincerely Joanne Connor
Minocqua, Wisconsin. USA