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U.S. Citizens Urged to Vote Early

By Jonathan Earle

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The U.S. government recommends that overseas voters cast their ballots at least four weeks before the election. **U.S. Army Pfc. Carlynn Knaak**

With Nov. 6 elections in the United States just around the corner, officials at the U.S. Embassy and volunteers from the two major political parties are urging voting-age Americans in Russia to get registered and cast their ballots as soon as possible.

Long mailing times and state-specific voting requirements mean that there's no time to waste, so get educated about your state's regulations and cast your vote, voting advocates said.

"There are 51 ways of actually doing this," Andrew Hardisty, chairman of Democrats Abroad in Russia, said in reference to voting regulations, which vary by state. "We cannot simply go to the U.S. Embassy on Election Day and vote for president."

Absentee voters must register with their local voting registrar, request a ballot and place their vote before their state's multiple deadlines. For this reason, the federal government

recommends that overseas voters cast their ballots at least four weeks before the election.

Fortunately, increasingly tech-savvy state and local voting authorities are making it easier than ever to vote. Connecticut, for example, allows voters to register and receive their ballots by e-mail. All states provide ballots by e-mail.

"Some states are more restrictive than others," Hardisty said. Less restrictive states "even allow you to vote by faxing in your ballot."

The U.S. Embassy in Moscow will be hosting an event at the American Center during the week of Sept. 30 to Oct. 6 to provide information to people who have not registered to vote or applied for their absentee ballot.

They'll also be collecting completed ballots and delivering them through the diplomatic pouch, which guarantees their safe delivery.

Democrats Abroad will be answering questions and handing out registration and absentee ballot request forms at Starlite Diner near the Chekhovskaya metro station on Thursday at 7 p.m. and Saturday at noon.

By all accounts, voters are charged-up for this year's election, headlined by the contest between President Barack Obama and his Republican challenger, Mitt Romney.

"I think turnout's going to be very high this year," Joe Rice Johnson III, chairman of Republicans Abroad in Russia and Georgia, said by telephone from Florida.

Obama and Romney have sparred over America's policy toward Russia, with Obama touting his "reset," which has produced the START II missile defense treaty and new agreements on bilateral visas and adoptions, and Romney accusing Obama of being too soft on Russia.

At the Republican National Convention last month, Romney pledged to show President Vladimir Putin "a little less flexibility and more backbone," a reference to an incident in March in which Obama was overheard telling then-President Dmitry Medvedev that he would have "more flexibility" in missile defense and other issues after the election.

Obama fired back by accusing Romney of being "stuck in a Cold War mind warp," citing an interview in which Romney referred to Russia as America's "No. 1 geopolitical foe."

For more information and a step-by-step voting guide, visit the "Vote 2012" section of the U.S. Embassy's website. Check the embassy's website, Facebook page or Twitter feeds for the date of the absentee voting event and other information.

Putin told RT last week that he could work with "whomever the American people elect as president," but added that Russia's effort would "only be as efficient as our partners allow it to be."

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