

MEMORANDUM

**TO:** The American Club of Sweden Board  
**FROM:** Peter R. Dahlen  
**DATE:** Wednesday, January 24, 2007  
**RE:** Proposal to Give Overseas Americans Delegates in Congress

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American Citizens Abroad (“ACA”) has begun lobbying for a proposal calling for the 4.1 million overseas Americans living throughout the world to be directly represented in Congress by 6 directly elected delegates to the U.S. House of Representatives and 2 to the U.S. Senate. ACA has been joined in this effort by the Alliance of American Organizations Iberia (ALLAMO), and the American International Club of Rome. (See the “ACA Proposal” link in the weboffice menu).

The reason for this initiative is that Americans overseas face all of the responsibilities of full citizenship, but are not afforded all the rights. Americans abroad pay taxes, are subject to the military draft, and the laws of our nation. Yet they do not have direct representation in the U.S. Congress to represent their views in determining the formulation, implementation and enforcement of those laws. This violates a central premise of representative democracy and the ideal, voiced by Thomas Jefferson, that governments “derive their just powers from the consent of the governed.”

Consequently, U.S. leadership in promoting the international rule of law and democratization is undermined. The U.S. devotes significant resources to promoting representative democracy abroad. Indeed, the Bush administration has made the promotion of democracy a cornerstone of U.S. foreign policy and giving Americans abroad direct representation in Congress will demonstrate to the world that the frontiers of democracy keep expanding in the U.S. as well. Because of this, ACA is hopeful the idea will quickly find bi-partisan support in Washington.

A number of European countries such as Croatia, France, Italy, and Portugal grant their expatriates direct representation in their home country parliaments. France, for example, gives its overseas citizens 12 senators who are elected for nine-year terms. Overseas Italians directly elect 12 deputies and 9 senators.

Under the ACA proposal, the delegates elected by the overseas American community would enjoy the same rights and privileges already enjoyed by the Delegates and Resident Commissioner who now represent Americans living in Washington D.C. and four overseas territories (Puerto Rico; Guam, the Virgin Islands and American Samoa). Like current Delegates in Congress, these proposed new overseas American delegates would be assigned to Congressional Committees and could introduce legislation and vote in committee.

*ACA’s proposal is on the following page.*

## ***Direct Representation of Overseas Americans in Congress***

### **Whereas:**

The radical changes taking place in the world make it necessary in the interest of the United States to open up a much more direct and official dialogue and much more efficient channels of communication between the U.S. Government and its citizens residing overseas.

The population of the overseas American community currently numbers 4.1 million (according to a study on the website of the U.S. Department of State); this population exceeds that of the 26 smallest states in the United States; and the 25th largest state, Kentucky, currently is represented in the U.S. Congress by a delegation consisting of six Members of the House of Representatives and two U.S. Senators.

Despite the size and importance of the overseas American community there is not a single individual in the U.S. Government today, in the Congress, or in the Administration, who has been assigned or has assumed the responsibility for looking after the full scope of the concerns and interests of Americans abroad; every policy area that arises concerning overseas Americans is addressed separately; there is no place in the U.S. Government today where the treatment of overseas Americans is compared to the treatment of overseas citizens of other countries by their home country governments; and therefore in a rapidly globalizing world, there is a total vacuum of such comparative knowledge in Washington today.

Neither Congress, nor any Cabinet Department, nor other agency of the Federal Government is properly equipped or sufficiently motivated to address the various issues that affect the daily lives of overseas Americans, or the impact of current policies on their ability to compete on a level playing field in the major marketplaces of the world; and this institutional ignorance and lack of expertise explains why there is so little understanding of the myriad problems and challenges that overseas Americans face, and why the policies of the U.S. Government that affect the life of Americans living away from home are often not only negative and inappropriate but also at variance with the practices of other countries and inimical to the interests of all Americans at home and abroad.

Delegates who would be directly elected by overseas Americans, and who would serve as active members of the U.S. House of Representatives and the U.S. Senate, would be a major asset to the United States, would provide additional knowledge and insight into world affairs, and would strengthen American interests across the board in terms of trade, politics, culture and national security; such Delegates would enjoy the same rights and privileges as those currently enjoyed by the four Delegates and Resident Commissioner who now represent those living in Washington D.C. and four overseas territories, including the right to introduce legislation, serve on and vote in committees, speak on the floor of Congress, and even become the Chairpersons of Sub-Committees and Full Committees of Congress. Overseas Americans would thereby acquire a very considerable amount of power and influence, far exceeding that of merely being able to vote in domestic U.S. elections as they can today.

*It is therefore hereby resolved that:*

*"The U.S. Congress should grant the 4.1 million U.S. citizens living and working abroad throughout the world the right to directly elect their own U.S. Congressional delegation which should be equivalent in size and composition to that currently representing the 25<sup>th</sup> largest state, Kentucky (which has a comparable population to the number of Americans living overseas). This means that overseas Americans should be able to directly elect six Delegates to the U.S. House of Representatives and two Delegates to the U.S. Senate.*