



Finlandia Foundation® Columbia-Pacific Chapter

To Support, Preserve and Cultivate Finnish and Finnish-American Culture

2021 Finnish Expatriate Parliament June 11-12 Report

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This year the parliament was held virtually for the first time and was attended by 275 Finns abroad representing 150 Finnish communities in 23 countries. It was exciting to see and hear from so many Finns in different locations and time zones, communicating across continents. The attendees from the Americas and Australia/New Zealand had to attend the conference during nighttime, Europe was in luck and had daytime meetings. We also heard special musical pieces by expatriate choruses, Ruusamari Teppo and Jukka Kuoppamäki, and a greeting from the President of Finland.

The parliament attendees were divided into committees that each had a set of initiatives to prepare for vote by the parliament. I was part of the citizenship committee. We discussed and polished up initiatives about passport cost and duration, mobile passports, dual citizenship and citizenship rights, and the so-called "D visa" or long-stay tourist visa for non-EU citizens that would allow (for example) family members of Finnish citizens to stay in Finland (and the Schengen area) for longer than 90 days at a time. We also prepared a very current initiative, which concerned digital identification of Finns living abroad. Now that Finnish banks have been closing services for expatriate Finns, it has become increasingly more important that the government has a way of identifying people without banks or other external parties, and there is a sense of urgency in this issue particularly now during covid.

Altogether there were about 70 initiatives made by Finnish communities worldwide concerning elections, voting, seniors, pensions, repatriation, student aid, residence, travel, driver's licenses, banking, social services, Suomi koulus and other Finnish education, digital libraries/media, Finnish youth, language tests, broadcasting (Yle) access from abroad, setting up an ombudsman for Finns abroad, expatriate parliament bylaws, accepting social media groups into the parliament, parliament's relationship with the Finland Society (Suomi-Seura), and others.

The parliament does not have enforcement powers. Several initiatives ask for changes to be made in Finnish laws. From the parliament these initiatives turned into proposals go to different authorities in Finland (e.g. ministries) for rounds of opinions and consideration and this might take quite a while. Some of them will be taken forward and implemented and some will not. Hopefully, we will hear about the results at some point.

If anyone at FFPCPC has an issue they want to take forward, we can write an initiative for the next parliament session that will be in two years.