

U.S. Senator Maria Cantwell

Cantwell and Clark County Leaders on Protecting Elections & Voters' Rights

February 18, 2026

Sen. Cantwell Remarks

[\[VIDEO\]](#)

Sen. Cantwell: Well, thank you, Nancy, and thank you Greg, and thank you, Michael. I don't know if I need to speak, really. I think the three of them summated these issues quite well and outlined what's at stake for America if the SAVE [America] Act actually makes it to the President's desk.

I do want to thank them, though, for standing up here today and making sure that America understands what is at stake if this legislation passed. I want to point out how unique it is that we are in southwest Washington.

A place with Vancouver and Portland probably knows better than anybody else in America what it really does take to defend elections. I call on the FBI to continue their investigation in figuring out who blew up ballot boxes in this area. That's what the federal government should be doing.

I am releasing a snapshot report today on how the SAVE [America] Act passed by the House of Representatives and under consideration by the Senate will cost Washingtonians time, money and maybe even their vote.

We need to fight back. These changes will make it difficult for senior citizens, rural community voters, working parents and so many others to actually vote, and they want to change these rules right now, right before the midterm elections. If this goes to the President's desk, these rules would take effect immediately.

We need to stop the chaos. The President, for four years, has been complaining massive voter fraud, particularly attacking vote by mail. He even talked about nationalizing the elections, as was brought up by two of the speakers.

But President Trump is wrong. He believes that our election system hasn't been fair, but I can tell you this: it has been the hallmark of our democracy for decades, and the fights that Michael and Nancy talked about are literally, as they said, on the backs of other Americans who made sure these rights were there.

Why is this so important? Because the hallmark of our country is free and fair elections. It is how we make tough decisions and move forward as a nation. It does distinguish us from other countries. But if somehow you erode that under this notion that what is taking place and has been taking place is not a fair election, you are undermining the United States.

Take it from the conservative think tank Heritage Foundation, which tracks voter fraud and found just 15 cases of voter fraud in Washington state between the years 1982 and 2025. That's about one case every three years. In that same period, a 43 year period, the Heritage Foundation found only 1620 cases nationwide, that's the entire country over four decades.

The system can catch fraud. And right now, what we need to do, as my colleagues have been saying, is promote participation in elections not try to retract.

These claims about fraud are incorrect. The claims that elections – and [what] they are trying to say as a reason to vote for the SAVE [America] Act – are wrong.

In fact, we don't have widespread election fraud, and that is because people like Greg Kimsey and other auditors and other electeds across the United States take this issue very seriously.

We have very strong penalties. You can see from the ballot declaration that our existing law basically says you have to be a United States citizen, and if you commit voter fraud, you will be punished [by up] to five years in prison and as much as \$10,000 or both.

And it has long been illegal for non-citizens [to vote]. Here in Washington state, we've been working together to make elections more secure, and that is why we instituted the vote by mail system. And we have one of higher turnouts in the country for both midterm and presidential elections.

We verify voters here in Washington with a signature and a matching barcode, and we have an online system so voters can verify their vote was counted and counted correctly, and the evidence shows it is extremely secure.

You have to be a citizen. You have to prove your residence. You have to swear and attest that you are a citizen. Your signature is your undeniable identification and can be tracked and can show fraud, and it is already the law in our state and in our country.

So that is why the SAVE [America] Act at the national level is so frustrating. It is going to not save us. It is going to cost us hardship and potentially denying voters the right to vote.

This legislation, as I said, hurts the vote by mail system, by that identification that Nancy talked about would be required. Can you imagine that – our vote by mail system, and now all of a sudden you have to figure out how to get a photocopy and put it and provide it?

I'm not even sure how the auditor would even figure out how to say that that documentation is even correct. And now you want to be able to sue him based on that. And then then what's going to happen with all those lawsuits and costing the taxpayers money on top of it?

So, as Greg mentioned, [the SAVE America Act] singles out – actually hurts – married women because of the fact that they may not have the same name. So Republicans want to force everybody to change their registration in person or at the office – also a hardship. Our report goes into detail about that – some of our most distant voters, what it would cost them to drive to an election place just to change this registration.

We know that here in Washington, that many people do not have a passport. Young voters, seniors, [and] disadvantaged [voters] they may not have access to their birth certificate.

The Brennan Center, a research center on voting, basically reports that 21 million American citizens of voting age don't have proof of that citizenship readily available. At least 3.8 million don't have these documents at all, and often because they were lost, destroyed or stolen.

All of a sudden, with the passage of this bill, you're disenfranchised. Republicans want to make it harder to vote by mail, requiring you to submit, as I said, in your mail-in ballot, a photocopy of your ID. These

changes are really about costing everybody more time, more money and more hardship, when in reality, we should be focusing on increasing participation.

As I said earlier, it's the free and fair election when lots of people participate that America is convinced [that] America must move on. But if you suppress the vote and have lower and lower turnouts, you have less and less faith in the direction of our country.

It is time that we fight back. We need to say to people, members of Congress, to people across the country, to be educated on this – that the new burdens of the SAVE [America] Act are too much.

Throw on top of that, the US Postal Service just chang[ed] their postmarking rules. No longer can you rest assured that your ballot will be postmarked when you mail it. Now, [your ballot] may need to go to a regional processing center, which could take days for it [to] be postmarked.

For example, Clark County postmarking will happen in Portland, possibly days from when you dropped your ballot at a local post office. This is a huge problem for rural voters, where the processing center may be several days away.

And lastly, the President signed an executive order, which is being challenged in court that prohibits states like Washington from counting ballots that are postmarked by election day but received after election day. That too is another disenfranchisement.

So here in Clark County in 2024, there were 9,547 ballots out of 281,000 voters, so 3.4% of those ballots would not have been counted if that [postmarking] rule goes into effect. That is disheartening. The President is wrong. Adding the delay to the postmark is certainly not enfranchising voters, so we need to fight back.

Don't disenfranchise American voters with paperwork requirements or cost. Their signature [and] their testament are the deterrents to the system of fraud, and it is working. Trust in the US is [through] free and fair elections and make sure this legislation never reaches the President's desk.