

U.S. Senator Maria Cantwell
Virtual Presser on the SAVE America Act

March 17, 2026

Sen. Cantwell Remarks

Sen. Cantwell: Thank you, Gov. Schweitzer. Thank you to the rest of the panelists, and a special shoutout to Clark County Auditor Greg Kimsey, because he too has been advocating, along with myself and many others about why the State of Washington's vote by mail system is such a strong system.

And he's right: the whole country should be moving more towards that and not away from it. But let me thank everybody for their participation and advocacy, because this is a critical time.

Today, we're going to be on the Senate floor with a vote that our colleagues are trying to actually pass the SAVE [America] Act. They may try to change the rules to pass the SAVE [America] Act, or they may just continue to advocate for us, in the near future, [to] chang[e] this process of the Senate and thereby allowing them to pass the SAVE [America] Act.

So it is a critical moment in our history, and I think just the panelists have really outlined why this is so problematic. I will say we're putting out a report today that shows the additional costs and burdens that are really unmanageable by the states and auditors to pull it off, particularly in this election cycle.

But more importantly, even than our own report, is just the reminder to people that the hallmark of a democracy is free and fair elections. And when you start to undermine that, and you start to question whether you have free and fair elections, you are truly undermining our power as a democracy.

It is so important that we do not have deterrence to people voting. We have laws that say that you have to be a US citizen. You have, even at time of registration, the requirement for your signature and the proof of where you reside.

And that becomes a tracking system that we use to track any kind of people who should not be voting. In some cases in our state, we've had people who have died and their spouse voted for them, or you could have felons, or you could have, you know, these instances.

But the fact that the system is based on that signature makes it a tracking system for us to continue to be successful with. And so you want the deterrence at the front end of the system. Why? Because on election day, you don't have time for that.

On election day, it's – as the previous participants have said, particularly Veronikah – about time. You want election day to run smoothly, so that you are not disenfranchising people, that you are getting out as large a participation as you can.

Why is that important? Because, again, the hallmark of a democracy and moving forward is to have more than 50% of the people participate, if possible, so that you have a clear direction for our country. And you know that issues have been weighed in on by the citizens of our nation.

So again, we have a very strong deterrent when it comes, in our state, to filling out an absentee ballot. It's right there before you put your signature on the ballot: it says you could go to jail for five years or have a \$10,000 fine, or both, if you are not a citizen.

And you have to attest; it is literally an [attestation]. And so I doubt that we are seeing very many people be confused about putting their signature, their John Hancock, on something that right above it, you read the print and it says you could go to jail for five years or [face] thousands of dollars in fines.

I doubt that that's what's happening. But as several of the speakers have already said: yes, that statistic [of voter fraud] by some organizations is six-millionth of a percent. So, we have a current system that we have six-millionth of a percent of people who might be voting that shouldn't have voted, and yet [somehow] that is not good enough.

So when I compare a lot of other deterrents to crime or, you know, other activities, I would say it's probably the best statistic of anything that we've tried to achieve as far as stopping people from bad behavior. I would say it's a great statistic.

The speakers who spoke before me are talking about this bill, and the reverse of that, which is that it would disenfranchise, according to some estimates, as many as 20 million people. So why would we disenfranchise 20 million people to somehow get to seven-millionth of a percent – if that even is the next statistic. I don't even know if that's the next statistic that we would get to.

But why would you disenfranchise 20 million people when you have a system that is working successfully [and] has strong deterrence? You do have to identify who you [are]. And since I went through Auditor Kimsey's operation a few weeks ago, it's quite amazing – our election official offices. It is just truly amazing.

The citizenry is there. The citizenry is there as observers of the election. The people are trained by our state patrol on signatures and signature verification. They have elaborate systems for overseeing and contesting ballots.

I have not heard from people saying – who have witnessed our elections – oh, we think there's a problem and these people are voting. That is because your signature becomes this, again, foolproof system by which you are tracking people to who they say they are.

So why are we doing this today? Why are we in this debate when, as the [former] Governor of Montana said, there's lots of other things to be talking about, including the high cost of just about everything – food, fuel, housing – and we should be getting to that debate instead.

And I really believe that this is a moment when my colleagues – who, yes, are facing an administration or a White House that doesn't seem to adhere to the Constitution – [decide] whether they are going to stand up ~~to~~ [for] the Constitution.

These are constitutional rights given to individuals and to the state. And as Auditor Kimsey said, why would you infringe on someone's rights? You better have a darn good reason. I don't think six-millionth of a percent is a good reason, that's for sure.

And second, this notion that was mentioned earlier about a massive database, where someone would compile all of this information about the voters and then somehow say these people aren't legitimate voters. As [speakers from] Texas and Ohio testified, there are incidents of this.

I bring up our own resident who, in a similar attempt [by] DOGE basically consolidating information, said that one of our residents was dead and didn't deserve his social security check. Basically, literally had his social security check ripped out of his bank account.

So now, that individual took weeks and weeks and weeks to prove that he was [alive]. He showed up in person, he called them and said, I'm not dead. But what happens if that's election day?

What happens to that individual [and] that vote? Particularly [when it's] controlled by some apparatus of [the Department of] Homeland [Security] saying that you aren't a person to be registered, [it] is very problematic.

You're not going to get the day back, as Veronikah mentioned. You're not going to get the day back. You're not going to get your vote back. And as [the speaker from] Ohio mentioned, the protest of provisional ballots is just another way of disenfranchising voters.

So, I hope that our colleagues will understand this [and] take the time to understand [that] this is very wrong headed, it's very detrimental to our democracy, and [to] turn this down.