

U.S Senator Maria Cantwell
Press Conference on Mail-In Voting
September 2, 2026

Hayward Evans Remarks

Hayward Evans, President of Seattle King County NAACP: Thank you very much. We know it's going pretty good right now. Thank you all for being here. I am Hayward M. Evans. I'm president of Seattle King County Branch of the NAACP 1136, and first I want to thank Senator Cantwell for inviting the NAACP to stand here today on an issue that goes very deep to the heart of our democracy.

You know, the vote is a right, and for over a century, the NAACP has fought to protect that right. For Black Americans, the ballot never really came easy. We had to fight for it.

Even after the 15th Amendment promised Black men the right to vote, states-directed barriers, poll taxes, literacy tests, intimidation, violence, and other measures designed to keep Black citizens from the ballot, and women didn't even get the vote or other minorities until the 20s. Come on now.

People organized, people marched, people even got arrested, beaten, even some lost their lives. Their struggle helped to lead to the Voting Rights Act of 1965. But history teaches us that progress is not permanent unless we protect it.

In 2013, the Supreme Court's Shelby versus Holder decision invalidated the Voting Rights Act's coverage formula, which effectively stopped the existing systems requiring certain jurisdictions to obtain federal approval from implementing voting changes.

Now today, today concerns about access continues. You all see it. The concerns today about access, from voter identification, proof of citizenship requirements to student voting, redistricting, changes affecting voting by mail, and right here in the state of Washington, voting by mail is not an alternative system, it's our voting system.

Every active registered voter is automatically mailed a ballot, I know I get mine. Did you get yours? Okay, automatically mailed a ballot. Yet the postal service recommended that voters using the mail return their completed ballot at least one week before the deadline, because of what transportation issues or some processing facility postmarks aren't there for the actual date that the ballot was submitted.

You know that should concern all of us. Everyone should be concerned. We can protect election integrity. We can protect access to the ballot. We can do both, and particularly to our young people, and especially young Black voters.

Look, don't allow frustration in politics to cause you to surrender the power that generations before us fought to obtain. The NAACP is nonpartisan. We don't tell people how to vote. Our message is very simple: register, educate yourself, vote, and hold your elected officials accountable.

Because we protect voting rights, we protect civil rights, and when we protect civil rights, we protect democracy itself. Your vote is your voice, and your voice matters. Thank you. May God bless you, and I have the distinct honor and privilege to introduce my favorite senator, Senator Cantwell. Thank you very much.