

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

Sen. Cantwell Remarks

Sen. Cantwell: Well, thank you, [Hayward Evans]. Thank you. I don't think I could have said it any better. I think all we need to do is take his comments and blast them all over the internet, because he not only chronicled the history and the fight that many Americans have done over decades to secure opportunities for future generations, he's clearly articulated the threat we face today and why it is so critical and why we can't go back.

He mentioned the issues so tied to civil rights and civil liberties, and that is why today we're here. I'm calling on my colleagues in the United States Senate to do their oversight job and hold hearings as [to] why the President of the United States and the United States Postal Service is disenfranchising voters across the United States with policies that are leaving them with a ballot that was cast, but never counted.

We're here today to talk about a report that we are issuing that basically talks about what happened in our primary. I first want to also thank the League of Women Voters for their participation. [It] can't get any clearer than that: a nonpartisan group [whose] life is dedicated to getting out the vote.

Basically talking about the problems that are being created by this administration and taking the votes away from American citizens, I thank them, and I also thank Secretary Hobbs, who joined me earlier this year at the State of the Union to start this process.

And I don't think he and I have slowed down since in trying to protect the system in our state as well across the United States. But now we're just 62 days away from a pivotal midterm election, and our report shows some troubling trends.

Ballots that voters believed they had mailed in time were rejected because they lacked a timely, verifiable postmark, or arrived too late to be counted. This is due to changes in the postal system that was discussed by the previous speakers, but in last month's primary, the rate of ballots rejected by the postmark shot up by 32 percent compared to the 2024 primary, and the story was even worse in rural communities.

For example, Stevens County had 172 ballots rejected for late postmark in 2024. In the August election, that number quadrupled to 602, even though fewer people voted in this election. So, as you can see on this map that we are showing, the rates doubled in more than 19 counties.

Why is that? Well, the League of Women Voters just talked about the fact that you don't necessarily have ballot boxes everywhere easy. I can walk to mine just in my own neighborhood at the library and cast my ballot. But in a rural community, you don't have that ability.

And if you are now casting your ballot, driving to that post office, who's not stamping your ballot as received and stamped that day, that's what Washingtonians need to know. The post office is taking your ballot as a piece of mail, but not stamping it that day.

They are waiting and [sending it] to a distribution center, and then later postmarking that, and may thereby be delaying your actual vote. Why is this so important? Because almost a third of the voters [vote by mail, and many] wait until the last 48 hours to vote.

But under this system, if your ballot is not postmarked, and some evidence I think we see from the U.S. Postal Service is saying yes, a ballot received the day before the election might not be postmarked until the next day, and a ballot received on election day might not be postmarked until the next day.

That means your ballot won't count. Why are we disenfranchising Americans when we've had one of the best systems in the United States, one that I think proved that the Republican Party, then Slade Gorton, literally believed in the vote by mail system and conceded a very close election, even though it was a few thousand votes, because he had faith that the election and the voters had spoken.

Now people are trying to weave a lot of distrust into the United States system of vote by mail, and it's inexcusable. We know that this system works. The fact that there is a penalty of \$10,000 for fraud, and that people have to show that they are a resident when they sign up to vote, is a system that doesn't mean that people won't try to fool it, it means that fraud will be caught. And the penalties are severe.

So instead of focusing on how to enfranchise more participation in our democracy, which should be the goal, and Hayward knows what's happening in the South when states restrict the rights to vote, and you may only have as low as a 50% turnout in a general election instead of an 80% turnout that we have in Washington, then that is not giving you the full participation of a democracy.

And yes, Congress should reestablish the Voting Rights Act and civil liberties and the John Lewis Voting Rights Act to make sure that we do not allow any state to possess tools that suppress citizens' rights to vote. So we're here today to say we're just 62 days away from this important moment.

And what do we need to do to educate voters? Well, first, as said, please drop your ballot in a ballot box provided by the local county, if possible. That is the key message number one. And secondly, if you can't do that and you're in a rural community, mail your ballot as soon as you get it.

Now, I find a little bit of irony here that the president may be disenfranchising his most stable voters in rural communities by taking the vote away.

That is why my colleagues in the United States Senate, if they were going to do their constitutional oversight role instead of trying to promote the SAVE [America] Act, would be holding a hearing of the Homeland Security [and Governmental Affairs] Committee and bringing the U.S. Postal Service in to the Congress and basically asking them why are they delaying a postmark.

Why are they curtailing pickups and deliveries? Why are they putting more voters at risk of not having their voices heard? We live in one of the most technological[ly] driven age[s] where information can flow so easily, but somehow we have an executive branch who is spending its time suppressing our voice and not letting it be heard.

Washingtonians, please heed this message and help us get the message out to voters. Vote in a ballot box or vote very, very early and help us with demanding that Congress do its oversight job and hold these hearings. This is so critical to our democracy.

As Hayward said, this is what makes our country great: the fact that we have free and fair elections. But right now, the U.S. Postal Service is not making it too fair. Thank you.