

Postal Service Pauses New Mail Ballot System

After a Supreme Court decision, USPS says election mail will follow the old rules for this year's federal elections.



A blank sealed envelope sits in a mail tray with a courthouse silhouette behind it.

The U.S. Postal Service has stopped work on a new computer system that would have changed how some mail ballots were handled, according to Associated Press reporting published by PBS NewsHour. The decision came after the Supreme Court rejected President Donald Trump's **executive** order for this year's **election**. An executive order is a written direction from the president to parts of the federal government.

The order had told several federal agencies to create state citizenship lists. Those lists would have gone to an online Postal Service portal, or secure website, and the Postal Service would have used that system to decide which voters could receive mail ballots. A mail **ballot** is a ballot sent through the mail instead of filled out at a polling place.

Postmaster General David Steiner, the top official at USPS, told the AP that work stopped because there is an **injunction**. An injunction is a court order that blocks something from happening, at least for a time. Steiner said the Postal Service will not enforce the new rules in the 2026 federal election. A federal election chooses national leaders, such as members of Congress.

This matters because the Postal Service is not just a place for packages and birthday cards. During elections, it helps move ballots between voters and election offices. Many Americans vote by mail because they are away from home, have disabilities, work long hours, live in states that use lots of mail voting, or simply choose that option. If mail rules change close to an election, voters and local election workers may have to adjust quickly.

The stopped system was controversial because it would have put the Postal Service in a bigger role in checking who could receive a ballot. The Postal Service is an independent **agency** of the executive branch, which means it is part of the federal government but is supposed to make many day-to-day decisions on its own. Steiner said he focused on how the order could be carried out, not whether the policy itself was right.

A whistleblower report released earlier this month by Sen. Richard Blumenthal of Connecticut said the system was built quickly and had many errors. A whistleblower is someone inside an organization who reports what they believe is wrongdoing or a serious problem. Steiner said he

read parts of the report and agreed that building such a large system fast was difficult. He also said he had confidence in the Postal Service technology workers who were building it.

The president's order also would have required states to use the same style of ballot **envelope** with barcodes. A **barcode** is a pattern that machines can scan to track or sort an item. Some states said that change would be hard so close to the election.

Even without the new system, mail voting still depends on timing. The AP reported concerns about **postmark** delays in Washington and Oregon, two states that use vote-by-mail widely. A postmark is the mark showing when the Postal

Service received a piece of mail. In some places, that date can help decide whether a ballot counts. Steiner said voters who use mail should send ballots early, and he recommended allowing seven days.

The bigger civics question is how to balance two goals at once. Elections need rules that protect voting from mistakes or fraud. They also need rules that are clear and stable enough so **eligible** voters are not confused or blocked. Courts, Congress, states, the president, and agencies like USPS can all affect that balance. That is why a story about mail can also be a story about **democracy**.

Written from reporting by PBS NewsHour.

THINK IT THROUGH

1. When election rules are being debated, how should leaders weigh security concerns against the risk of confusing or blocking eligible voters?

2. Should an agency like the Postal Service have a limited role in elections, or is it reasonable for it to help enforce voting rules? Defend your view.

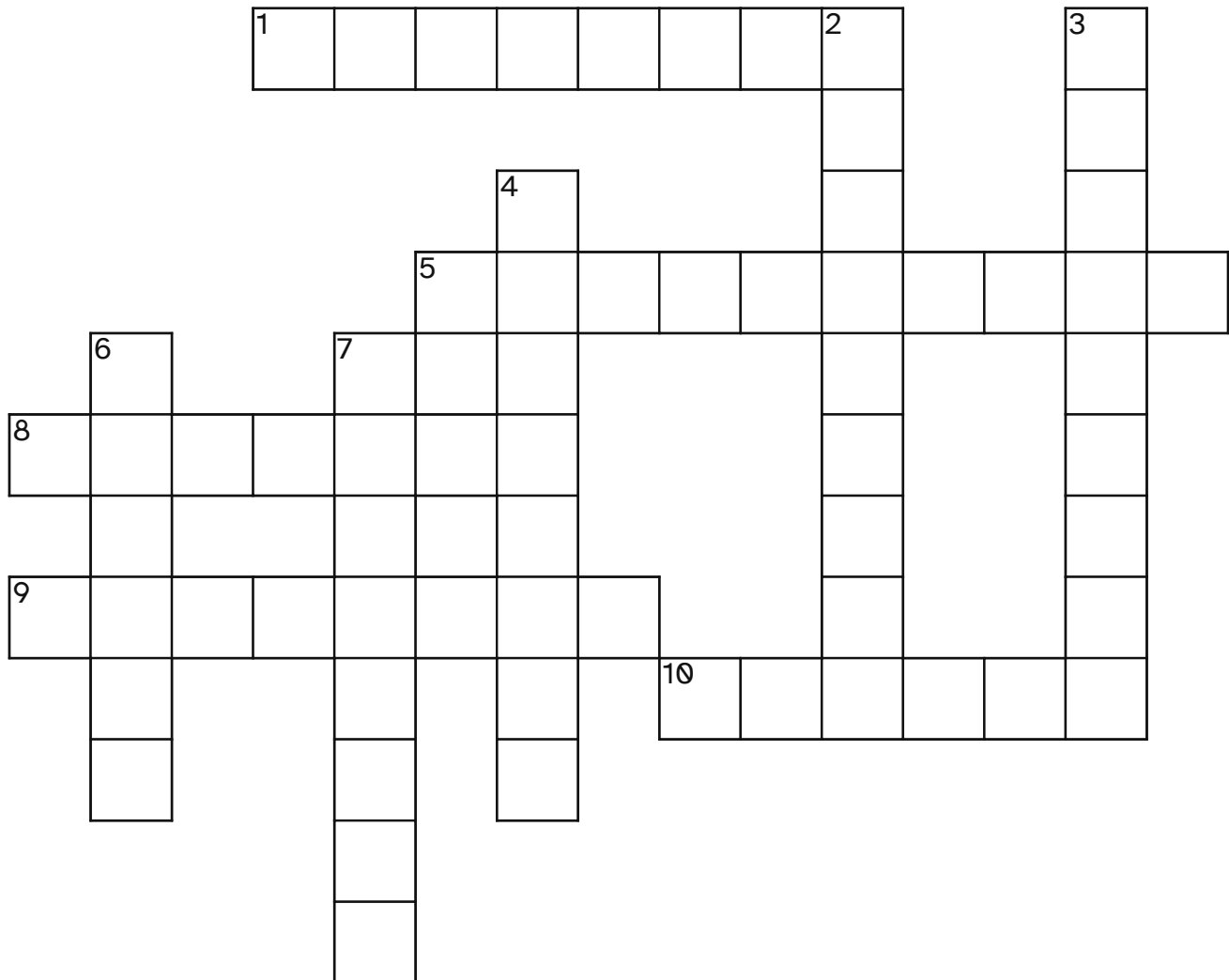
3. If a state or federal government wants to change election procedures, how close to Election Day is too close, and why?

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L E R E D C M P T R E O K W E C O U
T C H K B I E T I Y N N I P V O I J
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AGENCY	BALLOT	BARCODE	DEMOCRACY	ELECTION
ELIGIBLE	ENVELOPE	EXECUTIVE	INJUNCTION	POSTMARK

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ACROSS

- 1 Allowed by laws or rules to take part, such as in voting
- 5 Court order that temporarily stops an action
- 8 Machine-scannable pattern used to identify or track an item
- 9 Process where people vote on leaders or public questions
- 10 Government organization with a specific public job or service

DOWN

- 2 President-led branch responsible for carrying out laws
- 3 Government by people through voting and civic action
- 4 Folded paper cover for mailing a letter, document, or voting paper
- 6 Paper or form used to make choices in an election
- 7 Mail-service stamp showing when an item was received

Where this came from

This article was written for 3andB from the reporting below. It is not a reprint — the wording is ours and the facts are theirs.

PBS NewsHour

“Work has stopped on system that was key to Trump effort to limit mail voting, USPS chief says”

Published Thursday, September 17, 2026

Read by us on Friday, September 18, 2026

<https://www.pbs.org/newshour/politics/work-has-stopped-on-system-that-was-key-to-trump-effort-to-limit-mail-voting-usps-chief-says>

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