

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

March 12, 2026

Mr. David P. Steiner
Postmaster General
United States Postal Service
475 L'Enfant Plaza, SW
Washington, DC 20260-3500

Dear Postmaster General Steiner:

On December 24, 2025, the Postal Service finalized a revision to its Domestic Mail Manual about its postmarking procedures. I understand that the rulemaking served to clarify and publicize existing postmarking practice. However, I write to express concern that coupled with the recent changes at the Postal Service under the Delivering for America (DFA) plan, this will lead to a delay in timely postmarking, disrupt tax filing season, and undermine democracy.

As part of DFA, USPS has launched the Regional Transportation Optimization (RTO) initiative, a network change that eliminates evening mail collection at post offices more than 50 miles from regional hubs. This results in mail delays for rural customers and has led to inadequate service standards across the country. USPS also issued a rule in December codifying existing practice on the postmark and postal possession in the Federal Register. This rule explains that the presence of a postmark confirms that USPS possessed a piece of mail on that date but does not necessarily align with the date that USPS first received the piece of mail. Furthermore, the rulemaking stated that “this lack of alignment [of dates] has and will become more common with the implementation of the Regional Transportation Optimization (RTO) initiative.” I am troubled that the RTO initiative will continue to slow mail processing and thus delay the application of postmarks, which will have dramatic effects on important documents such as tax returns and mail-in ballots.

USPS claims that “postmarking is not and has not been a service that the Postal Service has provided to the public.” However, federal law, codified at 26 U.S.C. § 7502, explicitly states that postmarks are how the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) validates the timeliness of tax returns. Slower application of the postmark has direct legal consequences on whether taxpayers’ returns will be considered timely by the IRS. USPS’s network changes will inevitably delay postmarking for tax returns and may result in late penalties for a significant number of Americans who are unaware of these changes.

Furthermore, any delays in postmarking could result in mail-in ballots being invalidated and undermine confidence in our election systems. By law, elections officials in more than a dozen states rely on postmarks to determine whether a ballot is to be counted. During the 2024 general election the Postal Service delivered over 99 million ballots and over 97% were delivered in fewer than three days. Voters in my state of Oregon have for 30 years relied on the USPS to cast their ballots with confidence knowing their votes will be counted in a timely manner. These

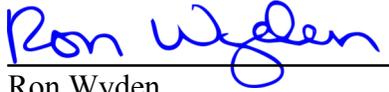
network changes and corresponding postmarking delays may jeopardize timely ballot delivery in 2026, disenfranchising voters in Oregon and nationwide.

While USPS published the postmark guidance in the Federal Register and posted a “frequently asked questions” page on the USPS website, I remain concerned about the efforts the Postal Service has undertaken to adequately alert the public and its customers of these network changes and potential postmarking delays that may result. In order to provide transparency, as Americans embark on tax filing season and a consequential election year, I request that you respond to the following questions:

1. What is the status of the Regional Transportation Optimization Initiative (RTO) under the Delivering for America plan?
 - a. Which regions has RTO already been implemented? Specifically, which ZIP codes and approximately how many customers are subject to RTO?
 - b. Which regions have been planned for RTO, but it has not yet been implemented? Specifically, which ZIP codes and customers will be impacted? Does USPS plan to implement RTO in any of these ZIP codes during 2026?
2. Will the Postal Service consider suspending or otherwise altering RTO during the election season?
3. What specific outreach has USPS undertaken to familiarize the public with these changes? Please provide examples of the specific public-facing documentation USPS has provided regarding this guidance change.
4. The November 2025 Federal Register notice stated that the “Postal Service is developing an approach to provide public and internal education regarding postmarking.” Please provide details of that approach.
5. How does USPS plan to communicate these changes to the public to protect voters from unintended consequences?
6. Has USPS worked with state and local elections officials to provide awareness about these changes?
7. How is USPS ensuring uniform implementation of this rulemaking across retail locations and processing facilities?
8. What steps are being taken to prevent delays that could affect ballot eligibility or the on-time filing of tax returns?
9. Did USPS consult any IRS or Treasury Department officials about the implications of this policy change for tax filing? If so, what input did they provide?
10. When does the Postal Service intend to organize its National Election Mail Taskforce force this year?

11. Does USPS commit to implement its “extraordinary measures” for the 2026 midterm elections? Does USPS intend to alter or supplement these measures when compared with prior elections?

Sincerely,



Ron Wyden
United States Senator
Ranking Member, Committee
on Finance