

## **18 Utah counties don't provide prepaid postage on by-mail ballots. They can still vote, ACLU says.**

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<https://www.sltrib.com/news/politics/2020/06/16/utah-counties-dont/>

As Utah pivots to an all-mail primary election to stem the spread of COVID-19, the American Civil Liberties Union of Utah wants to remind people that not having access to a stamp shouldn't preclude them from voting in the 18 Utah counties that don't provide prepaid postage.

That's because the U.S. Postal Service has a long-standing policy of delivering official election materials without a stamp — even when a return envelope says “postage required.”

While the 55-cent price for a stamp may seem negligible to some, “finding enough postage to return a ballot will be a high barrier to voting” for others, the ACLU wrote in a news release announcing its “No Stamp? No Problem!” campaign earlier this week.

“Think about the millennial, first-time voter who pays all of her bills online,” the organization said. “Consider the senior citizen with a chronic condition who is afraid to leave their home to buy stamps during a pandemic. Plus, how many of us actually know how much it costs to mail a first-class letter (Hint: It went up to \$0.55 in January)?”

There's a reason many jurisdictions don't publicize the stamp requirements, and it's because local elections offices often pick up the tab for postage in the end, according to ProPublica. Experts say that if large numbers of voters started leaving stamps off their ballots, it could significantly drive up the costs to administer an election — to the tune of millions, the nonprofit news outlet reported in 2018.

### **COUNTIES WITHOUT PREPAID POSTAGE:**

- Beaver
- Box Elder
- Cache
- Carbon
- Duchesne
- Iron
- Kane
- Millard
- Piute
- Rich
- Sanpete
- Sevier
- Summit
- Tooele
- Uintah
- Wasatch
- Washington
- Weber

- ACLU of Utah

The ACLU says it supports a move toward statewide prepaid return postage for the general election in November, which the organization argues could make voting “more accessible to many, including young, low-income and rural voters” and could increase voter engagement.

Implementing prepaid postage statewide would also let counties budget for costs ahead of time, rather than estimating how much they would have to pay for ballots mailed without a stamp, the organization argues.

Lawmakers in both the House and the Senate have also raised concerns in recent months about by-mail voting in counties that don’t provide postage on their ballots.

Sen. Todd Weiler, R-Woods Cross, worried during a special session in April — in which legislators approved voting changes in light of the coronavirus pandemic — that the lack of postage could be “suppressing votes.”

“The U.S. Postal Service position on delivery of unstamped ballots is that they will deliver those ballots,” noted Rep. Brian King, D-Salt Lake City, during those conversations. “I want to make sure that the people of the state of Utah ahead of this primary election are aware: This is no reason not to vote.”

Voters in Utah also have the option of returning unstamped ballots to an official ballot drop box, usually located outside the county clerk’s office.

While the Beehive State normally allows people to vote in person at election day voting centers, the Legislature enacted a law for the June 30 primary that will allow only voting by mail or at drive-up voting centers where ballots may be dropped off.

Seven counties have taken advantage of that brand-new-to Utah drive-thru option: Box Elder, Weber, Davis, Salt Lake, Tooele, Utah and Iron counties.

“What that will basically look like is if a voter needs help because they’ve lost their ballot, if they need a provisional ballot because they’ve moved, if they need help in some way, they can go to one of the counties that is doing drive-up voting, be allowed to stay in their car to help with [social] distancing and be given a ballot,” Justin Lee, the state’s director of elections, told lawmakers during a committee update on this year’s elections Tuesday.

There will also be no in-person registration at the polls in June, but unaffiliated voters can affiliate at those drive-thru locations. The deadline to register to vote or to change party affiliations is Friday; voters can do either online at [vote.utah.gov](https://vote.utah.gov).

While Utahns typically have to postmark their ballot the day before election day, they will be able to do that the day of the election for this year’s primary.

But out of concern that someone could postmark a ballot after polls close at 8 p.m., Lee told the state’s Government Operations Interim Committee on Tuesday that election results won’t be released until 10 p.m. on election night.

The typical two-week canvass has also been extended an extra week in case election staff need to quarantine and so ballots can be quarantined for 24 hours before they are processed in most cases out of an “abundance of caution,” he added.

“Everyone is going to need to be very patient with election results,” Lee told lawmakers. “They’re going to be a little bit slower, they’re going to be a little bit longer and in close races, as we’ve seen in the past, we may not have final results or even definitive breaks between candidates for a couple of weeks after election day. So patience is going to be difficult but key as we work forward.”

Drop-off ballot locations will remain open and accommodations will be made for people with disabilities who need to use alternatives to mark their ballots.