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LOCAL

Postal Service backs off threats to stop mail delivery in Wakulla County ahead of the election

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Ross Taylor wasn't sure what to make of the notice he got from the Postal Service warning his mail delivery could stop because of a problem with his mailbox.

The notice said his mailbox wasn't high enough off the ground and needed to be raised. It gave him 10 days to fix the problem or risk suspension of his mail delivery — a deadline that happened to overlap with the time mail ballots are scheduled to go out to voters.

With stories in the news about systemic slowdowns in mail delivery ahead of the election, Taylor suspected the worst.

"It was screwy," he said of the notice, which arrived Monday. "There was definitely the possibility of voter suppression."

The Postal Service, however, quickly backed off after getting customer complaints. Carol Hunt, a spokeswoman for the Gulf Atlantic District, said Wednesday that customers don't have to modify their mailboxes to avoid service disruptions.

"The Postal Service is continuing to examine this issue," she said. "And there is no action required by the customers at this time."

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Taylor, who resides in Savannah Forest, said everyone in the neighborhood and a nearby subdivision, Magnolia Ridge, got the notices. He was perplexed because his mailbox was never a problem in the 14 years he's lived there.

His mailbox, which was installed by the builder, is three feet off the ground. The notice said it must be at least eight inches higher — between 42 and 44 inches from the ground to the bottom of the mailbox. The Postal Service's website gives more wiggle room, saying mailboxes should be 41 to 45 inches above the road surface.

Taylor said his carrier told him that the notices stemmed from a customer whose mailbox was so short the carrier had to get out the vehicle to deliver their mail. One of his neighbors got a different story, that the enforcement was linked to new delivery vans.

He filed an online complaint Wednesday with the Postal Service's Office of Inspector General explaining the situation. Not long after, he got a phone call from a postal official in Jacksonville saying the notices would be rescinded.

On Thursday, he got another notice — complete with an apology — from Vanessa Cobb, the postmaster in Crawfordville whose name appeared on the original notices.

"Please be advised that after further review, the actions described in that notice are under reconsideration," she wrote. "Mail will continue to be delivered at this time."

Cobb went on to say that the reasoning behind the request was to allow for "safe and convenient delivery by carriers" without them having to leave their vehicles.

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"The industry standard is for the bottom of the box to be between 42 and 48 inches high from the road surface," she wrote. "If you are able to accommodate this request, it will be appreciated. Thank you again, and I apologize for any misunderstanding."

Taylor, a Republican who lives with his husband, Brian Martin, a Democrat, jokingly called the situation "MailboxGate." He wasn't sure whether it was a bureaucratic mistake or something more sinister.

"I think somebody at the post office needs a vacation or reassignment," he said.

Ashley Pope, who also lives in Savannah Forest, said she was more concerned about the time and money it might take to raise her mailbox, which is set in concrete. Her notice came at the same time she's spending every day at the hospital to visit with her sick mom.

She doubted the notices had anything to do with presidential politics.

"However, it definitely feeds into the suspicions that a lot of people have," Pope said. "And we don't need that at this time in the country."

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