

THE FILIBUSTER

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A mail-ballot rule heads to the Supreme Court, the House says no to a court-packing ban, and the podium at the White House stays empty. Here is what actually mattered in US politics this week, and why your exam board cares.

THE BIG STORY

RETURN TO SENDER

3–4 SEPTEMBER 2026

The Trump administration this week asked the Supreme Court to let it press ahead with strict new postal rules for mail-in ballots, just as a federal judge moved to freeze those same rules until polling day. The rules, issued by the US Postal Service (USPS) under a presidential executive order (a formal presidential instruction with the force of law), would force states to print a barcode linked to each voter's name and address on every mail ballot envelope, and to register through a new federal online portal.

“The Constitution Does Not Grant the President Any Specific Powers Over Elections”

US District Judge Indira Talwani ruled on 4 September that rolling the system out this close to the November midterm elections would leave election officials “unable to pivot this late in the election cycle”, and issued a preliminary injunction (a court order pausing an action until the full case is heard) that keeps the rule frozen through 3 November. The Department of Justice had already filed an emergency appeal asking the Supreme Court to lift an earlier, temporary block on the same rule; the fight over who controls the machinery of a US election now goes to the justices with the clock running down to polling day.

WHY IT MATTERS This is a live case study in federalism (the division of power between national and state government), the topic at the heart of Edexcel 3A.1 and AQA 3.2.1.1. The Constitution gives states, not the federal government, the job of running elections, and Talwani's ruling rests directly on that principle. It also shows the judiciary acting as a check on the executive branch in the run-up to an election, and sets up a genuinely live Supreme Court case to follow this term.

SPECIFICATION LINKS Edexcel 9PLO 3A.1 (US Constitution and Federalism) and 3A.5 (US Democracy and Participation); AQA 7152 3.2.1.1 (The constitutional framework of US government) and 3.2.1.5 (The electoral process and direct democracy).



Congress Kicks the Can to December

1–2 SEPTEMBER 2026

The House voted 370 to 48 on 1 September to pass a continuing resolution (a stopgap law that keeps federal agencies funded at their existing levels while a full budget is still being negotiated), funding the government through 11 December. President Trump signed it into law the next day, removing the threat of a shutdown just two months before the midterm elections.

The bill buys both parties time rather than settling anything. Only three of the twelve full-year spending bills that make up the federal budget have passed the House, and the Senate has passed none of them. It also temporarily blocks a White House plan to let political appointees review federal grant funding, and stops money being shifted from other programmes into Border Patrol.

WHY IT MATTERS Government funding is Congress's clearest form of leverage over the executive branch, often called its “power of the purse”. A stopgap bill delays rather than resolves the underlying disagreement, and pushes the next funding cliff to land right after the midterms, when the election result will reshape both parties' bargaining power going into 2027.

SPECIFICATION LINKS [Edexcel 9PLO 3A.2 \(US Congress\)](#); [AQA 7152 3.2.1.2 \(The legislative branch of government: Congress\)](#).



Number Nine, Denied

2 SEPTEMBER 2026

The House on 2 September voted down a Republican-sponsored constitutional amendment that would have fixed the size of the Supreme Court at nine justices for good. The result was 212 to 206, well short of the two-thirds majority that any constitutional amendment needs to clear the House under Article V of the Constitution. Every Republican present backed the amendment; all but one Democrat opposed it.

The vote was one of several “messaging votes” (measures brought to the floor mainly to put opponents on the record before an election, rather than because they are expected to pass) staged by Republican leaders ahead of November. It was aimed squarely at growing support inside the Democratic Party for expanding the Court beyond nine seats, an idea that has gained ground as frustration with recent rulings has grown on the left.

WHY IT MATTERS The size of the Supreme Court is not fixed by the Constitution itself, only by ordinary law, which is exactly why Republicans tried to lock it in by amendment instead. It is a clean, current example of Article V's deliberately high bar for constitutional change, and of how the threat of “Court-packing” (increasing the number of justices to shift the Court's balance) has become a live and partisan flashpoint.

SPECIFICATION LINKS [Edexcel 9PLO 3A.1 \(US Constitution and Federalism\) and 3A.4 \(US Supreme Court and Civil Rights\)](#); [AQA 7152 3.2.1.1 \(The constitutional framework of US government\) and 3.2.1.4 \(The judicial branch of government\)](#).

ELECTIONS, PARTIES & VOTING RIGHTS



Massachusetts Sticks with Markey

1 SEPTEMBER 2026

Senator Ed Markey turned back a primary (an election held within a party to choose its candidate for the general election) challenge from Representative Seth Moulton on 1 September, holding his Massachusetts Senate seat against a rival who had cast the 79-year-old incumbent as out of step with the moment.

The result mirrors a wider pattern this cycle: establishment-aligned Democratic incumbents have mostly survived primary challenges from the party's centrist and progressive wings alike this year, even as polling shows many voters saying they want generational change in Washington.

WHY IT MATTERS Primaries are where America's two major parties are actually shaped, since neither has a formal membership or leadership structure in the way a UK party does. A safely Democratic state re-nominating its long-serving incumbent says as much about party organisation and incumbency advantage as it does about ideology, and is a useful UK-US contrast for how candidates are chosen.

SPECIFICATION LINKS [Edexcel 9PL0 3A.5 \(US Democracy and Participation\)](#); [AQA 7152 3.2.1.5 \(The electoral process and direct democracy\)](#) and [3.2.1.6 \(Political parties\)](#).



The Voter List That Missed Its Own Deadline

3–4 SEPTEMBER 2026

The Trump administration is building, for the first time in US history, a federal list of citizens in every state believed to be eligible to vote, but confirmed this week that it will not meet its own deadline for publishing it. An executive order signed on 31 March directed federal agencies to compile “State Citizenship Lists” and hand them to state officials at least 60 days before a federal election, a deadline that fell on 4 September.

Voter list maintenance has always been run by the states, not by Washington, so the project is being watched closely as a test of how far federal power can reach into election administration. Critics argue the effort duplicates, and could conflict with, the checks states already run themselves; the administration says the lists will still be delivered, just later than planned.

WHY IT MATTERS Elections in the United States are administered locally and by the states, a deliberate design choice rooted in the Constitution's Elections Clause and the Tenth Amendment. A federal agency compiling its own citizen list, even with good intentions, tests that boundary directly, and offers a sharp contrast with the UK's single, centrally maintained electoral register.

SPECIFICATION LINKS [Edexcel 9PL0 3A.1 \(US Constitution and Federalism\)](#) and [3A.5 \(US Democracy and Participation\)](#); [AQA 7152 3.2.1.1 \(The constitutional framework of US government\)](#) and [3.2.1.5 \(The electoral process and direct democracy\)](#).

PRESIDENTIAL POWER & CIVIL RIGHTS



IRS Threatens Private Schools' Tax Break Over Race Policies

3 SEPTEMBER 2026

The Treasury Department and the Internal Revenue Service (IRS, the US tax authority) proposed new rules on 3 September that would strip tax-exempt status from private schools and colleges that use race in admissions, scholarships or other programmes, arguing this discriminates against white students. Tax-exempt status lets a school avoid most federal tax and lets donors claim their gifts against their own tax bill, so losing it would be a serious financial blow.

The rules would still let schools target help using race-neutral criteria such as family income, geography, or first-generation status, and would not take effect until the 2027-28 tax year, giving the roughly 18,000 affected schools time to adjust. The proposal follows the Supreme Court's 2023 ruling against race-conscious university admissions, extending that principle from admissions decisions into tax law.

WHY IT MATTERS This shows the executive branch using regulatory and tax policy, rather than new legislation, to advance a position on civil rights, a technique presidents of both parties increasingly favour when Congress is unwilling or unable to act. It is a strong, current link between the presidency's rule-making power and the ongoing civil rights debate over race-conscious policy after the Court's affirmative action ruling.

SPECIFICATION LINKS Edexcel 9PL0 3A.3 (US Presidency) and 3A.4 (US Supreme Court and Civil Rights); AQA 7152 3.2.1.3 (The executive branch of government: President) and 3.2.1.8 (Civil rights).



The Podium Stands Empty

WEEK OF 31 AUGUST 2026

A week on from Karoline Leavitt's last day as White House press secretary, the podium she stood behind for nineteen months remains empty, with no permanent successor named. Leavitt, 28, stepped down on 27 August, telling reporters she "cannot be the best mom my two young children deserve" while carrying the demands of the job.

"I Cannot Be the Best Mom My Two Young Children Deserve"

Officials say President Trump is in no hurry to fill the post, and it may stay vacant until after the midterms. Leavitt's exit is the latest in a run of departures from the president's inner circle this year, including his deputy national security adviser and his chief liaison to Congress, both of whom announced their own exits within the same few weeks.

WHY IT MATTERS The press secretary's post sits inside the Executive Office of the President (EOP, the cluster of staff and advisory bodies who serve the president directly), and a prolonged vacancy in such a visible role is a useful, concrete example of how presidents build and manage their own staff, largely free of Senate confirmation or congressional oversight.

SPECIFICATION LINKS Edexcel 9PL0 3A.3 (US Presidency); AQA 7152 3.2.1.3 (The executive branch of government: President).

IN OTHER NEWS

Five more stories worth ten minutes of your own reading this week.

- **Ad Rates, Settled** – The Supreme Court blocked a lower-court ruling and preserved political parties' access to discounted broadcast advertising rates ahead of November, a boost for both national parties' midterm campaigns.
- **Ballroom Wins, Roberts Dissents** – A divided Supreme Court let construction on the White House's new ballroom continue, with the Chief Justice warning in dissent that the project is "likely unlawful".
- **Black Sues the House** – Billionaire investor Leon Black sued the House Oversight Committee rather than hand over subpoenaed documents in its inquiry linked to Jeffrey Epstein.
- **Redistricting, Split Decision** – Missouri and Maryland's top state courts each handed Democrats a win in separate redistricting disputes this week, keeping the boundary-drawing wars alive ahead of the midterms.
- **Alito's Books, Opened** – Justice Samuel Alito's latest financial disclosure was released, renewing scrutiny of the justices' outside income and gifts.



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