ID Cards Coming In The Back Door?

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Having had to retreat from legislative attempts to establish a national ID card through Social Security numbers or unique health care identifiers, Congress seems to be trying a new tack to implement this wholly un-American idea. Congress has suggested that the Department of Transportation develop "model guidelines for encoded data on driver's licenses."
That's bureaucratese for turning driver's licenses into a de facto national ID card. This ominous suggestion was buried in last year's conference report on the Department of Transportation's appropriations request.

Even though this is not legislation, the American Association of Motor Vehicle Administrators (AAMVA) is already working with the Justice Department and the General Services Administration to set up the system. This non-official organization asserts that it has the "responsibility and obligation" to eliminate the lack of uniformity in state driver's licenses, and is demanding $70 million to close the "loopholes."

Sorry, AAMVA, under our federal system of government, driver's licenses are in the exclusive jurisdiction of the states, and you have no authority to require uniformity. The diversity of federalism is part of what we call freedom.

The pushers of a national ID card are trying to ride the wave of worries about the September 11 tragedies. But there is no evidence that a national ID card would have prevented the hijackings, since all 19 hijackers had visas issued by government officials, most of them had Social Security numbers, and several had legally issued driver's licenses.

Americans already have experience with the Federal Government giving everyone a number. When Social Security was instituted in the 1930s, we were promised "This card is not to be used for identification."

Demands that we provide our Social Security number are now so ubiquitous that identity theft has become big business. Before we even talk about new national numbers, the government should clean up the mess it has already created by allowing Social Security numbers to be used for non-Social Security purposes.

In arguing for a national ID card, an AAMVA spokesman said that birth certificates and Social Security cards can be forged. Yes, but driver's licenses can be forged, too, and several states even issue driver's licenses to illegal aliens.

This plan is clearly a vast expansion of federal power, with AAMVA CEO Linda R. Lewis calling bluntly for "federal intervention." But AAMVA is less than forthcoming in describing the mailed fist in the velvet glove of the driver's license system it is proposing.

This plan is not just a simple process of requiring airport security guards to match your face with the card you present. Transforming state driver's licenses into a national ID card poses bigger problems than just an offense against federalism.

What's lurking behind this new proposal is a computer, which is tied into a giant national database, which is administered by government officials, which is subject to abuse and error. Government busybodies would have access to your entire life history: your travels, your money, your medical treatments, and your school records.

But that's not all. This information would become available to banks, lending agencies, credit card companies, gun shops, auto dealers, colleges and, of course, all law enforcement agencies.

The accuracy of the database would pose persistent problems. Computers have glitches, humans make mistakes, and we all know how hitting one wrong digit or letter prevents the proper file from appearing on the screen.

The error rate in current government databases, such as Internal Revenue and Social Security, is already an embarrassment. Those mistakes, which may take weeks to rectify, are a costly annoyance.

But what if the mistake prevents you from boarding a plane to meet a scheduled appointment? Or withdrawing money to pay your taxes or mortgage on time? Or being admitted to the emergency room?

This proposed driver's license system is not about preventing terrorism, and it's not even about identity. It's about requiring individual American citizens to get government permission for traveling, banking, medical care, renting or buying housing, attending school or college, and even getting a job.

The problem that confronts America today is foreign-sponsored terrorism, and we must draw a bright line of different treatment between U.S. citizens and aliens. Our government should monitor the whereabouts of aliens, but NOT require U.S. citizens to relinquish our freedom.

Aliens, both the illegals and those in our country on temporary visas, should be required to carry and show a smart ID card with photo and fingerprint. It is long past time for the Immigration and Naturalization Service to implement an Entry-Exit system so we can deport the some ten million illegals and the temporary visitors who promised to depart on a date certain.

And yes, airlines should engage in profiling. The St. Louis police warned repeatedly that they would be profiling scalpers at the Rams football playoff game. If it's OK to profile scalpers, it should be OK to profile people who are trying to murder us.