ID Card: The Password to the Police State

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The current attempt to inflict Americans with the burden of having to carry a national ID card did not begin on 9-11 and, indeed, is unrelated to it. The attack on the World Trade Center is just a convenient excuse to promote this thoroughly un-American idea.
Totalitarian governments keep their subjects under constant police surveillance by the technique of requiring everyone to carry "papers" that must be presented to any government functionary on demand. This is an internal passport that everyone must show to authorities for permission to travel even short distances within the country, to move to another city, or to apply for a new job.

This type of personal surveillance is the indicia of a police state. It operates as an efficient watchdog to stifle any emergence of freedom.

Having to show "papers" to government functionaries was bad enough in the era when "papers" meant merely what was on a piece of paper. In the computer era, when the paper ID card is merely the tangible evidence of a file on a government database that contains your life history, it will control not only your right to board a plane, but also your right to drive a car, get a job, enter a hospital emergency room, start school or college, open or close a bank account, cash a check, buy a gun, or access government benefits such as Social Security, Medicare, or Medicaid.

With the use of a Social Security or other unique number, modern technology can make it so easy for bureaucrats at every level to monitor, record and track our daily actions and make them contingent on showing the ID card. This would not only be the end of privacy as we know it, but it would put power in the hands of Big Government that is inconsistent with freedom.

In 1996, Congress tried to create a national ID card by requiring state drivers' licenses and other state-issued documents to comply with federal identification standards, including the use of Social Security numbers as the unique numeric identifiers. Scheduled to start in October 2000, this law, fortunately, was repealed in 1999.

It's important for Americans to understand that the 9-11 hijackings are a problem of the U.S. government allowing illegal aliens to roam freely in our country, and promiscuously issuing visas without proper certifications. It's also a problem of the government failing to enforce current immigration and visa laws, and failing to deport illegal aliens including those who overstay their visas.

At least 16 of the 19 hijackers fit in one or more of these categories.

For more than two weeks prior to 9-11, the FBI had been trying to find one of the hijackers whom the CIA had spotted meeting with a suspect in the bombing of the USS Cole. But all the FBI had to go on was his visa application, which listed his address as "Marriott, New York City" (where there are ten Marriott hotels and he never went to any of them).

The U.S. State Department is a big part of the problem. Some 3,700 consular officers worldwide approve 80 percent of the 8 million visa applications every year.

The U.S. law that requires an alien's border crossing document to include a machine-readable biometric identifier (such as a fingerprint or handprint), and requires that the identifier match the appropriate biometric characteristic of the alien, has never gone into effect.

We are not going to tolerate a system that treats U.S. citizens and aliens the same; all aliens are not terrorists, but nearly all terrorists are aliens. We do not want to live in a police state, where every American is treated like a terrorist, drug trafficker, money launderer, illegal alien, or common criminal.

Larry Ellison, the head of Oracle Corp., the leading database software company, has offered to donate the tools for creating machine- readable ID cards that contain digitized thumbprints and photographs. Isn't that generous of him! A government ID card requirement would allow Oracle's government and industry customers to more accurately monitor the citizens in their privacy-invading databases.

We should have a computerized database of all aliens entering the United States, whether they are tourists, students, or workers, and a tracking system that flags the file when a visa time expires. Aliens should be required to carry smart ID cards that contain biometric identifiers, the terms of their visas, and a record of their border crossings and travels within our country, similar to the rubber stamps used in all passports.

Airports should be equipped with the machines to swipe the smart card every time an alien boards a plane. Dumb questions like "Has your luggage been under your control since you packed it?" should be replaced with useful questions like "Are you a U.S. citizen?".

Fortunately, the Bush Administration has rejected proposals for a national ID card and no member of Congress had introduced ID card legislation as of September 28. Let's keep it that way.