

Newsfront

White House Plans to Weaken Real ID Law

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The Obama administration is working to water down the Real ID law after 11 states refused to participate because of the cost.

The law, passed in 2005, calls for giving secure IDs to 245 million Americans by 2017. Homeland Security Secretary Janet Napolitano wants to substitute the \$4 billion program with Pass ID.

The idea is for a cheaper, less stringent ID plan, partly financed by federal grants, according to draft legislation that Napolitano's Senate supporters expect to introduce soon, The Washington Post reports.

Real ID stemmed from the 9/11 Commission's report. It recommended federal standards for driver's licenses and birth certificates, stating, "For terrorists, travel documents are as important as weapons."

Eighteen of the 19 Sept. 11 hijackers garnered state IDs to facilitate their travel in the U.S.

The Bush administration had trouble putting the law in force amid opposition from states and privacy advocates. Eleven states have refused to participate in Real ID.

The new rule comes after months of talks with the National Governors Association.

"If the law cannot be implemented, it is hard to claim that it increases security," David Quam, a lobbyist for the NGA, told The Post.

The new plan maintains some features of Real ID, such as requiring a digital photograph, signature and machine-readable features.

But it drops a requirement for new databases -- linked through a national hub -- that would allow all states to keep and cross-check such information.

Pass ID also eliminates a rule that motor vehicle departments must verify birth certificates with originating agencies to prevent identity theft.

Critics say the changes jeopardize our safety. "Real ID, not a gutted version with a tough-sounding name, is necessary to continue to keep us safe," Rep. Lamar Smith of Texas, the ranking Republican member of the House Judiciary Committee, tells The Post.

"Any attempt to repeal or weaken [Real ID] will harm national security."

A blog by Daniel McCarthy on The American Conservative's web site opposes any ID plan. "This is typical of how liberties get chipped away," he writes.

"When the public in the states rallies against assaults on privacy, the security apparatus in D.C. switches tracks to implement its wish-list piecemeal. We'll see whether the feds succeed in undercutting the grassroots revolt in the states."

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