



Deep-six Real ID

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Politicians seeking simple answers to complex problems are rarely successful. But Congress' boneheaded plan to convert 50 state driver's license bureaus into de facto immigration and homeland security agencies is proving every bit the disaster critics anticipated.

Congress' mandate to re-license all 245 million drivers in the nation within five years beginning May 2008 in order to verify their citizenship will cost more than \$11 billion and can't possibly be accomplished on schedule, according to a survey of state officials charged with performing the task. Federal regulators haven't even issued guidelines for the program yet.

What's more, this national identification process will neither weed out terrorists nor make a dent in the flow of illegal immigration - the two problems it was devised to address.

The National Governors Association is appealing to Congress to delay the start date, stretch out the re-licensing period, loosen some other requirements of the program and provide the money to pay for it.

A better idea would be to junk the so-called Real ID plan altogether. Verifying citizenship should not be a state responsibility. The local departments of motor vehicles have been put in the impossible position of authenticating birth certificates and passports and immigration documents when their real job is trying to make sure people who get licenses know how to drive.

After the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks, driver's licenses became a standard form of identification for airline travel because so many Americans have them. But they aren't well-suited to the much broader task being assigned to them. Among the many complications: Americans move a lot. Under Real ID, they'd have to get their drivers' license renewed in person whenever they change their address, spending hours in line and perhaps as much as \$100 each time.

Simplistic solutions proliferate in Congress these days, such as requiring voters to prove citizenship, thus putting election boards in the same spot as the hapless DMVs, or building walls on the borders in a hopeless quest to make them impenetrable.

The scandal is that Real ID was enacted. Cooler heads in Congress should correct that as soon as possible.

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