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FAIRFIELD SUN
TIMES

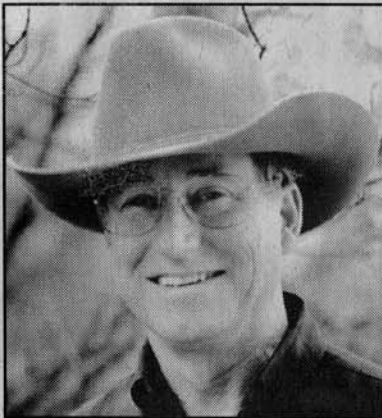
Fairfield MT 59436

Thursday

MAY 19 2005

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GUEST COLUMN . . . MONTANA VIEWPOINT



by
**Senator Jim
Elliott**

**READY FOR A
NATIONAL ID
SYSTEM?**

"As nightfall does not come at once, neither does oppression. In both instances, there's a twilight where everything

remains seemingly

unchanged, and it is in such twilight that we must be aware of change in the air, however slight, lest we become unwitting victims of the darkness." *Justice William O. Douglas, United States Supreme Court*

I used to know a Sheriff who believed that people who obeyed the law should have no problem with an officer having a look inside their house...I mean, hey, if you've got nothing to hide, what's the problem? I thought of telling the sheriff I'd be over to look in his refrigerator about 3 AM the next day, and please don't shoot me, but thought better of it.

As it happened, the sheriff's habits weren't able to withstand much scrutiny anyway, so he is long gone.

What brings this to mind is the recent issue of every American being issued a state identification card that conforms to federal requirements. I mean, if you've got nothing to hide...? Having something to hide isn't the point, is it? I believe it has a bit more to do with our Constitutional rights to be left alone and free from government snooping. That's important, because the information the states provide will go into a national data base. That base was originally to be shared with Canada and Mexico, but that provision was removed. Small wonder.

The "Real ID" system is not a "national" ID system in the sense that we are not required to get an identity card from the federal government. In the sense that the federal government will reject ID that does not conform to federal standards, it is. That means no passport and

no plane fights for citizens where states do not go along with the plan.

It requires states to verify that the document used to establish ID when we get a driver's license was actually issued to the holder by the company or agency in question. Montana is one of nine states that do not verify documents presented in order to get a driver's license, so when we show our electric bill as proof of being a resident of Montana, the state will now have to verify the information before we can get the license issued. Don't be complacent if you feel you're exempt because you already have your Montana driver's license; you'll get to go into the national data base when you renew it.

This, you will be glad to know, "will prevent another 9/11" according to the promoter of the legislation, James Sensenbrenner, R-Wisconsin. The concern is that undocumented immigrants can get state ID to easily, and thereby get on a plane and do who knows what? This may all seem reasonable, except that all of the 9/11 terrorists happened to be documented immigrants who used their U.S. ID to obtain state ID. So where does the blame lie? Not with the states.

The promoters of the legislation obviously feel that the issue won't stand up to national scrutiny because they have added it as a "rider" to the bill to fund the Iraq war effort. Last session, it was tacked on to the intelligence overhaul bill, but had to be removed. Riders to bills do not get public hearings, so there is no opportunity for opponents to testify.

So, there you have it, in order to protect our country we have to destroy the basic tenets of our Constitution. The rider is opposed by the libertarian Cato Institute, the ACLU, and me, among others.

Jim Elliott is a Democrat Senator from Trout Creek. He has served 12 years in the Montana Legislature, and is a member of the Taxation, Education, and Local Government Committees. He is also Vice-Chairman of the Legislative Audit Committee. Jim began writing his bi-weekly Montana Viewpoint articles in 1991. Archived articles are available on his web-site: www.jimelliott.org. He can be reached by e-mail at jim@jimelliott.org; mail at 33 Ranch, 100 TC Road, Trout Creek, Montana 59874; or by phone at 406-827-3671