Defund the national ID program

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As the representative of the most heavily Latino congressional district in the country, Rep. Lucille Roybal-Allard would be an unlikely supporter of one of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security's more insidious anti-immigrant programs. But her silence on the agency's efforts to implement a U.S. national ID program is notable. From her seat on the appropriations subcommittee that provides funds to DHS each year, Roybal-Allard, D-Commerce, could have a large say on whether California and other states are forced into compliance with the REAL ID Act. Given the anti-immigrant uses to which a fully implemented national ID system would be put, she should say no.

REAL ID is a federal law Congress passed hastily in 2005. It is designed to coerce states into producing a U.S. national ID. The law's standards for driver's licenses and non-driver IDs include forcing drivers to present multiple documents for proof of identity, proof of legal presence in the United States, and proof of their Social Security number. Full compliance also may require that states share all of their drivers' data and documents with every other motor vehicle agency through a nationwide network of databases.

California is currently noncompliant with REAL ID, having been granted repeated compliance extensions by the federal government. Compliance would require action from the Legislature, and officials have expressed concerns in the past about both REAL ID's cost and its lack of privacy protections. REAL ID's extensive document requirements, too, have raised concerns, with fears that they will disproportionately impact California's large immigrant and minority communities. Migrants and minorities often have difficulty procuring the necessary documents. With a national ID in place, minorities and migrants are more likely than most to be asked for proof of citizenship through their drivers' licenses and state IDs.

DHS has recently become more aggressive in pushing REAL ID on California and other states. In January, it announced that the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) will turn away travelers from noncompliant states at airport checkpoints starting in January 2018. By October 2020, the federal government expects every license held by an American to meet federal government standards. There's good reason to believe TSA wouldn't follow through. It has backed down from manufactured deadlines many times before. But the threat is driving some states to change their licensing procedures at the behest of DHS bureaucrats.

Roybal-Allard has represented the L.A. area's 40th District, where nearly 87 percent of residents identify as Latino, since 1993. She sits on the powerful House Appropriations Committee and is the ranking Democratic member of the subcommittee that oversees funding for DHS. Roybal-

Allard is in a good position to withdraw funding from the national ID program. There is good reason to do so.

Congress passed the REAL ID Act with no hearings and very little debate. Proponents frequently tout the Act as having been in a recommendation of the 9/11 Commission. However, REAL ID repealed federal legislation that had been passed to fulfill the commission's recommendations. Instead, the REAL ID Act ordered one-size-fits-all national ID mandate. Nobody has ever articulated how the national ID would provide cost-effective security, or why the threats to every Americans' privacy and data security are worth the risk.

When REAL ID came before Congress on a stand-alone vote in 2005, Rep. Roybal-Allard rightly voted against it. The House leadership later folded it into a military spending bill, which she voted for, boxed into approving the national ID by congressional maneuvering.

Since then, however, appropriators like Roybal-Allard have annually passed funding for REAL ID with little to no debate, much less oversight. The Cato Institute has found that, on average, Congress appropriated and DHS spent about $50 million per year on REAL ID from 2008 to 2011. Starting in 2011, REAL ID was folded into a $1 billion-per-year "State Homeland Security Grant Program" that reduced oversight of federal spending on the national ID program even further.

Restoring transparency to DHS appropriations and refusing to fund REAL ID would be an important step in pushing back against a federal program that will have negative consequences for many of the people Roybal-Allard represents. California and our whole nation would be better off with more transparency given to DHS spending and an end to funding of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security's unwanted national ID program.

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