House Republicans Push Obama Administration to Implement National ID System

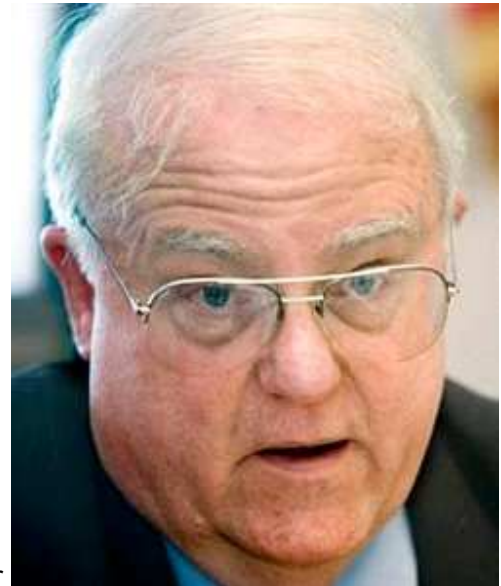by **Amar Toor** on March 3, 2011 at 01:30 PM

House Republicans are pushing the Obama administration to **move forward with a controversial law** that, if enacted, would require every state to issue nationally standardized identification cards to its citizens.

As it stands right now, states have until May 11th to comply with the **2005 Real ID Act**, signed by President Bush. Enacted as a response to the terrorist attacks of September 11th, the act calls for the creation of a national identification card. This digitized Real ID would synchronize information from state DMV databases, and would feature a standardized bar code that could be scanned for data retrieval.

Since it's been enacted, though, the law has drawn mixed responses from state legislatures. So far, a full 24 state governments have voted to reject the Real ID requirements, and some have even banned their motor vehicle administrations from participating. But unless Department of Homeland Security Secretary Janet Napolitano grants an extension to the deadline, these states' constituents could encounter serious difficulties at airports.

Under this scenario, residents in states that haven't adhered to the bill's requirements "won't be able to use their driver's licenses to get on airplanes," said Molly Ramsdell, of the National Conference of State Legislatures. "They can use a military ID. They can use some other federal ID. But they won't be able to use a driver's license." According to Homeland Security, travelers without a Real ID would be subjected to "delays," "enhanced security screening," or may even be denied boarding.

Yet senior House Republicans are urging Napolitano to resist extending the deadline, on the grounds that the Real ID Act is critical to national security. In a **letter** sent to Napolitano last week, Rep. James Sensenbrenner and two Republican colleagues warned the Secretary that "until Real ID is fully implemented, terrorists will continue to exploit this vulnerability to accomplish heinous purposes." Supporters of the act have long used 9/11

as a prime example supporting the need for national ID cards, as many of the hijackers boarded their planes using fraudulent drivers' licenses.

Under the Bush administration, the Department of Homeland Security firmly supported the act. With the Obama administration in power, however, that sentiment has changed. Napolitano herself has been quoted as saying she'd like to see the Real ID Act replaced with something that "**accomplishes some of the same goals**."

It's also probably unrealistic to expect state legislatures to comply with the law in just ten weeks. According to Jim Harper, director of information policy studies at the Cato Institute, House Republicans' demands seem more political than pragmatic. "Real ID was an unserious law, passed without a hearing in the House or Senate," Harper told CNET. "**This is an unserious letter**, sent without regard for the consequences if the DHS did what they ask."