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Senators Propose National ID Cards to Curb Illegal Immigration

by **Amar Toor** — Mar 24th 2010 at 10:40AM

As the Department of Homeland Security continues to urge states to adopt its national identification card program, Senators Chuck Schumer and Lindsay Graham have proposed a radically new alternative -- another national identification card.

Homeland Security's Real ID initiative, which began in 2005, requires

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motor vehicle authorities in each state to compile Social Security numbers, birth certificates, and other personal information from all its citizens, in order to construct a national database. According to Wired, though, virtually none of the state governments have complied with the $24 billion program. Schumer and Graham's proposal, on the other hand, calls for the implementation of a "high-tech, fraud-proof Social Security card" *without* the creation of a national database. Instead, each citizen's unique biometric identifier would be stored directly on his or her card, which, the Senators reassure, "would not contain any private information, medical information or tracking devices." Whereas the Real ID program was instituted as a border-tightening measure in the wake of 9/11, this latest proposal is being branded as a guard against illegal immigration.

Jim Harper of the Cato Institute, however, thinks the idea of having a national ID card without a centralized database is a bit unrealistic, claiming that there is no practical way of making a national identity document fraud-proof. The Electronic Frontier Foundation's Richard Esguerra, meanwhile, predicts that any national ID program would likely become requisite customer documentation for a variety of private sector services, including "airlines, insurance agencies, health care providers, mortgage lenders, credit card companies, and so forth."

So far, the Senators have only discussed their plan with President Obama, and it's still unclear if it'll get much further. We sincerely hope, though, that it doesn't. It seems like the debate over whether or not to create a national database of personal information is somewhat irrelevant to the core issue, which remains firmly grounded in Big Brother concerns. We certainly believe Schumer and Graham when they insist that the government won't use tracking devices, but there's still a police state overtone to any program that involves federally issued digital cards, docile as they may be. We're all for keeping our borders safe, but turning us into electronically branded cattle isn't necessarily the best way to go about it. [From: Wired]

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