

Commentary

REAL ID side effects

By Mark Sanford
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If I were a betting man, I would wager most people haven't followed the debate on REAL ID. If you indeed missed it, I would ask you take the time to learn about what I consider the most troubling piece of legislation I've seen come from Washington since I have been governor.

REAL ID would surreptitiously require all 50 states to change their driver's licenses to act as de-facto national ID cards. It's outrageous, and not just because it was a backdoor way of doing something proponents in Washington have never been able to pull off in the past. I say "outrageous" because REAL ID was never really debated in Congress; because the cost of its implementation is handed down to states and individuals; and because it is an affront to Americans' privacy concerns.

Let's look more closely at a few of those concerns:

(1) Steroid use in baseball has now received more congressional attention than has REAL ID. But national policy changes should be debated, not dictated. This was not the case with REAL ID. It never saw committee debate in the House or Senate, and passed as nothing more than a rider, an attachment, to a bill devoted to tsunami relief and military personnel fighting in the Middle East.

(2) The cost of REAL ID, and the national ID card system that would come with it, would not be borne by the federal government but handed to the states and individuals. So-called unfunded mandates like these keep the spending trains going in Washington. I find it amazing now that Washington has stacked up \$50 trillion in debts, which amount to \$450,000 per household, that their idea of keeping those promises rests on handing the bill to others.

Nobody seems to know how many billions REAL ID will cost taxpayers at the state level. Implausibly, the Department of Homeland Security has now revised its cost estimate downward from \$23 billion to \$9.9 billion. But whatever the number it seems to me that if Washington wants something done, it ought to find a way to pay for it — and make sure that it can pay for it.

(3) This proposal is one more step away from the Founding Fathers' vision of a limited federal government. Our greatest homeland security is liberty, and the Founding Fathers believed our greatest threat to liberty was a central government grown too powerful. Accordingly, they set up checks on federal power by vesting authority at the individual and state levels.

REAL ID disrupts this delicate balance of power in two ways. First, it turns the Founders' logic on its head by forcing states to act as agents for the federal government in creating a national ID card for

federal purposes. Needing a REAL ID to board a plane or enter a federal building would also change the balance of power in something as seemingly insignificant as a visit to a member of Congress.

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