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Date: 2/26/2008 7:33:30 PM
Subject: REAL ID quote

Given the Governor's quote, I gather that we won't be asking for an extension. We should probably talk about what I should be doing up here on my end, just let me know.

BTW in his quote he really sounds like a "bad-ass" (forgive the expression) - it's pretty cool!

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South Carolina Gov. Mark Sanford (R) blasted the law as a "de facto national ID card," and criticized the DHS decision to offer an extension to states. "It's a political remedy. It says we will punt on the issue until after the next election."

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Thanks,

Blair

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Monday, February 25, 2008

Govs press for more money on Real ID, Medicaid

By Eric Kelderman and Daniel C. Vock, Stateline.org Staff Writers

Governors sent a message to Congress and the next president that they are unhappy with federal standards to make driver's licenses more secure and with a batch of new Medicaid rules that could cost them \$13 billion over five years.

Despite changes designed to lower the cost of the 2005 Real ID Act, governors attending an annual meeting of the National Governors Association voted unanimously Sunday (Feb. 24) to object to and continue to call for full funding of the driver's license measure, estimated to cost \$4 billion.

Congress has appropriated \$90 million to help states electronically verify the identity of an estimated 245 million drivers and reissue secure licenses. The law is meant to keep driver's licenses out of the hands of terrorists and illegal aliens and was passed by Congress in response to the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001.

The executive committee of the National Conference of State Legislatures also recently renewed its call for Real ID to be repealed by Congress.

In 2007, six states * Maine, Montana, New Hampshire, Oklahoma, South Carolina and Washington * took the nearly unprecedented step of passing laws refusing to comply with the federal law because of the costs, federal imposition on state practice and the potential threats to individual privacy.

While the U.S. Department of Homeland Security said it cannot compel states to follow the law, non-compliant driver's licenses cannot be used as ID to board commercial airplanes or enter federal buildings after May 11, when the act takes effect.

Montana, South Carolina and Maine are currently the only three states whose residents won't be able to use their driver's licenses to

board aircraft after the May deadline. Those three have failed, so far, to file for an extension giving them another 19 months * until January 2010 * to start verifying the identities of driver's license applicants.

Montana Gov. Brian Schweitzer (D) voiced frustration that his state's residents would be treated unfairly at airports.

"We're not doing anything different than any other state. We're not providing any less security or more security. And so for them to say we're going to pick Montana and frisk everyone that gets on a plane is just ridiculous," he said between meetings at the NGA gathering.

South Carolina Gov. Mark Sanford (R) blasted the law as a "de facto national ID card," and criticized the DHS decision to offer an extension to states. "It's a political remedy. It says we will punt on the issue until after the next election."

The federal Homeland Security Department has interpreted requests for an extension by the other 47 states * including three that have rejected Real ID in law -- as a signal that they are planning to follow the act, which gives states until December 2017 to reissue all of their licenses.

But several governors said they had asked for an extension just to buy time, not because they are dropping their objections to the law. "It preserves our options," said Georgia Gov. Sonny Perdue (R).

Hawaii's Gov. Linda Lingle (R) said: "We were granted an extension * you're granted the exemption with no commitment that you're going to comply."

The governors also agreed Sunday to ask Congress for a one-year reprieve from new Medicaid rules that the Bush administration argues will better focus money spent on the health insurance program for the poor. State officials and health providers vigorously oppose the changes, which they say will shift \$13 billion in costs over five years to states at a time their own budgets are facing deficits because of the economic downturn.

"With states facing an aggregate shortfall of \$30 billion to \$40 billion (next year), that's very difficult to absorb," said Vermont Gov. Jim Douglas (R).

Congress placed a hold on most of the spending curbs until May or June. The governors asked to continue blocking the new rules until after the next president is sworn in next January.

"In the next year or two, with the new administration, there will be substantial changes in health care, and some of these rules are very onerous. So if we can punt for a year or two to find out what the new direction is, we can all do this more intelligently and more sensibly," said Tennessee Gov. Phil Bredesen (D).

Eight governors are being dispatched to Capitol Hill Tuesday to talk about health care, and a group of governors is scheduled to meet with House Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.) separately on Monday.

Blocking the rule changes could prove difficult, though, because money is tight in the federal budget and President Bush would likely veto attempts to thwart the changes.

"It's an uphill fight right now. Congress and the president are looking for ways to save money, and we can understand that. But you can't save money on the backs of people in the Medicaid program. I think it's the wrong priority for our country," Pennsylvania Gov. Ed

Rendell (D) said.

On Monday morning (Feb. 25), governors are scheduled to press their issues at the White House and ask President Bush for an economic stimulus package that includes money for transportation projects and other state funding. State leaders have complained that the recent stimulus package Congress approved to jumpstart the economy actually will hurt state coffers.

New York Gov. Eliot Spitzer (D) pressed federal Transportation Secretary Mary Peters Sunday (Feb. 24) about the possibility of road-building funds in a second stimulus bill, saying that the job creation from that infusion of money would provide long-term economic benefits to the country.

Peters, who is expected to join governors at the White House Monday, said the administration previously had rejected transportation funds because those projects take several years to pay out and would not be effective as an immediate boost to the economy.

Other Cabinet members expected to attend the White House meeting with governors include U.S. Trade Representative Susan C. Schwab; Alphonso Jackson, secretary of U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development; and Joint Chiefs of Staff Chairman Adm. Mike Mullen.

Vicki Ekstrom contributed to this report