Casey Bladow

Professor Ficek

CSIS 316

11/07/12

***National ID cards with RFID chips***

It won’t be long before your average everyday driver’s license becomes transformed in a national ID card of some sort with the latest federal law called The Real ID Act. The Real ID Act will require that state verify every license applicant’s identity and residency status, and that they store addresses, names, and driving records in a database that every other state can access. It also mandates anti-counterfeiting features for the licenses ad a “common machine readable technology.” It also enforces a time limit in which certain activities will no longer accept an old ID. Things such as; boarding an airplane, opening a bank account, or satisfying any other federally regulated use. The law’s sponsors argue that this law is necessary “to prevent another 9/11-type terrorist attack by disrupting terrorist travel.” Opponents contend that this act is primarily meant to deal with illegal immigrants and prevent them from getting a driver’s license. If you couldn’t already place this as another 9/11 related act it’s going to start seeming really clear shortly. When this bill was originally introduced the sponsor, James Sensenbrenner a Republican out of Wisconsin, referred to a section of the 9/11 commission report that read, “Members of al-Qaida clearly valued freedom of movement as critical to their ability to plan and carry out the attacks prior to September 11th.” He followed that statement by saying his proposed legislation would curtail such movement and would tighten the rules for political asylum. Upon even further questioning he would suggest that the law was intended to “get a handle on illegal aliens in the United States.” (Larkin)

Tim Sparapani, legislative counsel for the American Civil Liberties Union, says that the network of databases may eventually hold electronic copies of sensitive personal documents. The law already requires the states verify and store electronic copies of driver’s photo ID, birth certificate, and Social Security card, along with documents showing name and address. “We know that any kind of sophisticated hacker, ID thief, organized criminal, or terrorist will be able to hack into this system. There are so many points of entry” Sparapani states. As it sits right now, the new law neither requires nor forbids that the documents are stored in the same database and having multiple databases that have the chance of being hacked becomes a big risk. He also says that “States will do whatever is easiest and cheapest.” (Larkin) This could make one feel as if the country is already leaning towards having 50 different databases spread all over the country.

This law requires that licenses incorporate a “machine-readable technology”. To me, this is a very vague statement. Already, 47 states have a bar code or magnetic strip placed into their ID cards. Either one of those would satisfy the law’s mandate, but so would a radio frequency ID (RFID), a broadcast technology that’s already being planned for upcoming electronic U.S. passports. The broad language of this new law doesn’t surprise me, there have been quite a few laws that have been pushed through since the 9/11 attacks in one way or another stating that our privacy and safety are in jeopardy. So once again, this new law “really allows for many possibilities”, says Neville Pattison. Pattison is the director of technology and government affairs at the U.S. headquarters of the European company Axalto, which makes smart cards. (Larkin) The company makes and is currently involved in the bidding for the supplement of the RFID chips that will be used in the new passports. Many privacy and travel groups have strongly voiced their opinions about using RFID chips in passports stating that they are very easy to read from a distance, thus broadcasting such personal data could make targets of American travelers.

In my opinion the conspiracy theorists seem to be making the most sense with this one. The unfunded mandate known by congress as REAL ID, with an estimated cost of $11 Billion is not only a corporate welfare program, but a back door for a Big Brother style National ID system for the North American Union, a collection of US, Canada and Mexico basically creating a whole new government. These national ID cards would become like an internal passport program similar to the former USSR had in place to control the movement of their domestic populations. In 2007, 24 states have introduced legislation to refuse compliance with REAL ID. To date, states that have rejected the REAL ID legislation are Maine, Idaho and Utah; legislation is “pending” in several other states. (CHANNELINGREALITY.COM)

Figure (a) shows a national ID card issued by a state “Washington State – Enhanced Dual Purpose Driver’s License – Border Crossing Card with RFID chip.” (CHANNELINGREALITY.COM) Figure (b) shows an image of a National ID Card issued by the actual government, or what one might look like, including a fingerprint and RFID chip. (Drum)



Figure (a)



Figure (b)

Although the fact that twenty-four states have rejected the REAL ID Act of 2005, Rep. Lamar Smith (R-TX), Rep. Pete King (R-NY), and Rep. James Sensenbrenner (R-WI) issued Homeland Security a letter against any further extension of REAL ID. The letter stated that not implementing REAL ID “threatens the security of the United States.” The letter follows the arrest of Khalid Ali-M Adawsari on charges of attempting to use a weapon of mass destruction. EPIC previously released a report, testified to Congress, and submitted comments stating that REAL ID included few protections for individual privacy and security in its massive national ID database. (EPIC)

I have multiple problems with this national ID system. First off, a national ID card system isn’t going to solve the problem that the political powers are using to inspire it. The powers at be are using the good old Terrorism response as a reasoning behind enforcing such a nonsense law. A national ID card system will not prevent terrorism. It would make things more difficult, yes, but that’s not a legitimate excuse to strip away more privacy and security rights. To push that even further, several of the hijackers reportedly had identification documents on them, and were in the country legally. (ACLU) Another major issue I have with this idea is how a national ID card system would lead to a very slippery slope of surveillance and monitoring of citizens. My reasoning behind this sounds way out there and like every other conspiracy theorist out there, with that said. A national ID system would not protect us from terrorism, but would create a system of internal passports that would significantly diminish the freedom and privacy of law-abiding citizens. Once a system like this gets put into place, it is almost impossible to ever believe that such a system would be restricted and used for its original purpose. A few examples of this happening occurred with Social Security numbers. The original purpose of a Social Security number was intended to be used only to administer the retirement program. But it’s completely obvious that that system has been ignored and steadily abandoned over the past 50 years. (ACLU) A national ID would threaten the privacy that Americans have always enjoyed.

Supporters of this seem to follow the same reasoning behind voter ID problems. The most common form of ID in the United States is a driver’s license. Nonwhite registered voters are somewhat less likely than whites to have driver’s licenses. In South Carolina, for example, the gap is nearly 20%. Therefore, voter ID will have a major discriminatory effect. They will also state that employers are weary of hiring illegal immigrants and then getting fined or arrested for doing so. The simple solution is to do your hiring by the book. If employers properly follow all the hiring procedures then they really have nothing to worry about. This is just an excuse to try and gain a few more supporters. The employers that are already breaking the law by hiring illegal immigrants are already aware that they are doing so. Another supportive reason, that makes zero sense to me, involves the whole “terrorism” scare. Somehow sacrificing personal liberties will secure your freedom. Benjamin Franklin actually quoted that hundreds of years ago by stating “Those who would give up Essential Liberty to purchase a little Temporary Safety, deserve neither Liberty nor Safety.” (Benjamin Franklin) Not only will a person not get either of these but they’ll lose both as well. Don’t even get me started on deserving them. By sacrificing these things you are throwing your rights away. You are telling the government that you don’t care that at one point in time this country was considered the ‘land of the free’. Clearly giving up your rights is throwing that statement away. And by stating that you support this because you want to fight “terrorism”… you have to be kidding me. It’s a scare. It’s a fear tactic no different than what Hitler used against the Jewish people.

To summarize the point’s I’ve been making this debate I couldn’t be more against implementing something as silly as a RFID chipped national ID. For all the reasons I’ve listed above and several more. It’s pretty clear that when 24 states reject an Act of legislature that something is wrong with it. It really makes you wonder how it even got pushed through in the first place. Just another great thing we can blame on the Bush administration and then we get left with the aftermath. Although it’s been 4 years without him and not a whole lot of improvement has been made, a lot less has been messed up. It was clear that everything that administration did in eight years couldn’t be fixed in four. And I am personally glad that Obama has gotten another four to keep improving. I’m going to stand by what President Franklin said and say that sacrificing our freedoms for any sort of liberty is never the answer, and can only lead us into a dark and miserable place.

Works Cited

ACLU. 5 Problems with National ID Cards. Spetember 8 2003. 6 November 2012 <http://www.aclu.org/technology-and-liberty/5-problems-national-id-cards>.

Benjamin Franklin, William Temple Franklin. Benjamin Franklin. 1775.

CHANNELINGREALITY.COM. The REAL Purpose of the REAL ID. n.d. 6 November 2012 <http://www.conspiracyplanet.com/channel.cfm?channelid=74&contentid=4353>.

Drum, Kevin. E-Verify vs. a National ID. 26 August 2010. 6 November 2012 <http://www.motherjones.com/kevin-drum/2010/08/e-verify-vs-national-id>.

EPIC. National ID and the REAL ID Act. 4 March 2011. 6 November 2012 <http://epic.org/privacy/id\_cards/>.

Larkin, Erik. Coming Soon: National ID Cards? 31 May 2005. 6 11 2012 <http://www.pcworld.com/article/121077/article.html>.