

THE WAY FORWARD ON LICENSES

Daily News (New York)

October 23, 2007 Tuesday, SPORTS FINAL EDITION

Copyright 2007 Daily News, L.P.



Section: EDITORIAL; Pg. 29

Length: 620 words

Byline: BY BILL HAMMOND

Body

Gov. Spitzer could change a lot of minds about his plan to **license** illegal immigrants if he would make one key change in his controversial policy: Give them "driving privilege cards" instead of regular **licenses**. Or, if he must issue them **licenses**, stamp "undocumented alien" in bold red type across the front.

A two-tiered **licensing** system would allow Spitzer to achieve his worthy goals without taking such a bloody beating in public opinion.

He could still reduce the number of unlicensed, uninsured drivers on the roads of New York - saving lives and saving money for all New Yorkers.

He could still encourage many of New York's 1 million illegal immigrants to put their names, addresses and photographs into the Department of Motor Vehicles database - providing an invaluable resource for law enforcement.

But he would also show a healthy respect for the 72% of New Yorkers who think **licensing** illegal immigrants is a lousy idea.

Not all of those people are anti-immigrant demagogues. Many if not most are decent, open-minded, welcoming people who just can't understand, in the aftermath of 9/11, why their governor would confer the state's definitive ID card on people living outside of the law.

If Spitzer gives illegal immigrants **licenses** that clearly identify them as such, no one could accuse him of handing out "breeder documents" that terrorists could use to get other legitimate IDs - and, in the process, worm their **way** into mainstream society. No one could accuse him of making it easier for noncitizens to commit voting fraud.

Immigrants who receive such a document could use it only for the narrow purposes of legally operating a car and buying insurance. And armed with legitimate ID to show police, they would have one less reason to flee the scene of car accidents.

Yes, people carrying such a card would flag themselves as illegal immigrants every time they flash it. But that didn't prevent tens of thousands of Utah residents from signing up for that state's driving privilege card. To them, the benefits outweighed the negatives.

THE WAY FORWARD ON LICENSES

Aides to Spitzer say they don't want to brand people with scarlet letters. But legal citizens who committed no offense other than being born since Oct. 23, 1986, now carry the words "Under 21" in red ink across their driver's licenses. If the treatment is good enough for them, why not for illegal immigrants?

By making this concession to the reasonable concerns of the people who elected him, Spitzer would demonstrate that he can and does respond to criticism - and live down his reputation as a steamroller who tries to flatten anyone who gets in his way.

He would begin to make up for the ham-handed way he introduced the plan, announcing it as a done deal without inviting public comment or even consulting his fellow state leaders.

Finally, he would bring his policy in line with the federal Real ID Act, which bans full licenses for illegal immigrants.

Since then, Spitzer has done a more effective job of selling the plan, rallying high-profile security experts such as former NYPD Commissioner William Bratton, now police chief of Los Angeles, to endorse it. He's also sharpening the focus on public safety, pointing out that thousands of police queries to DMV databases find no matches because immigrants live off the radar.

But his policy is still in deep trouble in the Legislature, particularly the Senate, which must approve his DMV budget in order for him to fully implement his plan. If public opinion doesn't turn around, even the Democratic-led Assembly might get nervous enough to overturn Spitzer's decision and draw a hard line against licenses for any immigrants.

A two-tiered system might not be perfect, but it's way better than nothing.

whammond@nydailynews.com

Classification

Language: ENGLISH

Document-Type: COLUMN; OPINION

Publication-Type: Newspaper

Subject: ILLEGAL IMMIGRANTS (91%); IMMIGRATION (90%); GOVERNORS (79%); CITIZENSHIP (78%); DRIVERS LICENSES (78%); LAW ENFORCEMENT (78%); LICENSES & PERMITS (73%); TRAFFIC ACCIDENTS (70%); TERRORISM (66%); ELECTION FRAUD (63%)

Industry: DRIVERS LICENSES (78%); AUTOMOBILE INSURANCE (75%); TRAFFIC ACCIDENTS (70%); VEHICLE TRAFFIC (70%)

Geographic: NEW YORK, USA (94%)

Load-Date: October 23, 2007