'Big Brother' warning sounds again / Critics fear 'evil' in national ID cards

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Body

Identity **_cards_** are under consideration **_again_** as an answer to illegal immigration problems, but **_critics_** say they would be an Orwellian nightmare.

The Commission on Immigration Reform, a bipartisan group created by Congress, is expected to propose that every citizen and legal immigrant get a Social Security-type identity **_card_** so that employers can verify work eligibility through a **_national_** database.

"The implications of this are staggering," says Marc Rotenberg, director of the Electronic Privacy Information Center. "It becomes a way to monitor people, like an internal passport."

"It's the consensus view at this point," says Dan Stein, head of the Federation for Immigration Reform, which favors reducing immigration.

"Down the line it could turn out to be benign or it could be Orwellian, but we just can't tell and no one is monitoring implications," says Lance Hoffman, a George Washington University professor who studies privacy and security issues.

The concept has been around for years, but more in Congress are embracing it in the face of public resentment of illegal immigrants and the failure of laws against hiring illegal workers.

Last year a **_national_** poll showed that 53% of the public opposes **_ID cards_** for immigration, while 39% support them.

Still, California Gov. Pete Wilson, a Republican who's made immigration an issue in his re-election bid, wants his state to be the testing ground.

"If (illegal immigrants) have to produce proof of their legal presence and cannot do so, they will be denied employment, and if they know that, they won't come (here)," Wilson says.

Critics include immigrant, civil-rights and privacy advocates, plus liberals, conservatives and libertarians worried about government knowing too much.

"People aren't thinking about the potential for **_evil_**," says Steve Moore, economist at the libertarian Cato Institute think tank. "This is a fundamental invasion of privacy rights."

"It won't work, it will cost billions, it won't solve the problems, and it will cause new forms of discrimination," says Lucas Guttentag of the American Civil Liberties Union.

Wilson says he's not worried:

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"We have already given up a certain amount of privacy, but I don't see this as a further intrusion."

The **_National_** Conference of La Raza, a Hispanic civil rights group, **_fears_** that people who look or **_sound_** foreign will be forced to carry the **_cards_** at all times.

"The Social Security and immigration databases are notoriously flawed and filled with inaccuracies," says Celia Munoz, a La Raza analyst.

A similar outcry greeted Social Security **_cards_** in the 1930s, though the numbers weren't to be used for other purposes. Today, SSNs are used on drivers licenses and employee **_IDs_**.

"Look at history and see the abuses - they used SSNs to round up the Japanese during World War II," Moore says.

California governor hopes to close the door to illegals

There are about 3.38 million illegal immigrants in the USA. Most are from Mexico, followed by El Salvador, Guatemala, Canada, Poland and the Philippines. Most illegal immigrants settle in one of seven states, with more than 40% living in California. States with the most illegal immigrants:

State	Number
California	1,441,000
New York	449,000
Texas	357,000
Florida	322,000
Illinois	176,000
New Jersey	116,000
Arizona	57,000
Other states	461,000

Source: Immigration and Naturalization Service estimates of 1992 data, the most recent available.

Notes

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Graphic

PHOTO, b/w, Grace Saenz, El Paso Times via AP

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