

## **National ID cards let Uncle Sam spy on you**

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### **Body**

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Think the federal government already knows too much about your private life? Hang on. The granddaddy of all privacy invasions - a **national ID card** - is marching onto Capitol Hill.

Startling numbers of Democrats and Republicans, liberals and conservatives, are embracing variations of the identity **card** - all in the name of immigration reform. They contend the **cards** could keep illegal immigrants out of American jobs by requiring potential bosses to use the **cards** and accompanying **national** data base to verify citizenship.

Sound like a cheap and harmless fix? Wrong. The **cards** present gargantuan potential for abuse with enormous costs.

Just ask Eddie Cortez about the possibilities. The mayor of Pomona, Calif., was stopped and ordered to produce proof of citizenship by U.S. Border Patrol agents more than 100 miles from the Mexican border last summer. What did Cortez do to warrant such suspicion? The mayor was sitting in a pickup truck, wearing jeans and looking like a Latino.

Civil rights organizations and advocates for Asians, Hispanics and other minorities believe the **national ID cards** would mushroom such incidents of harassment - by police, immigration officials, border guards and any xenophobic authority figure who wants to hassle someone who looks or sounds "foreign."

Even if true, what's the harm if law-abiding citizens have a **card** to clear them on the spot? Fear of constant harassment is the wrong. Having to carry a **card** to guarantee your freedom is not what the Founding Fathers had in mind.

Then there's the price tag. Most plans on Capitol Hill - and there are dozens in various bills - require all U.S. citizens, not just recent immigrants, to get **cards**. Production costs for those plus a supporting computer data base are estimated conservatively at \$ 2.5 billion by the Social Security Administration. More elaborate systems could top \$ 6 billion or more.

Still, proponents believe the means justify the end - closing the jobs door to illegals. They believe "tamper-proof" **IDs**, verifiable through the **national** data base, will stop the use of fraudulent documents to get jobs for non-citizens.

Not likely, say technical experts. Right now, on street corners in California, Texas and other states, fake Social Security **cards**, passports and driver's licenses can be had for a price. Should a **national ID card** go into effect, these same counterfeiters would merely turn their talent to producing fake **IDs** or to producing the fraudulent documents necessary to obtain the **national ID**.

**National ID cards** are an old idea and a bad idea. The last thing the federal government needs is another peephole on personal privacy that ends up costing U.S. taxpayers more money than it saves.

## Notes

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THE EDITORIAL PAGE; Today's debate; PROVING CITIZENSHIP; OUR VIEW; The idea is hot in Washington and carries a heavy price both financially and in loss of privacy.

## Classification

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