



FRIST'S FOLLY

By **DICK MORRIS**

SENATE Majority Leader Bill Frist may have just killed his hopes to be the Republican nominee for president in 2008 — by coming out against a proposal to bar illegal immigrants from getting drivers licenses.

All but one of the 19 9/11 hijackers had a valid drivers license. In a bid to tighten our security, House Judiciary Chairman F. James Sensenbrenner Jr. (R-Wisc.) is pushing legislation to make it illegal for a state to issue a drivers license to an illegal immigrant. At the moment, he's trying to pass it into law as an amendment to the Supplemental Defense Appropriation Bill.

Licenses are the main American form of ID; in our nationwide post-9/11 security upgrade, they have become, in effect, passports for air travel.

Yet 10 states now permit illegals to get licenses. And many more have porous systems that, *de facto*, do the same by asking only that the applicant produce a Social Security number. (New York officials recently discovered that one Social Security number had been used to get 57 driver's licenses!)

The Sensenbrenner bill would require states to ascertain that the applicant is here legally before granting him a drivers license that would be recognized as adequate identification to board an airplane. (States could also offer "soft-ID" licenses, which would *not* be adequate for air travel.)

Even though this measure is a vital part of our battle against terrorism, liberal Democrats and some big business Republicans are opposing it — the former on civil-liberty grounds, the latter because it would interfere with making money.

Knowing full well that a Democratic filibuster loomed in the Senate, House Republicans chose to tack the license ban onto the Intelligence Reform Bill the president was pushing last year. They knew that Democrats wouldn't dare filibuster the bill and their amendment could pass with a simple majority in the upper chamber.

But President Bush and House Speaker Dennis Hastert got Sensenbrenner to pull back that amendment — in return for their commitment to let him attach it to another piece of "must pass" legislation early in 2005. He decided to cash in on this commitment by tacking it onto the Supplemental Defense Appropriation Bill. Nobody is going to filibuster a bill to fund our troops in Iraq and Afghanistan in the middle of a war.

But now Sen. Frist has come out against amending the Defense Spending bill. He claims that he wants to "defer" consideration of a license ban until it can be part of a broader debate on immigration — one that he knows full well will run headlong into a Democratic filibuster.

By this sleight of hand, Frist hopes to set the ban on licenses for illegal immigrants up for a

Democratic kill later in the year — and avoid getting the blame.

Why are some Republicans trying to derail a measure vital to our national security? Because big business interests — e.g. agricultural interests — oppose the legislation, mostly so they can go on hiring illegals.

Gov. Arnold Schwarznegger, once more leading the way, has repealed a law (passed under his ousted predecessor) that let undocumented workers get licenses.

When I worked for President Clinton, I proposed again and again a ban on licenses to undocumented people. I urged that licenses to non-citizens expire when visas do and that anyone found driving without a license be referred to the INS and the FBI to see if they are here illegally or are on a terror watch list. Clinton, under pressure from liberals, wouldn't agree.

When Mohammed Atta, the ringleader of the 9/11 attacks was pulled over in Florida for driving without a license, he got a summons and was sent on his way, a free man.

Some have described the GOP debate over licenses for illegals as a fault line between the cultural conservatives and business interests. It is really more like a division between those who put protection against terror first — versus those who prefer to curry favor with campaign contributors who want to hire illegal immigrants.

By blocking efforts to attach the license ban to the defense appropriation, Frist is siding with those who put profit ahead of national security.

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