

LOU DOBBS TONIGHT

U.S. Says Syria's Planned Withdrawal Not Enough; Bush Makes Controversial Nomination of U.N. Ambassador

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DOBBS: Coming up here next, an identity crisis. Why some states are fighting the passage of a federal ban against drivers' licenses for illegal aliens. That story is coming up next.

Stay with us.

(COMMERCIAL BREAK)

DOBBS: The House of Representatives passed legislation that would prevent states from issuing drivers' licenses to illegal aliens. The Senate is expected to consider the legislation in the next month. But some governors from all around the country say that's not up to the federal government. They say, instead, states should be deciding who does and does not deserve a driver's license.

Bill Tucker reports.

(BEGIN VIDEOTAPE)

BILL TUCKER, CNN CORRESPONDENT (voice-over): It seems simple enough, pass a law setting minimum standards for the issuance of drivers' licenses by the states. But the Real I.D. Act does not enjoy widespread support among the states. In fact, it's widely seen as an effort by the federal government to make the states responsible for immigration enforcement.

MICHAEL BALBONI (R), NEW YORK STATE SENATE: This is a federal responsibility. And frankly, the federal government has never really seemed fit to put the proper resources into the immigration system in the first place. TUCKER: State budgets are already strained. The governors balk at the additional budget requirements which would be imposed by the Real I.D. Act. And state legislators are asking why the act is even necessary in the first place.

CHEYE CALVO, NATIONAL COUNCIL OF STATE LEGISLATURES: The federal government has at its disposal the ability to impose a federal national I.D. And it could do that if it wanted to. It would have to round everyone up and hand out the national I.D. card, and then say that everyone who's in the country needs to have one or they'll be deported.

TUCKER: Presently, 40 states do require some proof of legal status before granting a driver's license. Ten do not.

Tennessee is the only state which offers two classes of licenses, one with full privileges, and one with only driving privileges which cannot be used as identification. What is rarely discussed is that under the Real I.D. Act, no state would be required to change their standard.

REP. DAVID DREIER (R), CALIFORNIA: We don't want to in any way encroach on

states' rights. And so what we've said is that any state can offer drivers' licenses to anyone. It's just if they do offer drivers' licenses to people who are here illegally, then those drivers' licenses cannot be used for any federal purpose.

(END VIDEOTAPE)

TUCKER: Now, the Senate Intelligence Reform Bill of 2004 contains the same language, which is why the states don't think any further legislation is necessary. But Lou, here's the real rub. The Real I.D. Act also contains more punitive language, saying you can opt out of going along with us, but maybe perhaps you won't get federal highway dollars as well.

DOBBS: Right. So what we're really get a sense of, not only are there states that are insistent upon playing some games with this at the governors' level, obviously, in terms of allowing illegal aliens to get drivers' licenses, there's some games being played at the federal level. Hearing Congressman David Dreier say we're not going to bother with it suggests this isn't going to have much teeth.

TUCKER: Well, and to say that you believe in states' rights, but then also to put a coercive measure in there opens the ground for argument from the states' rights groups.

DOBBS: And the states' rights groups, many of those governors are the same ones saying why isn't the federal government enforcing immigration laws. The question is becoming, why aren't all of our government officials at the state, local and federal level enforcing the law?

Bill Tucker, thank you, sir.

Later here in the broadcast, I'll be talking with one lawmaker who is fighting back against employers who hire illegal aliens instead of American citizens.

Coming up next on this broadcast, taking heat. Former White House press secretary Ari Fleischer joins me. We'll be talking about his new book, about his years in the White House, "Taking Heat."

And thousands of families forced from their homes after a mysterious incident. We'll have that story and a great deal more still ahead right here.

Stay with us.

(COMMERCIAL BREAK)