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EDITORIAL:

**Standardized drivers' licenses could make air travel safer**

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It may be wise for the federal government to stipulate that all states follow the same criteria for granting and issuing hard-to-counterfeit drivers' licenses.

Because some of the Sept. 11 hijackers used fraudulent licenses to buy airline tickets, making it harder to get such IDs and limiting them to citizens and legal residents could make them less of a tool for terrorists.

That is less the establishment of a "national ID card" than the simple recognition that licenses are already being used for many such purposes. That is the reason why the U.S. House has approved a bill sponsored by Rep. James Sensenbrenner, R-Wis., to give states an incentive to use uniform standards in producing and issuing licenses. (The Senate has not yet acted on the bill.)

As the bill stands, states are not required to conform, but will lose federal grants for driver's license programs if they do not. In addition, federal officers and transportation security agents will not have to accept licenses from nonconforming states as valid IDs for travel purposes.

The concerns of privacy advocates, including civil liberties organizations and gun owners' groups, are understandable and well-founded. The United States should not be adopting a form of "internal passport" often used in totalitarian countries to keep track of their residents. Even the lesser step of adding "chips" with personal, financial and even medical data offers too great an opportunity for the violation of privacy. It thus should be rejected if it is ever proposed.

What this bill would do, however, is merely improve the reliability of a common form of identification already used to verify that people purchasing travel tickets really are who they say they are.

Having such a system in place could have been very valuable on Sept. 11, 2001. It could be even more valuable now.