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**Our view on new driver's licenses: Time running out on arguments against Real ID**

**Six years after 9/11, states still fight to block tighter rules on licensing.**

Khalid Al-Midhar and Hani Hanjour, the al-Qaeda hijackers who crashed American Airlines Flight 77 into the Pentagon, obtained the paperwork needed for their Virginia driver's licenses by paying \$100 to an illegal immigrant in a convenience store parking lot. Five other 9/11 terrorists also had licenses from Virginia, although none lived there. With [the fraudulently obtained IDs](#), the hijackers were able to rent cars and board planes to carry out their murderous plot.

As any underage drinker knows, getting a phony driver's license isn't difficult. But the stakes of tolerating fake IDs extend far beyond teenagers trying to buy beer. "For terrorists, travel documents are as important as weapons," the 9/11 Commission noted in calling for national standards to make driver's licenses more uniform and tamper-proof.

In response, Congress passed the Real ID Act in 2005, setting minimum standards for licenses and state-issued ID cards. Last week, after much delay and debate, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) [issued proposed rules](#) for implementing the law. If your state doesn't follow the rules, you won't be able to use your license as ID to get on a plane or into a federal building.

Real ID has produced much howling about the costs, the likely hassles at state motor vehicle departments and the potential threat to privacy. All are valid concerns. But the fact is that driver's licenses are the nation's principal form of ID. As long as that's the case, they need to be credible.

Taking the arguments of Real ID opponents one at a time:

*It won't make the nation safer.*

True, there's no guarantee that the law would have stopped the 9/11 hijackers and that determined terrorists won't find a way around the new requirements. Averting terror attacks, however, requires layers of security. Credible IDs are an important layer.

*It costs too much.*

Motorists will have to [spend an estimated \\$20 more](#), a relatively small sum for a standardized, tamper-proof license. For states, the costs are estimated at up to \$14.6 billion over five years, offset by as much as \$100 million in federal grants this year alone, on top of \$40 million in federal aid already provided. Governors can make a case for more help, but cost-sharing arguments shouldn't stop the program from going forward.

*It violates privacy.*

The creation of large databases always is reason to be wary. But the new regulations don't create a national ID card or giant Big Brother-like federal database. States will still issue the licenses and retain information used to verify identity. Making an existing database more credible threatens privacy far less than many private sector data collections do.

*It forces illegal immigrants to drive without licenses or insurance.*

Illegal immigrants won't be able to get Real ID licenses, but states will be allowed to issue permits allowing them to drive and obtain insurance. In any event, the nation's immigration problems require a comprehensive solution in Washington; they can't be solved at state motor vehicle departments.

*It's too hasty.*

This is just absurd. DHS gave states until the end of 2009 to have programs in place to replace all licenses by 2013 — a sluggish 12 years after the 9/11 attacks.

Each day that driver's licenses lack credibility is a day of needless vulnerability. As DHS Secretary Michael Chertoff told Congress last month, "If we don't get it done now, someone's going to be sitting around in three or four years explaining to the next 9/11 Commission why we didn't do it."

### **Proposed guidelines**

If federal regulations proposed last week are adopted, applicants for driver's licenses would need these forms of identification:

\*A photo ID, or other identity document that includes full legal name and date of birth.

\*A birth certificate or other documentation of date of birth.

\*Proof of Social Security number or ineligibility for one.

\*Documentation of address, such as a utility bill.

\*Proof of lawful status in the USA.

*Source: Department of Homeland Security*