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Real Bad ID
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It's unfair to say that the Republican Congress has done nothing on immigration. In one respect, according to a new report from state officials, Congress made matters worse.

In May of last year Congress passed the Real ID Act at the urging of House Judiciary Chairman James Sensenbrenner (R., Wis.). It was yet another border-security measure, intended to thwart illegal immigration by denying drivers' licenses to undocumented aliens. President Bush signed the legislation in hopes that Republicans then would meet him halfway on comprehensive immigration reform. Didn't happen. We now know that the Tom Tancredo "enforcement first" crowd has no intention of ever compromising with Mr. Bush.

We doubt Mexicans willing to risk their lives crossing hundreds of miles of desert on foot care much about not being able to obtain a drivers' license once here. Nor is deputizing Department of Motor Vehicle officials going to force many illegal aliens already in the country to return home. The most likely result is more unlicensed and uninsured motorists, which means more dangerous U.S. roads.

Real ID gets worse. According to a new analysis from the National Governors Association, the National Conference of State Legislatures and the American Association of Motor Vehicle Administrators, the law is also going to be costly and burdensome.

Under Real ID, all 245 million existing holders of drivers' licenses must apply -- *in person* -- for new, standardized identification cards. The report says that state motor vehicle department staffs will need to be more than doubled, and workers will have to be trained to verify copies of original birth certificates, Social Security cards and the like. Misplaced your Social Security card? Have fun getting a new one. We're pretty sure that voters don't elect Republicans to increase the size of their already bloated state bureaucracies.

And yes, you can expect longer lines at the DMV in the future. "Real ID will reduce efficiencies and increase wait times," according to the report. "Real ID will also effectively reverse state practices designed to ease an applicant's interaction with motor vehicle agencies (e.g., Internet, mail in renewal, over-the-counter issuance)." The deadline for compliance is May 2008. After that, identification from states that don't meet the new national requirements won't be accepted at federal agencies.

Proponents claim that standardizing drivers' licenses is essential to fighting terrorism on the domestic front. Mr. Sensenbrenner has said that Real ID will stop the next Mohamed Atta. But the 9/11 hijackers entered the country legally, which means they qualified for

valid drivers' licenses. Nothing in the new law changes that reality, or the fact that you still don't need a driver's license to board a plane. Other forms of ID, such as a passport, will continue to suffice.

All this cost and inconvenience might be acceptable if the law did what its proponents claim. But like a 700-mile fence along a 2,000-mile border, Real ID amounts to one more anti-immigration measure that ignores the economic incentives that draw immigrants here in the first place.

State agencies put the total cost of standardizing drivers' licenses at upwards of $11 billion; Congress has so far appropriated all of $40 million. Again, this is from a Republican Congress that made its first legislation upon taking power in 1995 a bill against imposing "unfunded mandates." It included a pledge not to impose any burden on the states that wasn't fully financed from Washington. Now comes Real ID, transforming state departments of motor vehicles back into everyone's worst nightmare. Some accomplishment.