



Written by [Steve Byas](#) on May 22, 2017

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## Real ID Threatens a Free Society

Exiled to the island of Patmos off the coast of Asia Minor (modern Turkey) late in the first century, the Apostle John struggled to describe the visions God was giving him. His description, found in the Book of Revelation, chapter 13, verses 16-17, has perhaps been quoted millions of times in the past 2,000 years:

“He [the “False Prophet,” working for the Beast, or Antichrist] causes all, both small and great, rich and poor, free and slave, to receive a mark on their right hand or on their foreheads, and that no one may buy or sell except one who has the mark or the name of the beast, or the number of his name.”



Christian theologians have offered various and sundry explanations as to what John meant, but this much is clear — any person or oligarchical power able to control all commerce would be antithetical to a free society, creating a totalitarian nightmare.

Combined with a push by powerful elites to move to a cashless economy, the requirement that all Americans use an identification card in order to conduct certain types of commerce, with the suggestion offered by high-ranking public officials that *all* commerce be so conducted, brings us perilously close to “no one may buy or sell” without it.

And if a person’s economic activity is regulated to the point of every transaction, the person or group so regulating can achieve totalitarian control greater than anything dreamed of by Hitler, Stalin, and Mao.

Former Texas Congressman Ron Paul said of the REAL ID Act, which he refers to as “Dangerous ID,” that while our calendar may say 2017, “unless you and I act today it may soon seem like 1984.”

In a letter written to supporters of the Campaign for Liberty, Paul explained why he called REAL ID “Dangerous ID,” saying it allows the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) to require that this identification card contain “biometric features.”

“Dangerous ID also requires that your personal information — including your biometric identifiers like fingerprints and retina scans — be stored in a federal database.” And this information is then shared with other states, various agencies within the federal government, “and even foreign governments.”

The information that could easily be added to the database includes “gun ownership, health records, purchasing habits, religious beliefs — virtually anything you could dream up.”

Ultimately, Paul argues, “It will only be a matter of time until they spend their workdays making sure you and I don’t go anywhere, read anything, eat anything, or drink anything they think we shouldn’t be allowed to.” With this REAL ID card, the federal government would be able to track its citizens’ actions



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and movements. “If you’ve ever legally purchased prescription drugs,” Paul warns, “the government can deny your ability to purchase a firearm.... They can also track your financial transactions and all of your travel.”

## **What Is REAL ID?**

After the attacks upon America on September 11, 2001, political figures rushed to pass legislation, ostensibly designed to make sure such an attack would not happen again. In the aftermath of the attacks, fear of even more terrorist attacks led to the passage of legislation such as the so-called Patriot Act, which has done little to make Americans safer, but has certainly restricted our civil liberties, and enhanced government surveillance of U.S. citizens. It was in this charged atmosphere that software tycoon Larry Ellison of Oracle called for the creation of a national identification system, which would include embedded digitized thumbprints and photographs of all legal residents in the country.

When the federal REAL ID Act was passed, advocates argued that the 19 hijackers on September 11th used fake documents, including 30 forms of identification and 364 aliases. The solution offered was REAL ID, which is actually a national identification card.

Americans had long rejected the concept of a national identification card. When the Social Security system was created during the Roosevelt administration, the Social Security number was explicitly intended only for identification services provided by that system. (My Social Security card even includes language that reads, “For Social Security and Tax Purposes — Not for Identification.”) Efforts to make the card and its number act as a national ID card have been repeatedly rejected over the years — by the Carter administration, the Reagan administration, Congress, and the Social Security Administration itself. In September 2004, Tom Ridge, the secretary for DHS said, “The legislation that created the Department of Homeland Security was very specific on the question of a national ID card. They said there will be no national ID card.”

Yet, we have all experienced “requests” for our Social Security number as an identifier in all sorts of situations. This should be instructive as to how the REAL ID card can be launched to frustrate terrorists, and be expanded later to include many more purposes, as Ron Paul fears.

Despite this opposition to a national ID card, the REAL ID Act of 2005 did create a national ID card, although it was not called that. The legislation was designed to turn state driver’s licenses and state-approved identification cards (for citizens who do not drive) into a de facto national ID card. The law created minimum standards for these state-issued cards. Under the law, states were directed to reissue more than 240 million driver’s licenses, beginning in 2010.

In order to implement the law, the Department of Homeland Security issued nearly 300 pages of guidelines for state-issued driver’s licenses and identification cards, as well as standards for license-issuing facilities. The guidelines required physical features on the licenses, including machine-readable data. Certain steps were required to verify the identity of driver’s license applicants, including checks of birth certificates, Social Security numbers (you know, the ones not to be used for identification purposes), and citizenship status. Agencies issuing IDs were required to capture digital images of driver identification documents, photographing each person making application for a license, using a high-resolution digital format. They were then directed to store the images electronically in a transferable format that could then be shared with other entities.



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Under the act, states were required to share their motor-vehicle database with all other states. The database had to include, at a minimum, all the data printed on the state driver's licenses or ID cards, plus drivers' histories (including motor vehicle violations, suspensions, and "points" on licenses).

Civil libertarians argue that REAL ID is a further intrusion of the federal government into citizens' lives, and raises the specter of a nationwide database of personal information. They are particularly concerned about the provisions requiring state IDs to include high-resolution photos and fingerprints for potential biometric identification.

## Privacy Concerns Raised by REAL ID

"Biometric ID is the linchpin of the modern surveillance society. Biometric means measurement of the body," Kaye Beach said, in explaining why she refused in 2011 to not renew her driver's license in Oklahoma. "In truth, we are being enrolled into a global system of identification and control that links our bodies to our ability to buy, sell, and travel. And, it is being done through deception, coercion, and stealth."

After being ticketed for driving without a license, Beach hired a lawyer and her legal battle eventually gained the attention of the conservative Rutherford Institute, founded by constitutional lawyer John Whitehead. He explained Beach's legal argument: "The biometric photographs digitalize your face and then put all your information into a central computer which goes worldwide, which means it's like a facial scan." This means, Whitehead continued, that "wherever you go, that becomes part of your ID card."

Many argue that REAL ID will accelerate the surveillance society that has been constructed over the past several years in the United States. As is the case with most government programs, it will continue to grow in size and scope. The central database created by REAL ID can only be expected to collect an increasing amount of data on individuals, for an ever-increasing number of reasons.

As it stands now, much data is collected on American citizens, but this information is spread across several databases. Consolidating all this data into one database could be used for nefarious purposes, either by government bureaucrats or private companies.

Another problem with a national ID card is that an individual American can be tracked much more easily. If all such information — visits to doctors' offices, highway tolls, subways, gas stations, hotels, and so on — is entered into one giant database, a citizen's movements within the country can be monitored and recorded. Then, "Big Brother is watching you" is not just an expression from George Orwell's classic dystopian novel, *1984*.

In 2008, DHS Secretary Michael Chertoff said he saw many more uses for the system of REAL ID, and suggested it could be used whenever a private citizen chose to "cash a check, hire a baby sitter, board a plane or engage in countless other activities."

When one combines this monitoring with the push for a "cashless society," one can quickly determine where this is headed. The European Union (EU) is presently pursuing a plan to impose limits on cash transactions. The EU bureaucrats behind this effort are very open about its purpose — they want to reduce "anonymity" in economic transactions, giving government authorities the ability to monitor every transaction.



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What is the argument for monitoring virtually every transaction? Fighting terrorism, of course, which is the reason given for almost every increase in government invasion of our privacy over the past several years. Other excuses offered for ending the use of cash include “fighting drugs” or fighting other criminal activity. Any person opposing this contraction of liberty is dismissed as “soft on terror,” or “indifferent to the threat of terrorism.”

REAL ID cards could be used in every financial transaction, justified as a way to stop fraudulent use of a credit or debit card, a bank transfer, or a check.

## **Other Problems With REAL ID**

Congress originally estimated that the costs for implementation of this program would be about \$100 million. But the National Conference of State Legislatures estimated the costs would be more like \$11 billion over five years. Another problem with REAL ID is that it turns local tag agencies and motor vehicle offices into agents for the federal government — an unfunded mandate upon the states.

For example, the law stipulates that states cannot issue a REAL ID to any person who cannot prove U.S. citizenship. While this may sound like a positive to those concerned about illegal aliens, when one considers the large numbers of illegal aliens in the country, this would force local motor vehicle agents to determine who can and cannot be given a license. This would require extensive training in U.S. immigration law, which would be another cost to the taxpayer.

Because of this, REAL ID is a back-door tax increase, one that members of Congress do not have to vote for. Instead, they are just passing the costs of this enormous program to state and local governments. And this program would cause slower service for those citizens who are simply wishing to renew their automobile registrations.

## **Making States Comply With REAL ID**

When REAL ID passed in May 2005, it was a part of a larger bill that provided for tsunami relief and military appropriations. Few Americans knew what was happening, and it passed with little debate and no hearings. Senator Bill Frist (R-Tenn.), who was at the time the senate majority leader, refused to allow any hearings or permit a separate vote on the measure.

Though compliance with REAL ID was touted as “voluntary” for the states, DHS nonetheless emphasized that “many states may find noncompliance an unattractive option.”

Over one-half of the states initially balked at implementing REAL ID provisions. But as is typical, when the federal government wants the states to do something, they have a variety of weapons to gain compliance. For example, back in the 1970s, Congress passed a national speed limit of 55 miles per hour, supposedly to save gasoline during the so-called energy crisis. There is no enumerated power in the Constitution for Congress to establish speed limits, but states were told if they did not lower their speed limits, their “federal” highway funds would be taken away. Every state meekly complied.

While many state legislators and governors boldly refused to implement the provisions of the new federal REAL ID law, resistance in the states is slowly being overcome — by the federal government making “noncompliance an unattractive option.” Using the threat that a person would not be able to board an airplane without the enhanced ID, enter certain federal buildings, or go onto military installations, intense pressure was brought upon the states to cave and implement REAL ID.



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As *Reason* magazine of January 10, 2017 explained, “This year, after years of shifting deadlines on the federal government’s effort to create a backdoor national ID card, the TSA began posting signs at airports warning travelers that, as of January 22, 2018, they’ll need identification documents compliant with the REAL ID Act, passed in 2005, to be allowed to fly.”

*Reason* said the “scary signs are meant to apply pressure to those states balking at making their driver’s licenses compliant with federal requirements.”

Technically, the REAL ID Act does not (and really cannot) force the states to comply, nor does it penalize states by withholding federal funds. But by requiring compliant IDs to board commercial aircraft and the like, state legislators and governors have come under pressure from citizens (and voters) to capitulate to the federal law.

Another problem is that local media tend to emphasize the latest “crisis.” After a steady drumbeat of stories on television or radio, or in the newspapers, complete with grave-sounding editorials, the public is frightened into believing that they will no longer be able to travel by plane.

## **What Can Be Done to Stop REAL ID?**

With state legislators and governors buckling under the pressure, what can be done? Simply put, Congress enacted REAL ID, and Congress can repeal it. The arguments that led recalcitrant states to finally give in (after a decade, in some cases) — such as the fear tactic that noncompliance will keep citizens from boarding airplanes and entering some federal buildings — are not applicable to members of Congress.

After all, repeal of the law will restore the status quo ante — America will return to the situation it was in before the passage of the REAL ID law, a situation in which Americans enjoyed traveling on airplanes and the like without a de facto national ID card.

But to move Congress to repeal the law will require voters to tell their senators and representatives that they do not want the government to monitor their every movement. False information about a citizen can show up on the card — damaging information, often without the citizen’s knowledge. The No-Fly List, for example, has placed many Americans on it who are not terrorists, and are no threat to anyone. Little children have mistakenly been made part of the No-Fly List. The late Senator Edward Kennedy (D-Mass.) was even placed on the list. Although Kennedy might have been too dangerous to drive a car over a bridge on Chappaquiddick Island, he was highly unlikely to hijack an airplane.

It will not be easy. As Ron Paul has said, “Support for the bill cuts across party lines — from statisticians like Senators Chuck Schumer (D-New York) and Lindsey Graham (R-South Carolina) to U.S. Representatives Peter King (R-New York) and Nancy Pelosi (D-California). Powerful interests, from statisticians to certain corporate interests, favor the increasing expansion of the surveillance society.”

But it is a fight Americans have to make — if they wish to preserve their liberty.

*Photo: AP Images*





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