

NATIONAL ID CARDS

System would erode everybody's privacy

The implementation of a national ID card is not the silver-bullet solution to our security problems that Marianne Means makes it seem (Nov. 29).

A national ID card would be ineffective at identifying terrorists before they strike and could allow them a free pass to board a plane or get through security checks at public places.

Remember, all but two of the 19 hijackers of Sept. 11 were not on the FBI watch list, meaning that they remained undetected threats with the government-issued ID they had obtained.

Even with a new type of card, terrorists will continue to be able to obtain, legally and illegally, the documents needed to get a government ID.

A national ID card system would erode privacy. People's movements would be tracked and recorded each time their card is scanned to enter a building, board a plane or, eventually, drive through a tollway.

Such a system would require a vast database to hold personal information for everyone in America. It's unlikely that its use would stay restricted to the original purpose. Witness the runaway collection and use of Social Security numbers resulting in alarming cases of identity theft – even though the original Social Security Act had strict prohibitions against use of the numbers for unrelated purposes.

Moreover, a national ID card would certainly lead to new and increased forms of discrimination for anyone who looked or sounded "foreign."

Minorities would be subject to status and identity checks from police, banks, merchants, and others. It would create a stigma by constantly forcing them to prove their citizenship or immigration status.

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