

THE GROWING COST OF THE REAL ID ACT OF 2005

Implementing the REAL ID ACT of 2005, passed in 2005 as part of the annual defense spending bill, is estimated by the Department of Homeland Security to cost \$14.6 billion over a 10 year period. The law, to take effect in 2008, requires that states document proof of identity before issuing/reissuing a driver license with a digital photograph and personal information in a machine-readable chip. The act has not gone unchallenged. Lawmakers in 20 states are considering legislation to delay implementation until the federal government provides at least part of the necessary funds. Most in Congress support the concept of a real ID card but many raise the issue of personal data security and that, in time, besides permission to drive legally, such a card would become a requirement for employment and for receiving various benefits at all government levels. Advocates of a real ID card (driver license) argue that it would provide far greater security than the present 50 state issued driver's licenses, essentially insuring that an individual is who he/she says they are.

Suggested here is that cost wise and otherwise there is a far more scary scenario just around the corner. One that recognizes America's world class pharmaceutical research capabilities and the desire of pharmaceutical firms to capture large, potentially profitable markets.

First, it is assumed that any future form of ID, as in the past, will heavily rely on an individual's picture, digital or something else. Second, that America's pharmaceutical industry will succeed, sooner rather than later, in reducing the price of hair restoration products to that of a tube of tooth paste. Last, most men would rather have more hair rather than less. If the above is granted, what is the implication for any photo-based ID card? Consider market numbers first. A conservative estimate of the American male market, factoring in age and that many males have no need for more hair, to be around 15 million. One might quarrel with the estimate but still agree that there is a very large potential market out there and one waiting to be exploited. No estimate is made of

the female market for a hair restorer, only that is comparatively small.

Now for the ID problem. Urged here is that a picture of a bald or partially bald individual is considerably different from a picture of the same individual with a full head of hair which raises the question of whether, at any point in time, federal, state and local governments will be satisfied with driver picture IDs they have on file but are significantly different from the individual claiming the ID.

In addition to driver licenses, picture ID is used by the military, all federal employees, many state and local employees, on passports and by thousands of private sector firms. Given a successful, cheap and available hair restorer, the possibility of tens of thousands new mustaches and the many kinds of hair color available, the picture ID problem becomes a Homeland Security Department nightmare. And even more vexing is what to do about the millions of foreigners entering the United States each year, legal or illegal. (It is assumed that foreign males, like their American counterparts, favor more hair rather than less) Shall we refuse entry to these individuals until their passport picture matches reality? How would foreign governments respond? If history is any guide we could probably buy some of them off. Requiring dual language signs in the states bordering Quebec province, that is, Maine, New Hampshire and Vermont, would probably satisfy the French. In the case of Germany we might mandate that a percentage of federal vehicles be BMWs or Volkswagens. Italy would probably be satisfied with an Italian born American ambassador with a decent tenor voice. What the remaining nations of the world might want in this regard is beyond contemplation.

As any military analyst worth his/her salt will tell you, one must plan for contingencies. In this respect, now is the time to act. Hair restoration products must become controlled substances with heavy penalties for unauthorized use otherwise the Real ID Act of 2005 will become nothing more than a hollow shell, long in theory but short in substance.

Author's note. Beyond any doubt, national security and the means to secure it is one of America's most urgent tasks. However, as we seek this goal and at the same time insure individual liberties, a little humor about an otherwise humorless subject is not amiss. The Growing Cost of the Real ID Act of 2005 was written with that in mind.

Continuing on a more serious note, as argued above, a picture ID can be an unreliable means of identification. Acceptable, for the moment, in cashing a check at a grocery store, but a very real problem for homeland security. And given that an individual's picture will change with age, a fair question is—how often must a super expensive Real ID (with a picture) be issued to be effective?

It can, of course, be urged that a picture is a secondary means of identification and that the other tamper proof information is imbedded in the card. Given the many problems with picture IDs such an argument has little merit. If we are going to spend billions of dollars on Real Ids, let's do away with the picture requirement, save a chunk of money and make things a little easier for the individual in obtaining his Real ID

Clint Whitehurst
Senior Fellow
Strom Thurmond Institute
Clemson University

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