

REAL ID BIOMETRICS IN IMMIGRATION BILL

I've got two ginormous issues with the report that the Immigration Bill includes a measure that would require the creation of a "photo tool" database to verify status before employment.

The immigration reform measure the Senate began debating yesterday would create a national biometric database of virtually every adult in the U.S., in what privacy groups fear could be the first step to a ubiquitous national identification system.

Buried in the more than 800 pages of the bipartisan legislation (.pdf) is language mandating the creation of the innocuously-named "photo tool," a massive federal database administered by the Department of Homeland Security and containing names, ages, Social Security numbers and photographs of everyone in the country with a driver's license or other state-issued photo ID.

Employers would be obliged to look up every new hire in the database to verify that they match their photo.

First, this would accomplish precisely what Real ID would accomplish, but less.

I've long believed we were going to go to Real ID in any case. I've also long believed that we ought to change the politics of such a discussion by proposing that along with Real ID, we also get universal registration. The authoritarians would thus have a choice: give up their efforts to disenfranchise the poor via voter ID and track employment, or lose both.

I'm guessing it'd present quite a dilemma for the authoritarians.

But to learn a bipartisan bill is basically ceding on real ID without using it to foster democracy?

My other problem has to do with the certainty that this would be turned into a counterterrorism tool. Recall that last year, John Brennan decided protecting US person data was just too tough, so National Counterterrorism Center would have to have access to any federal database that NCTC deemed to have terrorism information.

I think it highly likely that NCTC would deem a database of all Americans to contain terrorist information.

Therefore, we should assume that whatever else this database is supposed to do, it would also mean that the faces of innocent Americans would start getting included in the data analysis of potential terrorists.

Mind you, the authorities claim (though I'm not convinced) that they weren't able to ID the Tsarnaev brothers with all the images they had of them at the Boston Marathon. Maybe the technology sucks (again, not convinced).

But that doesn't stop the inclusion of all Americans in the dataset of possible terrorist mugshots from being an invitation for witch hunts.