

November 16, 2001

Statement for the Government Reform Committee Hearing on National ID Card Proposals

Mr. Chairman, thank you for holding this important hearing examining the question of whether national ID cards would enhance security. Protecting the security of the American people from foreign threats is the most important responsibility of the federal government, and there is much the government needs to do in this area. Among the steps the federal government should take is to restrict immigration from countries which support or harbor terrorists, and implement policies to effectively enforce existing immigration laws. Moreover, private property owners certainly can take steps to protect their property from terrorists and other criminals. For example, it is perfectly legitimate for airlines to issue private ID cards to passengers and perform background checks as a condition of selling them a ticket.

However, Congress should reject proposals which provide only the illusion of security, while in reality simply eroding constitutional government and individual liberty. Perhaps the most onerous example of a proposal that creates the illusion of security (yet really promotes servitude) is the plan to force all Americans to carry a national ID card. A uniform national system of identification would allow the federal government to inappropriately monitor the movements and transactions of every citizen. History shows that when government gains the power to monitor the actions of the people, it inevitably uses that power in harmful ways.

A national ID card threatens liberty, but it will not enhance safety. Subjecting every citizen to surveillance actually diverts resources away from tracking and apprehending terrorists toward needless snooping on innocent Americans! This is what has happened with "suspicious activity reports" required by the Bank Secrecy Act. Thanks to BSA mandates, federal officials are forced to waste time snooping through the private financial transactions of innocent Americans merely because their banking activities seem suspicious to a bank clerk.

Furthermore, the federal government has no constitutional authority to require law-abiding

Americans to present any form of identification before engaging in private transactions (e.g. getting a job, opening a bank account, or seeking medical assistance). As we consider how best to enhance the federal government's ability to ensure the safety of the people, it is more important than ever that Congress remain mindful of the constitutional limitations on its power.

In conclusion, Mr. Chairman, I once again express my gratitude to the committee for holding this important hearing. I also would remind my colleagues that national ID cards are a trademark of totalitarianism that contribute nothing to the security of the American people. I therefore urge my colleagues to reject all proposals for a national ID, and focus instead on measures that will effectively protect both security and liberty.