

WebMemo



Published by The Heritage Foundation

No. 1886
April 4, 2008

All Aboard: Fifty States Now Compliant with Real ID

James Jay Carafano, Ph.D., Charles Stimson, and Diem Nguyen

This past week, the state of Maine agreed to comply with Real ID regulations. Maine was the last state to agree to comply with Real ID, making this a remarkable cornerstone for the program. All 56 U.S. jurisdictions and states have either complied with the law to implement Real ID security standards by May 11, 2008, or have applied for an extension of the deadline for security improvements.

The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) should be applauded for its efforts to implement Real ID with the states' approval, having negotiated the terms of the security requirements respectfully and in good faith. Now it is up to Congress to hold up its end of the bargain and fully fund the program.

Real ID's Turbulent Past. Real ID originally stemmed from the core recommendations by the 9/11 Commission Report to secure driver's licenses. Congress agreed with the commission and passed the Real ID Act of 2005, which established voluntary national minimum standards for state-issued identification cards.

Real ID quickly fell under attack. Accusations that Real ID was a national ID card and infringed civil liberties ran rampant. States characterized the program as another unfunded mandate from Washington. Some states were so opposed to the program that they passed legislation against Real ID.

Some of the criticisms were without merit; however, concerns regarding the costs of implementation were valid for many states. Recognizing this, the DHS proposed a plan earlier this year to reduce

the costs of the program by 73 percent, provide further aid to states, and provide extensions for those states that could not meet the 2008 deadline.

Halfway There. Today, all jurisdictions have agreed to enhance their state driver's license security features consistent with Real ID. Once the issue of cost was resolved, the states were able to recognize Real ID for what it truly is: a program that makes their state driver's license's less vulnerable and thereby makes their citizens more secure. Lately, the country does not seem to have agreed on much, but everybody can agree that Real ID is necessary. Congress should make certain that the DHS receives the money for Real ID so that states are able to fully implement the program.

All governments—state, county, or federal—are obligated to protect their citizens. Implementing Real ID is therefore the correct and responsible thing to do. By complying, states will greatly enhance the security of their citizens, facilitate easier travel and commerce, and help to protect Americans from identity theft.

—James Jay Carafano, Ph.D., is Assistant Director of the Kathryn and Shelby Cullom Davis Institute for International Studies and Senior Research Fellow for

This paper, in its entirety, can be found at:
www.heritage.org/Research/HomelandSecurity/wm1886.cfm

Produced by the Douglas and Sarah Allison
Center for Foreign Policy Studies

Published by The Heritage Foundation
214 Massachusetts Avenue, NE
Washington, DC 20002-4999
(202) 546-4400 • heritage.org

Nothing written here is to be construed as necessarily reflecting the views of The Heritage Foundation or as an attempt to aid or hinder the passage of any bill before Congress.

National Security and Homeland Security in the Douglas and Sarah Allison Center for Foreign Policy Studies; Diem Nguyen is a Research Assistant in the Allison Cen-

ter; and Charles D. Stimson is Senior Legal Fellow in the Center for Legal and Judicial Studies at The Heritage Foundation.