

Passports to Become National ID Cards?

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In the name
of national

security, we are dangerously close to having a national identity card, which will be required for all internal air travel (and, sooner or later, for other forms of travel as well). But it's not federally issued driver's licenses, or even state-issued driver's licenses and IDs made to conform to federal standards. It will more likely be the passport, that expensive and cumbersome travel document required for travel to many destinations overseas prior to 9/11, and



for all foreign travel, including to Canada and Mexico, since new cross-border security standards were set up in the last decade. Gone for Americans are the days of weekend fishing trips to Canada, family visits to both sides of Niagara Falls, or a day trip to Tijuana from San Diego — unless you go to the time and considerable expense (now about \$150 and several weeks of wait time) of obtaining a passport. Even little children must have passports for travel outside the United States, and these must be renewed every five years (rather than 10 years for adults). The new passport requirement has made casual travel to the Great White North for fishing or hunting a thing of the past for many lower-income Americans.

Now the federal government appears bent on making the possession of a passport a requirement for domestic air travel as well. For a number of years, the federal government has been trying to coerce the states into making all driver's licenses "Real-ID" compliant — that is, in conformity with federally mandated standards of security that includes a long list of features mandated by the Real ID Act of 2005 and enforced with increasingly authoritarian enthusiasm by the Department of Homeland Security. The original year for all states to comply with Real ID was 2011, but it has since been moved forward repeatedly under pressure from state governments reluctant to tender unquestioning obedience to this latest federal edict. As of now, driver's licenses and state-issued IDs from all 50 states may continue to be used for domestic air travel until January 22, 2018, when air passengers from states whose driver's licenses are not yet Real-ID compliant will need to present a second form of photo ID to board domestic flights.

As of October 1, 2020, however, the federal government will require all IDs for boarding domestic flights to be either Real-ID compliant or a federally issued ID such as a passport.

As of early 2016, however, only 23 states and territories are Real-ID compliant, while five of the remaining states are noncompliant (i.e., in open defiance of the Real ID Act). Many of the remaining 28, having been granted extensions, will probably not make the 2020 deadline, presenting the very real prospect that millions of Americans will no longer be able to fly at all — unless they procure an ID card issued by the federal government, which for most of us, means a passport.

Not only that, the IRS now has statutory authority to revoke the passports of Americans owing the government more than \$50,000 in delinquent taxes (a suspicious coincidence in timing, as a [recent Forbes article by Robert W. Wood pointed out](#)). That, at least, is the current standard, although we can expect the threshold to be lowered as the grasping hand of government reaches ever more desperately for our earnings to stave off its own fiscal implosion. It is not at all a stretch to imagine a future IRS empowered to confiscate the passports of Americans owing \$10,000 in back taxes, or even less.

At the same time, even as the Department of Homeland Security expands its jurisdiction from airports to **major bus and train stations**, and even **checkpoints along major interstates**, it is easy to envisage the passport or some other equivalent federal ID become a requirement for all forms of internal travel. Of course, a \$150 passport is an onerous cost for many Americans, so expect the federal government, in feigned benevolence, to offer a more cost-effective alternative — a federal ID for the purposes of domestic travel, to satisfy the diktats of the Department of Homeland Security.

All indications are that a national ID for domestic travel is now planned, and that before too many years, the legal landscape of the United States of America will be little different from that of many a foreign dictatorship present or past, namely, the unfettered freedom of movement will be negated by a stifling network of checkpoints designed to monitor movement by land, sea, and air, and carrying a national ID card or “internal passport” at all times will become mandatory.

As it is, most of the legal architecture and precedent for such a regime is already in place: The Department of Homeland Security has been pursuing and refining its agenda for a decade with scarcely a peep of dissent in Washington, and random checkpoints — ostensibly for illegal immigrants, seatbelt use, or drunk driving — are a fact of life in the “new normal.”

All this in combination with the IRS’ newfound power to revoke the only ID that, in a few years, will give most Americans access to air travel, points to a fairly bleak state of affairs in which travel — even to the next town — will become a de jure privilege granted by the federal government, not a right. And all of this will be delivered in the name of homeland security, the pretext for much of the terrifying expansion of federal government power now underway in the Land of the Free.

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