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Real debate Real ID under fire

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State drivers' licenses could become part of a national identification program that's on track to take effect in 2008.

A legislative effort to reject participation in the Real ID Act of 2005 broke down in Concord last month. Privacy concerns in the Live Free or Die state were at the forefront of the opposition.

If the state decides now to accept a \$3 million grant for computer improvements for Real ID compliance, it would be necessary to join a Real ID pilot program and thus more difficult to bow out of the national ID program later, according to opponents.

State Executive Councilor candidate Bob Bruce (D-Candia) from District 4 (including Manchester) is making a campaign issue of the grant money. He's challenging Council members to refuse the grant.

"I'd like to see the Council send a message to lawmakers by going on record now as being opposed to the plan," Bruce said. The Executive Council oversees receipts and expenditures of state and federal funds.

District 4 incumbent Executive Councilor Ray Wieczorek (R-Manchester) questions whether Bruce is raising a legitimate concern.

"What he's talking about is a non-issue," he said, although he's not claiming support for Real ID.

"I'm not enthused about it," Wieczorek said. "This is New Hampshire. We don't play follow the leader here."

State Rep. Neal Kurk (R-Weare) believes the \$3 million federal grant is a worthy campaign issue. Kurk sponsored HB1582, a measure that would have prohibited compliance with the Real ID Act, and it passed the House by a wide margin.

At least two state laws would need to be changed for Real ID to be enacted here: the state does not presently require digitized photos on drivers' licenses and it does not require use of a social security number (except for new applicants), Kurk said.

Privacy advocacy group Granite State ID Coalition is railing against Real ID, calling it an unfunded mandate and a de facto national ID system.



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Coalition spokesman Joel Winters of Ward 12 in Manchester is also seeking a seat in the state legislature from District 17.

“Accepting the \$3 million is like a pig in a poke,” Winters said. “We don’t know what we’re agreeing to.” The grant proposal was tabled on March 24. Public Safety Commissioner Richard Flynn asked that the proposal remain on the table at a meeting of the Legislative Fiscal Committee on June 7. It meets again on July 11. The panel consists of five members from the House and five from the Senate.

“Regular people don’t know how much of an invasion of privacy this is,” Bruce said about the prospect of becoming part of Real ID. “If you want to open a bank account, collect Social Security payments, take a trip on an airliner, or access any kind of government service, you’ll need one of these cards,” he said.

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