

Baldacci expected to sign bill blocking Real ID - June 7, 2007

A proposal barring the state from implementing a national identity card gets final legislative approval.— By GLENN ADAMS -- The Associated Press

AUGUSTA — Gov. John Baldacci is expected to sign a bill prohibiting Maine from implementing Real ID, the national identity card system that's been vilified by critics as unworkable and too expensive, a spokesman said Wednesday.

Months after Maine lawmakers led a national revolt against the federal program by passing a resolution objecting to the 2005 act of Congress, Maine's House and Senate on Tuesday gave final approval to a bill that goes a step further by prohibiting the state from implementing Real ID.

The bill was sent to Baldacci, who opposes Real ID and is expected to sign it, said spokesman David Farmer. The federal government, meanwhile, has eased the timelines for states to comply amid federal legislation to repeal the program.

In the State House, Secretary of State Matthew Dunlap lobbied for passage of the bill keeping Maine out, saying it's impractical and could cost Maine taxpayers \$185 million over its first five years.

"It's unrealistic, it's science fiction," said Dunlap.

The bill's passage also came at the urging of an ideologically diverse coalition of groups spearheaded by the Maine Civil Liberties Union. The coalition believes the program is not only unworkable, but also would trample on privacy rights while creating a bonanza for identity thieves, said MCLU Executive Director Shenna Bellows.

The program sets a national standard for driver's licenses and encourages states to link their record-keeping systems to national databases. Although it's technically voluntary, it would inconvenience residents of noncomplying states because their existing IDs would not be acceptable credentials for entering many facilities, said Dunlap.

The law's backers have said Real ID would keep terrorists and illegal immigrants from getting fake identification cards.

Since Maine passed the resolution opposing Real ID in late January, more than a dozen states followed suit with resolutions or statutory prohibitions. Legislation is pending in another 20 states.

As federal legislation to repeal the program appeared, the Bush administration agreed in March to give states more time to comply with new driver's license standards. States received an extension through 2009. The original deadline was May 2008.

A bill sponsored by Rep. Tom Allen, D-Maine, seeks to repeal Real ID and replace it with a fully funded program that protects privacy rights, said spokesman Mark Sullivan.