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## **Montana's Senators back anti-Real ID Amendment**

**By The Associated Press**

HELENA - Montana Sens. Max Baucus and Jon Tester introduced an amendment Thursday that would strike provisions related to the Real ID Act from the immigration reform bill before the U.S. Senate. The main bill, however, lost a key vote later that day and appears unlikely to pass.

Montana was one of 15 states that passed legislation this year opposing or refusing to implement the federal program, which sets a national standard for driver's licenses and requires states to link their record-keeping systems to national databases.

Baucus and Tester, both Democrats, said they want to keep the controversial law from expanding.

"Real ID does nothing but cause headaches," Baucus said. "It's expensive and could expose Montanans' personal information to terrorists or identity thieves. ... I will not support a law that ties state officials' hands with more government bureaucracy."

The amendment would remove provisions from the immigration bill that require employers to check the eligibility of prospective employees by using only identification that complies with the Real ID Act.

Tester said Real ID isn't needed to verify employees or toughen national security.

"Including Real ID in this bill is a disaster for the privacy and freedoms that make Montana and America great," he said. "Beyond that, it will be harder to hire folks, and it will be more expensive to hire them. We need to crack down on employers who hire illegal workers, not make it tougher on businesses that follow the rules."

Co-sponsors of the amendment include Sens. Daniel Akaka, D-Hawaii; Susan Collins, R-Maine; Patrick Leahy, D-Vt.; and John Sununu, R-N.H.

Akaka is also sponsoring a bill to repeal the Real ID Act altogether. That legislation, co-sponsored by Baucus, Leahy, Sununu and Tester, was heard by the Senate Judiciary Committee last month.

Montana's other congressional delegate, Republican Rep. Denny Rehberg, originally supported the Real ID Act, but is now against it. Rehberg has said he thought it was what most Montanans wanted but now supports the opposition of the Montana Legislature and Gov. Brian Schweitzer.

Schweitzer, a Democrat, said, "no, nope, no way, hell no" in signing a state law rejecting Real ID in April. His spokeswoman, Sarah Elliott, said Thursday he feels the program

violates people's privacy and he supports any effort to weaken it.

"We don't need the federal government snooping in our business," Elliott said.

Real ID supporters say the law, passed in response to the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, is needed to prevent terrorists and illegal immigrants from getting fake identification cards.

States have until May 2008 to comply, although an extension can now be requested through Dec. 31, 2009. If they do not comply, driver's licenses that fall short of Real ID standards cannot be used to board an airplane or enter a federal building or open some bank accounts.

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