

Essay sample



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Published in Business Week Online on November 5, 2001, Lorraine Woellert presents an argument that National ID cards are not the answer to advancing security in the United States. In the article titled “ National IDs Won’t Work,” Woellert begins by reasoning why people have the need for increased security. She introduces the idea of a national ID card and explains the inherent benefits of increased security but that the ID cards will in fact put the United States at a greater risk. According to Woellert, a national ID card would violate our freedoms and cost tens of billions of dollars while still being vulnerable to forgery.

The author ends with what seems to be the most horrific fault of a national ID card. ID cards may “ lull” the public into having an artificial feeling of security, thus creating more opportunity for terrorist attack. I agree with Woellert in that creating mandatory national ID cards generates security problems rather than increasing security. I believe that flaws such as high cost, invasion of privacy, and false sense of security, outweigh the benefits that could become of this ID. Lorraine Woellert claims that almost anyone would be able to obtain a forged national ID because technology is not advanced enough to be impenetrable.

This supports her claim that an ID card would not increase security, nor protect the United States any further (para. 3). She goes on to say, even standard ID cards are expensive and creating an ID on a grander scale would increase the already large costs (para. 4). I agree with Woellert in that there would have to be an advanced identification system to enable one to obtain an ID card. Social security cards and birth certificates can easily be forged,

so people who present these forged documents would be able to appear less harmful under a false identification card.

Possibly including an eye scan or finger print would prevent the common thief but would be penetrable by sophisticated thieves. This would compromise security in the United States thus increasing danger. If a criminal were to obtain a false identity and live under an alias, they may go unnoticed without a trace of their past. In an article in Techknowledge, Adam Thierer asks readers to consider how effortless it is to create a license. He quotes USA Today to confirm that technology has made counterfeiting IDs effortless.

Gone are the crude, cut-and-paste fake IDs common a few years ago that were so obviously bogus.... but often they're good enough to fool bartenders, nightclub doormen and, sometimes, police officers" (para. 8). If teenagers with little computer experience can forge licenses, then imagine what a dishonest person who has advanced technological knowledge could do. In an article posted in the Minneapolis Star Tribune, Bruce Schneier claims, " No matter how unforgeable we make it, it will be forged. And even worse, people will get legitimate cards in fraudulent names" (para. 10).

The cost of an unforgeable card would be unreasonable and unaffordable for the government and the people. If retina scans or even thumb prints were used to identify the card holder, costs would increase further and may not guarantee security. About 300 million people (the United States population) would have to register and complete these scans. Along with other expenses such as: facilities and staff to create cards, automatic card readers and

staffing to monitor and repair the readers, the cost of national ID cards would amount to a multi billion dollar operation that would take many years to create and manage.

Woellert goes on to claim that forcing citizens to obtain national ID cards would be an invasion of privacy and security. She speculates that a “ smart card” could hold information of your ethnicity, religion, political leanings, or products you consume on a regular basis, enabling discrimination (para. 6). Because the card would be required, someone may be able to easily view information, and possibly steal identities. If a required ID card were to be put in effect, it would encroach on privacy because people would be forced to reveal personal information.

Eventually when an individual applies to college, he or she could be denied because their card showed that they took an antidepressant. In an article in the magazine National Review, John Derbyshire refers to a study that revealed, “ In August 1993 the IRS revealed that 369 of its employees in one regional office had been investigated for browsing through the returns of friends, relatives, celebrities and others” (para. 8). With a national ID, this would be the case as well. There would be increased motivation to obtain the information on an individual’s card because there would be much more exclusive material.

ID cards would also become a major liability to the United States because the information on lost or stolen cards could be used to another’s advantage. Identities could be stolen and bank accounts emptied, creating mass hysteria. Some say that this encroaching on our privacy is necessary

because we are at war. For example, Richard Gephardt, House Minority Leader, stated, “ We are in a new world. This event will change the balance between freedom and security” (Thierer para. 2). In addition, Woellert considers a false sense of security would be established.

If the card is more secure, the public may put more faith in it, and eventually people will less suspect of others, making it very easy for dishonest people to find a way around the system. Therefore, an artificial sense of security will leave the United States more susceptible to future terrorist attacks (para. 8). Again, I agree with Woellert in that a national ID will instill a false sense of security. No matter how secure the system, there will always be ways around it. Those holes will be ignored because the public will most likely assume the system is untouchable.

A terrorist may obtain a forged ID and go undetected because the public’s faith in this “ secure” system. The terrorist could become a pilot or even develop weapons under a clean alias. In the article, “ National ID Cards: New Technologies, Same Bad Idea,” Adam Thierer quotes Jonathan S. Shapiro, an assistant professor in the Johns Hopkins University Department of Computer Science. Shapiro claims airport security guards and other officials, “ think they are relying on the cards when in fact they are relying on the integrity of the human process by which the cards are issued” (para.). Similarly, over dependence on technology enables a false sense of security. The idea of a national ID card assumes that all of the United States citizens are not terrorists, when in fact many attacks have come from the interior. Our news stations confirm the presence of many criminals in our society.

Providing terrorists with an easier way to infiltrate our society will lead to more devastating attacks. Bruce Schneier debates the reason for an ID card in his article “ A National ID Card Wouldn’t Make Us Safer. He questions, “ What good would it have been to know the names of Timothy McVeigh, the Unabomber, or the DC snipers before they were arrested? ” (para. 18). When there is a method to identify one’s intentions that could be an answer, but an ID card wont solve anything. There negative effects of requiring a national ID card outweigh the positive. Giving criminals and terrorists a way to impersonate upstanding citizens will increase the possibilities of attacks on the United States on a grander scale.

The price of a national ID card alone, without staffing, will exceed millions for our approximate 300 million U. S. citizens. A national ID card invades the privacy of citizens and may cause discrimination because of the plethora of personal information contained on a card. Is a national ID card the answer to identifying terrorists? It will do nothing of the sort. It is but a costly band aid that seems to address many security issues effectively but ignores the real underlying issues and puts our citizens at risk.