cnet NEWS.COM   http://www.news.com/

National ID plan may have killed immigration bill

By Declan McCullagh
http://news.com.com/National+ID+plan+may+have+killed+immigration+bill/2100-7348_3-6193916.html

Story last modified Thu Jun 28 13:46:11 PDT 2007

The U.S. Senate definitively rejected President George Bush's immigration bill on Thursday, just hours after senators expressed deep misgivings with portions that would have expanded the use of a national ID card.

Because the procedural vote was 46 to 53, with 60 votes needed to advance the immigration legislation, the proposal is likely to remain dead for the rest of the year.

Privacy advocates were quick to claim that a vote against Real ID cards the previous evening doomed the bill.

Wednesday's vote showed that senators were willing to delete the portion of the labyrinthine immigration bill that would require employers to demand the Real ID cards from new hires. Because some of the bill's backers had insisted that the ID requirement remain in place--as a way to identify illegal immigrants--they were no longer as willing to support the overall bill.

"The proponents of national ID in the Senate weren't getting what they wanted, so they backed away," said Jim Harper, a policy analyst at the free-market Cato Institute who opposes Real ID. "It was a landmine that blew up in their faces."

In a press release, the two Montana Democrats, Max Baucus and Jon Tester, said they were happy that a pro-privacy approach killed the bill. "If Jon and I just brought down the entire bill, that's good for Montana and the country," said Baucus, who cosponsored the amendment deleting the employer verification rule.

But supporters of the overall legislation, which would have created a new category of "Z" visas for currently illegal immigrants, expressed dismay at its apparent demise.

Microsoft said it was disappointed by Thursday's procedural vote against advancing the bill, which will "likely result in the collapse of comprehensive immigration reform that is desperately needed to address the shortage of highly skilled talent."

"The American people understand the status quo is unacceptable when it comes to our immigration laws," Bush said.

Now on News.com
The iPhone has landed   New GPL reflects software shifts   Putting the 'super' in supercomputer   Extra: IBM 1401 Mainframe, the musical

Opponents of the bill, including Republican senator Jim DeMint of South Carolina, said derailing it was a victory. "When the U.S. Senate brought the amnesty bill back up this week, they declared war on the American people," DeMint said.

The American Civil Liberties Union, another longtime foe of Real ID, said the Real ID requirements were a "poison pill that derailed this bill, and any future legislation should be written knowing the American people won't swallow it." Another section of the immigration bill would have given $1.5 billion to state officials to pay for Real ID compliance.

Even if the immigration bill is goes nowhere, however, the Real ID Act is still in effect. It says that, starting on May 11, 2008, Americans will need a federally approved ID card to travel on an airplane, open a bank account, collect Social Security payments or take advantage of nearly any government service.

States must conduct checks of their citizens' identification papers and driver's licenses may have to be reissued to comply with Homeland Security requirements. (States that agree in advance to abide by the rules have until 2013 to comply.)