

Feb 11, 2005 - Rep. Slaughter Reacts to Passage of "Real ID Act of 2005"

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Local Congresswoman voted no on Thursday.

Washington, DC - Rep. Louise M. Slaughter (NY-28), who served on the Select Committee on Homeland Security from its inception and represents a border district with Canada, voted against H.R. 418, the Real ID Act of 2005 on Thursday for several reasons.

H.R. 418 is a massive unfunded mandate on state governments to comply with a single national policy that may or may not be appropriate for each individual state. Understandably, there is strong opposition to creating a master-database of all American drivers' licenses. Furthermore, the bill gives no details about how this information could be used or whom the information can be shared with. This standardization of drivers' licenses has long been seen as a bureaucratic back-door to implementing a national identification card.

"Although I am in favor of tough laws when it comes to illegal immigration, using the issue as a back-door to create a national ID card is not a step I am willing to take," said Rep. Slaughter.

In addition, the bill authorizes the Homeland Security Secretary to waive "any other provision of law" to ensure that the fence along the U.S./Mexican border be completed. Since 1996, the Federal government has been allowed to build 14 miles of security fencing in southern San Diego, today having three miles left to be completed. These three miles are an environmentally sensitive area of the Tijuana Estuary also containing important Native American cultural artifacts. This bill grants the completion of the fence irrespective of all laws including environmental or cultural limitations.

"Giving the Homeland Security Department the power to override Federal laws designed to protect the environment and important cultural artifacts would be a terrible precedent," stated Slaughter. "I'm confident that the fence can be finished without gutting laws meant to protect the environment and our oldest cultural touchstones," Slaughter added.

According to supporters of the bill, terrorists intent on causing harm to the United States have been making up persecution stories to block their removal from the United States and apply for asylum. However, current law already prohibits suspected terrorists from applying for asylum or stopping their removal. This bill only makes it more difficult for those who truly need asylum to get it.

"As a beacon of freedom and liberty in the world, granting asylum to those unfortunate enough to have experienced such things as slavery, prostitution, torture, and forced abortion in their own countries should be granted asylum in our country," said Slaughter. "As a caring nation we should open our arms to those who have not been given the same rights and independence that we have been blessed with. This bill slams the door of freedom shut making it that much harder for those in need to find their freedom."

Because a mega-database would dangerously increase the Federal government's ability to monitor individuals, with a peculiar absence of privacy limitations on the use of that information with other people, companies, Federal government agencies, and foreign governments, it was necessary to attempt to strike the bill down. The structure of the government itself is designed to protect an individual's rights and liberties, and the passage of the bill is entirely contradictory to those ideals.

"It is foolish to think the centralization of private information of the people of this nation will not be used in such a way that contradicts the foundation of the Constitution," continued Slaughter. "The general policing of citizens should be left to the states as it was intended in a Federalist government. Make no mistake, I am fully committed to homeland security, however I must argue there are other ways to increase our safety at home without this bill."