

California takes small step away from Real ID

CNET NEWS.COM

March 11, 2008

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The State of California has for years been a supporter of Real ID, if not an altogether enthusiastic one. Now that may be about to change.

California State Assembly member Pedro Nava, the influential Democratic chairman of the transportation committee, has introduced an anti-Real ID resolution. It asks the state's congressional delegation in Washington, D.C., to "support measures to repeal Real ID."

"I quite frankly think the Legislature will support this measure, my resolution, because there are too many unanswered questions," Nava, who represents part of Santa Barbara and Ventura counties, said in an interview on Tuesday. Liberal groups like the American Civil Liberties Union and conservative-libertarian ones like Gun Owners of America support his approach, he added.

Until now, California has been a lukewarm supporter of the law. Federal regulations creating a uniform national ID card--called Real ID--take effect on May 11. The law promises to cause travel headaches and problems entering federal buildings for residents of states that have not agreed to comply or request an extension. (See our special report from last month.)

Last year, Denise Blair, the assistant deputy director of the California Department of Motor Vehicles said of Real ID: "We're certainly not the rabble-rousers out there trying to lead a rebellion" against the law." In a statement in January, the California DMV said the Department of Homeland Security's final Real ID regulations will "further strengthen the security of our driver licenses and identification cards."

Nava's legislation isn't as sweeping as what other states, such as New Hampshire, Montana, and South Carolina, have already enacted. It still would permit California to comply with Real ID while its congressional delegation tries to rewrite the law.

But the symbolism of the nation's most populous state deciding--should the Legislature agree with Nava--that one of Homeland Security's most high-profile initiatives is deeply flawed is undeniable. Because California's costs will be so high, with one estimate in the neighborhood of \$500 million, at a time when the state budget deficit has grown to \$16 billion, the legislature now has a strong incentive to find a way to cut costs.

Nava's bill was introduced on Monday; he predicts committee hearings within a month and a floor vote in the Assembly within two months.