Is a National Digital ID on the Horizon for Americans?

October 30, 2022 - Anyone who is more than 25 years old probably remembers something about the debate over the Real ID Act. As it was originally envisioned, it would have established a national ID that would have been mandatory and implemented through driver's licenses. There was a lot of pushback from Americans. When implemented, the law got watered down a bit and some states allow people to get driver's licenses which are not Real ID compliant today. But those licenses won't allow you to board a plane or enter a federal office building. If you have a noncompliant license, you'll need a passport for that. Now Congress is looking at implementing a digital national ID. And the pushback on that idea needs to be a lot more fierce.

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Just last week, the Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee approved the Improving Digital ID Act. The same bill passed out of committee in the House of Representatives in July. The bill provides the groundwork for establishing a national digital ID for Americans.

It's quite likely that any national ID of this type would become a new version of the Social Security Card. As recently as the 1960's those cards had a line of text on them that said that they weren't to be used for identification. But you can't open a bank or brokerage account, get a job or purchase a new car (even with cash) without one.

Digital ID's offer a much more Orwellian prospect. We're living in an era where people are being denied services because of their opinions and political views. Companies have become very vocal in their political positions. JP Morgan Chase recently cut off the bank account of Kanye West because they donâ€™t' agree with him. Mike Lindell had a similar experience with a different bank.

But banks are private companies. Now just imagine a politicized government that doesn't like your position on certain things. In a world with paper documents, they can't just come into your house and seize you Social Security Card. But in a digital world, they may be able to do exactly that, cutting you off from any services that require the ID and which the government deems you unworthy of.

Digital IDs are dangerous for another reason too. An American digital ID would be the wholly grail target for identity thieves. And there is no reason to believe that the government would be able to protect them based on their track record so far.

If anything, the US government has repeatedly demonstrated how inept it is when it comes to protecting digital data. In fact, some of the largest and most damaging data breaches in history have been with government stored data. There have been breaches at the Pentagon, the Office of Personnel Management and even at some of the agencies responsible for nuclear oversight. These breaches have included the personally identifiable information on millions of Americans including those on active military duty. And in the case of the Office of Personnel Management breach, there was information that allowed the hackers to identify people who held American security clearances.

There is no reason to believe that the government would be any more diligent in protecting the average American than it has been in protecting its own employees. But there is every reason to believe that once the government does issue a digital ID, it will be used as leverage over Americans. Any potential benefits that might come out of such a scheme are more than outweighed by the downsides. A US Government issued digital ID is something that should never see the light of day in the United States.
by Jim Malmberg
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