Bipartisan Effort Emerges to Curtail Government Use of Facial Recognition Technology

February 9, 2024 - In a bipartisan push against government overreach, Senators John Kennedy and Jeff Merkley are leading the charge to halt the widespread use of facial recognition technology by the Transportation Security Administration (TSA). The move comes amidst growing concerns over privacy violations and the unchecked expansion of surveillance measures at U.S. airports.

The proposed legislation, known as the Travelers' Privacy Protection Act (TPPA), is designed to safeguard individual privacy rights by banning the TSA from utilizing facial recognition technology. This technology, powered by artificial intelligence, has sparked outcry from both citizens and lawmakers alike due to its invasive nature and potential for abuse.

Leo Hohmann recently revealed on his Substack account the TSA's plans to deploy enhanced Credential Authentication Technology (CAT) devices equipped with facial recognition capabilities at 430 U.S. airports. Despite assurances from the agency, concerns persist regarding the collection and storage of biometric data without explicit consent from travelers.

Reports indicate that while participation in facial recognition screenings is presented as optional, many passengers have reported feeling coerced or unaware of their rights to opt out. Instances of individuals being subjected to facial scans without consent underscore the urgency of legislative action to protect civil liberties.

Moreover, the lack of transparency surrounding data retention policies raises red flags about the long-term implications of facial recognition surveillance. While the TSA claims to delete images after a brief period, the potential for misuse or unauthorized access to stored data remains a significant concern. The fact remains that the TSA is a part of the Department of Homeland Security and that while the TSA may not keep the images on a long term basis, there is little to prevent the DHS from doing so.

Critics argue that the unchecked expansion of facial recognition technology represents a slippery slope towards a surveillance state, where individuals are subject to constant monitoring without due process or oversight. The bipartisan effort to pass the TPPA signals a growing recognition among lawmakers of the need to rein in government surveillance powers and uphold constitutional rights.
by Jim Malmberg
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