

Gingrich Disfavors National ID Card

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Newt Gingrich and other former Republican lawmakers predicted Friday that a new national identification card system will probably never become a reality despite the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks.

"It's a dead end. It won't happen," Gingrich told a House Government Reform subcommittee. Talking about national IDs smacks of Nazism and "Big Brother" in people's minds, and Congress will not have the political support to get it through, said former Sen. Alan Simpson, R-Wy. "You use the words 'national ID,' it's over," he said.

Indeed, former Rep. Bill McCollum, R-Fla., called a new all-encompassing national identification system "offensive" and said it "contradicts some of our most sacrosanct American principles of personal liberty and expectations of privacy and is far in excess of what is needed to provide us with the security and protections we all want."

Gingrich, McCollum and Simpson said instead the government should invest in securing existing means of identification. The three lawmakers called for the use of more identifiers like fingerprints and retina scans.

"We need to make the Social Security card and our drivers licenses more tamper-resistant and counterfeit proof," McCollum said. "Both of these documents, outside of passports and green cards, are the most commonly used identification cards in America."

Several people proposed starting a new national identification system following the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon. The Bush administration has yet to take a position on the cards, although Attorney General John Ashcroft has frowned upon the idea.

Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia also has said that the Fourth Amendment doesn't mention a national ID card but if such a popular vote were held on allowing a national ID card, "Personally, I'd probably vote against it," he said.

Rep. Stephen Horn, R-Calif., the subcommittee chairman, refused to dismiss the idea out of hand. "While holding firm to America's freedoms, we must also be open to new ideas," he said.

"The survival of this great nation may depend on it."

Groups including the American Civil Liberties Union have strongly opposed the idea of another national identifier. "A national ID card would substantially infringe on the rights of privacy and equality of many Americans, yet would not prevent terrorist attacks," ACLU lawyer Katie Corrigan said.

The Sept. 11 attacks showed that a national identification system probably would not help make America safer, said Rep. Janice Schakowsky, D-Ill.

"Systems like national identification cards will not deter the crazed terrorist from his or her mission," she said. "Those terrorist all had driver's licenses, credit cards and Internet accounts."