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AZ bill would halt states' licenses as entrants' ID

By Howard Fischer

CAPITOL MEDIA SERVICES

PHOENIX — Two Republican lawmakers are pushing to prohibit driver's licenses from states that issue them to illegal immigrants from being used as identification in Arizona.

The restriction, which would apply to any state or local government, would affect licenses from New Mexico, Texas, Oregon and five other states, along with the District of Columbia.

But the move, pushed as another method of cracking down on those who enter the country illegally, could have serious repercussions for Arizonans driving elsewhere.

If Arizona stops recognizing licenses from other states, those states could do the same to Arizona drivers.

HB 2012 was written by Reps. Warde Nichols of Chandler and Russell Pearce of Mesa.

"We believe that the legal status of those who are driving on our roads is critically important," Nichols said. He said that is underscored by the fact that some of the terrorists who hijacked planes and flew them into buildings in 2001 had driver's licenses.

"This is just another mechanism to say ... here in Arizona we're serious about this illegal-immigration issue," Nichols said.

"And I don't care if they're coming from south of the border, I don't care if they're coming from Canada, I don't care if they're coming from other countries through those avenues," he said. "If they're going to go to a state that's going to offer them a driver's license without verifying legal status, that opens up all sorts of doors when they go into these other states."

He said there is no reason for these people to be driving in Arizona.

"If they haven't checked your legal status (in the other state), why should we recognize you?" he asked.

Where not accepting some out-of-state licenses gets tricky is that those states recognize each other's licenses. Most — including Arizona — have adopted an interstate compact specifically agreeing to that reciprocity.

Nichols conceded there is a risk behind his measure: Legislators from those other states might pass laws saying they will not honor the licenses of any state that does not do the same.

There already is precedent for such laws. Many states honor concealed-weapons permits only from states granting reciprocity to their own residents.

Nichols conceded there may be "a ton of unintended consequences" if his measure passes. So Nichols said he may have to alter it.

One option, he said, might be to amend the legislation so people from these states still can drive legally in

Licenses the bill would affect

Do not require proof of legal presence in this country to get a driver's license:

- Hawaii • Maine • Maryland
- Michigan • New Mexico • Oregon
- Texas • Washington • District of Columbia

Source: Motor Vehicle Division
Arizona Department of
Transportation

Arizona.

But those motorists would face additional scrutiny if stopped by police, including a requirement that police officers check to see if they are in this country legally.

That raises yet another question: Would residents of those other states be willing to visit Arizona and spend their tourist dollars here if they think they might get hassled?

"Ultimately I think this is a debate that we need to have," Nichols said, if only to send the message to other states that Arizona is "getting serious" about illegal immigration.

"If they're not going to, fine, but we are," he said.

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