

Real ID

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Yesterday I dropped by my local Department of Motor Vehicles office to apply for what is touted by its proponents to be a high-security driver's license. The new license is called a Real ID. For reasons that elude me, the old license was not called a Fake ID.

Sometime in the near future, the law says you will have to present a Real ID or a passport if you want to board (even) a domestic flight. A note from mom won't suffice.

A Real ID looks like a driver's license, but it's obviously a national ID card, too. That concept makes some people uneasy. They think the card will make it possible for some nefarious agency to watch them. My advice: relax. Even the check-out register at your local grocery store is watching you, and it knows more about your eating and drinking habits than you do.

I presented my documents to the attending clerk. He punched a couple of keys on his PC and said, "That's weird. It says you are already approved for Real ID. Did you ever work in intelligence?"

A competent foreign agent would answer "No". A competent US intelligence officer would act like he didn't hear the question, or answer "No". A less competent intelligence agent would answer, "I'm not allowed to answer that question." An honest person who hadn't worked in intelligence would answer "No". A deeply disturbed person who hadn't worked in intelligence might answer "Yes". Truth doesn't stand a chance in that minefield.

I gave the best answer I could.

"I'm not aware that I have."

"Is that a 'Yes' or a 'No'?", the clerk asked, slighted peeved.

"Yes", I replied. If pressed in court, I knew I could always say that I interpreted the question to mean, "Are the only two possible answers to the question 'Did you ever work in intelligence?' 'Yes' or 'No'?"

"Stand in front of that blue screen so we can take your picture", the clerk directed.

I did. The camera clicked. The clock ticked. I stepped back to the clerk's station.

“That’s weird”, the clerk opined as he scanned his screen. “The Real ID facial recognition software says that the person whose photo is on your current driver’s license isn’t the person whose picture I just took.”

The clerk at the station adjacent to his offered, “Maybe he had glasses in the old picture.”

“No, he doesn’t have glasses in either picture”, my clerk replied. “Have you done something different since you got your last license?”

You don’t want to fool with the lords of the license. An answer like, “Yup, I won second place in hog-calling contest in Gnaw Bone, Indiana, last week”, is tantamount to calling Security. Merely admitting you know there is a Gnaw Bone raises questions. And explaining that it’s near French Lick won’t help.

“I’ve had cataract surgery since I got my last license”, I said. “The artificial lenses are that implanted during cataract surgery are much more reflective than biological lenses, and that’s enough to change anybody’s looks.”

I chose not to tell him that I’d lost half my large intestine during that same period, too. Not everyone thinks semicolon jokes are funny ;->