

Island kin of 9/11 dead interrupt Capitol news session

They want crackdown on illegal immigration not included in reform plan

Thursday, October 21, 2004

By TERENCE J. KIVLAN

WASHINGTON -- Two Staten Island relatives of World Trade Center victims interrupted a Capitol press conference yesterday to protest support for a Sept. 11 reform plan that mandates an intelligence overhaul but not the crackdown on illegal immigration they're pushing for.

The measure, which has White House support, would implement the Sept. 11 commission's two main recommendations -- creation of a national intelligence director and a counterterrorism center to improve coordination among the FBI, CIA and other intelligence agencies.

"You are settling for a bill that is like a Hollywood studio -- all storefront and no backs or sides," Joan Molinaro told Rep. Carolyn Maloney (D-Manhattan), Sept. 11 commission member Tim Roemer and others at the event.

"We have open borders and 4,000 people are coming in every night," said Bruce DeCell of Dongan Hills, who, like Mrs. Molinaro, calmly addressed the press conference from the back of the room where the event was held.

Mrs. Molinaro's firefighter son was killed at Ground Zero, and DeCell's son-in-law died in the Twin Towers.

But another group of Sept. 11 victims' relatives joined Mrs. Maloney and Roemer at the press conference, calling for adoption of the Senate version of intelligence reform legislation before the Nov. 2 election.

Mrs. Maloney, Roemer and the relatives urged the elimination of "extraneous, controversial" provisions in the House-passed bill -- such as those supported by Mrs. Molinaro and DeCell, which provide for immediate deportation of illegal aliens, without court review, and bar states from issuing drivers' licenses to illegal immigrants.

"What we are saying is, let us move now in areas where there is a broad consensus," said Mrs. Maloney, noting that "while Congress is debating, the terrorists are plotting."

The immigration provisions "probably are important issues to look at," said Mary Fetchet of Connecticut, whose son died at the World Trade Center. "But we don't want these debates to delay the bill."

Roemer told Mrs. Molinaro and DeCell that there was "nothing to prevent" Congress from returning after the election to deal with the immigration matters. "There will be legitimate immigration reforms that need to be taken on," said the former Democratic congressman from Indiana.

But the two Islanders were not mollified.

"We are not going away ... I am very angry," said Mrs. Molinaro in an interview after the press conference.

DeCell argued that it would "not accomplish anything to shuffle chairs" in the intelligence agencies as long as illegal aliens could enter the country and travel freely, as the Sept. 11 hijackers did.

"These are not extraneous issues," said DeCell. "They are only extraneous if you don't want to do something about them."

The Bush administration has called for scuttling the House immigration provisions to clear the way for approval of the intelligence overhaul.

Mrs. Maloney and her allies yesterday urged President Bush to put direct pressure on the House-Senate conference committees now meeting to negotiate a final bill.

"If you speak, Congress will listen," the group said in an open letter to Bush. "If you say you want a bill before the election, you will have it."

Rep. Vito Fossella (R-Staten Island/Brooklyn) and 10 other House members have written to chief House conferee Peter Hoekstra (R-Mich.), urging approval of the reform legislation before the election.

"We have a golden opportunity to improve our nation's security, and we must not let it slip by," said the letter, whose signers included Mrs. Maloney.

After initially supporting a move to strip the House bill of the immigration provisions, Fossella did an about face and voted to keep them.