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Opryland gathering to address stronger immigration laws

By YVETTE CRAIG

*Staff Writer*

Peter Gadiel's life forever changed the day in 2001 that terrorists attacked the World Trade Center and the towers collapsed in a shower of debris and plumes of thick dust.

His son, James, 23, was killed while working on the 103rd floor of the north tower where he worked as an assistant trader at Cantor Fitzgerald.

Gadiel walked away from his real estate job in Connecticut to begin a crusade to expose "those responsible" and persuade lawmakers to address illegal immigration as a national security issue.

Tomorrow, Gadiel will be in Nashville to speak at the Southern Midwest Immigration Summit, sponsored by FAIR, the Federation of American Immigration Reform. U.S. Rep. Marsha Blackburn, R-Brentwood, and local talk show host Phil Valentine are among other speakers scheduled to discuss a number of issues relating to strengthening immigration laws.

"Our loved ones are dead because the government didn't bother to secure our borders," said Gadiel, president of 9-11 Families for Secure America. "For years, the politicians have been sweeping these problems under the rug. At this point, the rugs look like mountains."

The FAIR summit will convene at the Gaylord Opryland Resort & Convention Center, just two days after the U.S. House of Representatives passed a measure that could make it harder to get a driver's license. The bill, known as the Real ID Act, would require states to demand at least four forms of identification for license applicants. It is expected to pass the Senate next week.

Touted as an antiterrorism measure, the act would expunge laws in states that allow undocumented immigrants to obtain driver's licenses, which are accepted as official identification for boarding airplanes and opening bank accounts, among other things.

In Tennessee, residents unable to prove they are citizens or legal permanent residents can't get driver's licenses. They are, however, able to receive a state-issued driving certificate.

Blackburn, a supporter of the Real ID Act, said the proposal would be a step toward making this country safer.

Congress continues to make immigrants scapegoats, argues David Lubell with the Tennessee Immigrant and Refugee Rights Coalition.

Lubell, saying FAIR has close relationships with "racists and xenophobic groups" around the country, said the coalition is "very disappointed" that Blackburn "would align herself with this hate group by participating in their regional meeting."

"Our opinion of FAIR is it's an extremist group trying to paint itself as a moderate immigration group," said Lubell, when asked whether he was aware of tomorrow's conference. "We believe this country is a nation of immigrants. Our ancestors — certainly mine — came here in search of a better life and hopes to provide a better life for their families and contribute to the economic success of our country."

Blackburn and her staff strongly disputed the characterization of FAIR as "extremist," saying FAIR is a group concerned about homeland security.

"TIRRC is using inflammatory rhetoric to hide the fact that they believe illegal aliens should be able to acquire valid Tennessee driver's licenses and have access to government services at taxpayer expense," said Ryan Loskarn, a Blackburn spokesman. "It's unfortunate they would use such rhetoric rather than engaging in an honest debate about our very serious illegal immigration problem."

"Representative Blackburn simply doesn't believe any group should encourage people to violate U.S. law. ... Rewarding illegal immigration is an affront to the millions of people who've worked hard and sacrificed to become legal residents and citizens of this country."

### **To learn more**

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### **If you go**

The Southern Midwest Immigration Summit is scheduled 8 a.m.-5 p.m. tomorrow at the Gaylord Opryland Resort & Convention Center. The event is open to the public and costs \$50. To RSVP, call Susan Tully at 608-606-0631.

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