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### **Southern Poverty Law Center Statement on New York State Senate and Assembly Witnesses**

In response to New York Gov. Eliot Spitzer's decision to drop the state's immigration status requirement for those seeking state driver's licenses, legislative opponents of the governor's plan have called several hearings and invited a series of witnesses to give "expert" advice on the policy change. These witnesses have been presented as essentially independent, mainstream commentators and analysts of security policy. But they are not. The four leading "expert" witnesses are all linked to the Federation for American Immigration Reform (FAIR), an organization founded by a racist nativist that has accepted more than \$1 million from a major hate group. Just this year, FAIR's president met with officers of an anti-immigrant Belgian political party whose immediate predecessor party was banned for "racism and xenophobia."

"The witnesses opposed to Gov. Spitzer's driver's license plan are being presented as serious, knowledgeable critics of security policy," said Mark Potok, director of the Intelligence Project of the Southern Poverty Law Center, a civil rights organization that monitors hate groups. "In fact, they represent a small band of ideologues, many of whom are bigoted extremists with close connections to hate groups."

The witnesses include Michael Cutler, fellow of the Center for Immigration Studies (CIS); Peter Gadiel, president of 9/11 Families for a Secure America; Neil Berro, New York State director of the Coalition for a Secure Driver's License; and Dan Stein, president of FAIR. The organizations these men represent are not objective analysts of immigration. At base, they are all manifestations of FAIR, groups created by essentially the same group of people with the same goals in mind.

CIS, which presents itself as nonpartisan, was founded and partly funded by John Tanton, the man who originally started FAIR. The 9/11 Families group is headed by a former member of FAIR's board of directors. The Secure Driver's License group was founded by two of FAIR's current board members. And Stein, an acolyte of Tanton's, heads FAIR, a group that claims to be mainstream but is not. FAIR and Tanton both have a history of creating various front groups to make it appear that their restrictionist "movement" is far more broad-based than it actually is.

FAIR accepted more than \$1 million between 1985 and 1994 from the Pioneer Fund, a racist foundation that finances studies in "race betterment" and the relationship between race and intelligence — and it kept accepting money for almost a decade after being informed of the Pioneer Fund's nature. Rick Oltman, until recently FAIR's Western States Regional Coordinator, is a long-time member of the Council of Conservative Citizens, a group that describes blacks as "a

retrograde species of humanity.” His recently hired replacement, Joe Turner, headed Save Our State, a group listed by the Southern Poverty Law Center as a hate group. Tanton, FAIR’s founder, is the author of a series of racist 1986 memoranda that accused Latino immigrants of bringing a culture of corruption to the United States and of being less “educable” than others. These and other facts on Tanton, FAIR and related groups are available at <http://www.splcenter.org/intel/intelreport/article.jsp?aid=93>, as well as in a highly accurate white paper by the New York Immigration Coalition.

“The Southern Poverty Law Center urges New York legislative leaders to disavow these so-called experts,” Potok said of the four witnesses. “At the end of the day, these are men who are simply opposed to immigration in general, not ‘security experts’ who can offer New Yorkers anything other than nativist rhetoric.”

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*The Southern Poverty Law Center is a nonprofit civil rights organization, based in Montgomery, Ala., that combats hate, intolerance and discrimination through education and litigation. For more information, visit [www.splcenter.org](http://www.splcenter.org).*