

# Kansas doctor, target of anti-abortion fanatics, gunned down in Wichita

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Dr. George Tiller, an abortion provider who has been the target of repeated attacks by right-wing elements linked to the Kansas Republican Party, was shot to death Sunday morning at his Wichita church.

The gunman, described as a white male, fled the scene in a powder blue Ford Taurus, but was reportedly taken into custody by police later in the day in New Century, Kansas, about 170 miles northeast of Wichita.

Johnson County sheriff's spokesman Tom Erickson later reported that Scott Roeder was the man whose car was stopped. Wichita police said charges were expected in the murder on Monday.

Dr. Tiller, who was 67 years old, was murdered inside Reformation Lutheran Church, where he was a member of the congregation. Tiller was serving as a church usher while his wife sang in the choir. He is the fourth abortion doctor murdered by right-wing religious fundamentalists since 1993.

One of a handful of doctors willing to provide third-trimester abortions in Kansas, Tiller has been subjected to a series of abusive prosecutions and lawsuits by right-wing politicians, most of them Republicans, and was frequently targeted for death threats from the fascistic wing of the anti-abortion groups. His Wichita clinic was bombed in 1985, and he was shot by an anti-abortion fanatic in 1993, who wounded him in both arms. His clinic was vandalized last month, with tens of thousands of dollars worth of damage.

Refusing to be intimidated by this two-decade-long campaign of threats and provocations, Tiller continued to provide abortion services to women who frequently had no other recourse for hundreds of miles. His Women's Health Care Services clinic is one of three US facilities that perform abortions after the 21st week of pregnancy.

In the most recent trumped-up case, he was acquitted in March of 19 misdemeanor charges based on alleged failure to obtain the required second opinions from another doctor before performing abortions. The prosecutor claimed that the second doctor was essentially Tiller's employee, but a jury required only an hour of deliberation to acquit him on all 19 counts, each of which carried a penalty of a year in jail.

The prosecution was initiated by an ultra-right Republican state attorney general, Phill Kline, who was defeated for reelection in a campaign where his vendetta against Tiller was a major issue.

Tiller's family issued a statement through Wichita attorneys Dan Monnat and Lee Thompson: "Today we mourn the loss of our husband, father and grandfather. Today's event is an unspeakable tragedy for all of us and for George's friends and patients..."

"Our loss is also a loss for the City of Wichita and women across America. George dedicated his life to providing women with high-quality health care despite frequent threats and violence. We ask that he be remembered as a good husband, father and grandfather and a dedicated servant on behalf of the rights of women everywhere."

Nancy Keenan, president of abortion-rights group NARAL Pro-Choice America, issued a statement praising Tiller's courage and dedication.

"Dr. Tiller's murder will send a chill down the spines of the brave and courageous providers and other professionals who are part of reproductive-health centers that serve women across this country. We want them to know that they have our support as they move forward in providing these essential services in the aftermath of the shocking news from Wichita," she said.

Anti-abortion groups issued hypocritical statements

bemoaning the shooting, although they created the moral climate in which a deranged individual or a fascist-minded terrorist would target Dr. Tiller for assassination, regularly picketing his clinic with signs bearing imprecations like “Tiller the Killer.”

In 1993, Operation Rescue mounted a series of physical blockades of Tiller’s clinic, and the group’s founder Randall Terry denounced the doctor as “a mass murderer.” The group’s web site describes Tiller as a “monster” who has “been able to get away with murder.”

After the murder, Terry issued a written statement reiterating his support for blockades and other acts of physical intimidation against abortion doctors and women seeking their services. After expressing perfunctory regret for Tiller’s death, he declared, “I am more concerned that the Obama administration will use Tiller’s killing to intimidate pro-lifers into surrendering our most effective rhetoric and actions. Abortion is still murder, and we still must call abortion by its proper name. Those men and women who slaughter the unborn are murderers according to the Law of God. ”



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