

In the aftermath of the George Tiller assassination

Slain doctor's family announces closure of Kansas clinic

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One of the few remaining clinics in the US that have provided late-term abortions will be permanently closed. On Tuesday the surviving family of Dr. George Tiller announced that the Women's Health Care Services clinic in Wichita, Kansas, where Tiller served as medical director, would not be reopened. The clinic had been closed for a mourning period following his death.

The doctor was gunned down at his church by a right-wing, anti-abortion fanatic on May 31. Tiller and his clinic had long been the target of anti-abortion groups, right-wing media personalities and leading figures in the Republican Party. He had survived a previous assassination attempt in 1993.

In a statement issued by their lawyer, Tiller's family said, "We are proud of the service and courage shown by our husband and father and know that women's health care needs have been met because of his dedication and services. That is a legacy that will never die."

While they did not elaborate on the reasoning behind their decision, it is safe to say that the vicious and ultimately deadly attacks waged by anti-abortion zealots against George Tiller and his life's work have taken their toll on the family.

The closure of the clinic is a blow against the legally protected right to abortion and democratic rights. The Wichita facility was one of only an estimated three clinics in the US where women—facing danger to their lives or carrying a fetus with horrible deformities—could go to terminate their pregnancies after the 20th week.

News of the clinic's closure has been met with a sickening response by anti-abortion forces. Tiller's alleged killer, Scott Roeder, commented from prison in an interview with CNN that the closing of the women's clinic is "a victory for all the unborn children." Although

not admitting he shot Tiller, he said if he were to be convicted in the murder, "the entire motive was the defense of the unborn."

Troy Newman, president of Operation Rescue, said in a statement on the anti-abortion group's Web site Tuesday that they are "thankful that Tiller's clinic will not reopen and thankful that Wichita is now abortion free." Attempting to qualify this statement, he added, "We have worked very hard for this day, but we wish it would have come through the peaceful, legal channels we were pursuing."

Operation Rescue was obsessed with shutting down Dr. Tiller's clinic. Seven years ago, Newman moved his organization's national headquarters to Wichita to target the Women's Health Care Services clinic.

The supposedly peaceful and legal methods they and other groups have utilized include hurling obscenities at the woman seeking treatment at the clinic, and holding up posters with the names and home addresses of clinic employees. Protesters have blocked clinic entrances and glued their doors shut. Doctors and clinic workers have been warned that they should fear for their lives.

In the days since Tiller's assassination, new evidence has emerged indicating that Scott Roeder was engaged in illegal actions at another Kansas women's clinic in the days before the killing.

Appearing June 3 on MSNBC's Rachel Maddow Show, a staff member from the "Aid for Women" clinic, using the pseudonym Jeffrey Pederson, described how employees showed up on May 25 to find the doors to the facility super-glued shut.

After reviewing the clinic's video surveillance tape, Pederson was able to identify Roeder, with whom he had previous confrontations over vandalism at the clinic. He provided a copy of the videotape to the FBI on May 28.

Pederson said Roeder returned to the clinic on May 30, the day before Tiller's murder, and another staff member reportedly witnessed him attempting again to superglue the doors. Pederson chased Roeder down and was able to write down his license plate number. He passed this information on to the FBI and told them that he was the same individual he had seen in the earlier video footage.

Pederson said the FBI told him that they could take no action without convening a grand jury and obtaining a warrant. In fact, under the 1994 Freedom of Access to Clinic Entrances Act (or FACE Act) it is a violation of federal law to use intimidation or physical force to prevent or discourage persons from gaining access to a reproductive health care facility.

Federal civil rights prosecutors have only now launched an investigation into whether violations of the FACE Act were committed in connection with events surrounding George Tiller's murder.

This obvious failure under Barack Obama to vigorously pursue operatives in the anti-abortion movement follows Department of Justice practice under the Bush administration, when only about two prosecutions were brought per year throughout the entire country under the FACE Act.

The Obama administration and the Democratic Party as a whole are intimidated by these forces and their allies in the Republican Party and the Christian right, who through often illegal means seek to deny women the legally sanctioned right to obtain an abortion and stop medical professionals from providing these services.

Obama issued a two-sentence statement on George Tiller's assassination, going out of his way to provide a "balanced" response and accommodate himself to anti-abortion fanatics responsible for the killing. "However profound our differences as Americans over difficult issues such as abortion," he said, "they cannot be resolved by heinous acts of violence."

In April, Department of Homeland Security Secretary Janet Napolitano drew the wrath of conservative bloggers and right-wing TV and radio hosts after the DHS issued a nine-page report, "Right-wing Extremism: Current Economic and Political Climate Fueling Resurgence in Radicalization and Recruitment."

The report, commissioned under Bush, warned in particular of potential violence from right-wing groups, singling out "anti-abortion extremism" and the "sovereign citizen movement" such as the Freemen—a group Scott Roeder had belonged to.

Republican critics took particular exception to a passage

in the report that focused on returning veterans: "DHS/I&A [Office of Intelligence and Analysis] is concerned that right-wing extremists will attempt to recruit and radicalize returning veterans in order to boost their violent capabilities."

At least three Republican congressmen called on Napolitano to resign for issuing the report. She responded by removing the report from the DHS Web site, and qualified the reference to extremism. "We don't have the luxury," she stated, "of focusing our efforts on one group; we must protect the country from terrorism whether foreign or homegrown and regardless of the ideology that motivates its violence."

The ensuing period has seen at least two instances of domestic terrorism motivated by right-wing extremism.

The first was the Tiller assassination. And this Wednesday, a guard at the Holocaust Museum in Washington, DC, was shot and killed. The alleged gunman is 88-year-old white supremacist and military veteran James von Brunn. On his web site he publicizes a book he wrote as "a new hard hitting expose of the JEW CONSPIRACY to destroy the White gene-pool."

The Democrats and the Obama administration bear responsibility for facilitating such acts, which are motivated by a fascistic ideology that is tolerated by significant sections of the political establishment in America. Their refusal to condemn these forces and actively pursue them legally constitutes tacit acceptance of their activities.

In Wichita, this has resulted in the death of Dr. George Tiller and the closure of a clinic that provided vital medical services for women. Those women unable to travel to the remaining clinics will face enormous hardships, financial and medical, including the possibility of death.



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