

Closure of Appleton, Wisconsin abortion clinic leaves state with two centers

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27 August 2016

Planned Parenthood has announced it will close its clinic in Appleton, Wisconsin, the only center providing abortion services for the central and northern part of the state, due to security concerns.

This leaves only the clinics in Milwaukee and Madison to provide pregnancy terminations for the 1.3 million women of childbearing age in Wisconsin. Each center is over 100 miles (161 kilometers) from the city of Appleton.

Wisconsin's state health care program does not fund abortions, per federal law. The state does offer a family planning waiver, which is available to all low-income women. This waiver is commonly used at clinics like Planned Parenthood to ensure contraception and women's health needs are met for free. Planned Parenthood offers all of their services on a sliding-scale fee basis.

Planned Parenthood has been a target of right-wing attacks by the media, politicians and through individual violent attacks. Murders of abortion doctors and intimidation tactics have been carried out by vigilantes nationwide, most recently in November last year when a gunman opened fire in a Planned Parenthood facility in Colorado Springs, Colorado, killing three people.

Legislatures in Louisiana, Texas, Alabama, Kansas, Missouri, Oklahoma, Florida, Arizona and Wisconsin have attempted to defund Planned Parenthood in an effort to block the abortion services being provided. The majority of the services provided by Planned Parenthood are for women's health, including breast and cervical cancer screening.

The importance of free and low-cost reproductive health services to poor and working class women cannot be understated. Moreover, the right to an abortion is constitutionally protected under the 1973 landmark *Roe v. Wade* decision of the US Supreme

Court.

Official poverty rates in the northern counties of Wisconsin range from 9 to 15 percent, with child poverty over 20 percent. The share of children in the state receiving free or reduced cost school lunches is over 40 percent. Food insecurity is high, with about 20 percent of households needing Foodshare (food stamps) and 16 percent needing to visit food pantries, according to the 2013 WestCAP Community Needs report, a survey of social conditions in several northern Wisconsin counties.

The economy in northern Wisconsin has historically been more depressed than the rest of the state. While agriculture enriched the southern part of Wisconsin, forestry and mining have been the dominant industries of the north. In recent years the forestry and paper industry as well as mining have seen significant job losses and negative growth.

The most recent economic boost to Northern Wisconsin has been the rightly maligned frac sand mining industry. But with the decline in global oil prices, sand mining companies have laid off over 500 workers in northern Wisconsin since 2015.

Decades of take-backs have gutted the social gains of the 20th century in Wisconsin and across the US. Foodshare (food stamps), Medicaid, welfare, unemployment benefits and other government programs providing support for the poor have been purposefully rendered impotent.

The Democrats and Republicans have been united in clawing back social gains, including abortion rights, which were enshrined the 1973 *Roe v. Wade* ruling. In that same year, the Hyde Amendment banned federal Medicaid funding for abortion except in cases of rape, incest, or where the mother's life is in danger. The reactionary measure has been renewed in subsequent

years, including in the Affordable Care Act.

Democratic President Bill Clinton's infamous welfare reform of 1996 cut off large numbers of single mothers from welfare cash assistance and forced them into the workforce. Welfare reform also introduced substantial funding for "abstinence only" education in public schools, leaving many young people clueless about contraception and unprepared for social reality.

Even more restrictive conditions have been applied to abortion rights at the state level, including mandatory waiting periods for pregnancy termination, "counseling" sessions to pressure and manipulate women into not having an abortion, and requirements for clinics to have physicians with hospital admitting privileges. These tactics have not reduced the national abortion rate, nor have they increased patient safety for outpatient procedures widely regarded as safe.

Despite their complicity in rolling back abortion rights, the Democratic Party has proclaimed itself the only means for defending women's rights. The Democrats peddle the lie that as the first woman president, Hillary Clinton, a candidate overwhelmingly supported by Wall Street and increasingly by so-called mainstream Republicans, would advance the social and economic position of all women. The hypocrisy has only intensified since Clinton picked as her running mate Virginia Senator Tim Kaine, a conservative Democrat who has declared himself "personally anti-abortion."

The right to abortion and reproductive health care is not fundamentally a gender but a class issue. The policies of the Obama administration, foremost Obamacare, have not secured the reproductive rights of poor and working class women but have only put them further out of reach.



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