

# Must Mr. Reagan Tolerate Abortion Clinic Violence?

By Warren M. Hern

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**OP-ED**

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BOULDER, Colo. – President Reagan’s affable tolerance of anti-abortion violence threatens more than the women who need abortions and the doctors who perform them. It threatens the fabric of civilized society. The Administration’s failure to condemn in any but the mildest words those who have bombed and set fire to abortion clinics has given these tactics respectability – even as some anti-abortion leaders have begun to shrink from the results of their own harsh words.

In a National Right to Life newsletter in February, the organization’s president, John C. Wilke, issued a fervent appeal to the abortion clinic bombers. “Don’t do it,” he said, arguing that bombing clinics will “hurt our cause.” Mr. Wilke has also been quarreling editorially with radical anti-abortion leaders Paul Brown and Joseph Scheidler, who have been trying to get Mr. Reagan to pardon the abortion clinic bombers.

But Mr. Wilke’s concerns seem largely tactical. Further, he ignores the fact that his own inflammatory rhetoric contributes heavily to the atmosphere of violence. Mr. Wilke presides over an organization and a publication that regularly portrays doctors and other professionals involved with abortion services as “murderers.” The newsletter’s review of my textbook, “Abortion Practice” called it “Nazi-style medicine.” Mr. Wilke and other anti-abortion leaders regularly use words like “violence” and “butchery” to describe what goes on in abortion clinics.

Meanwhile, Mr. Reagan honors men like Mr. Wilke and Mr. Scheidler with invitations to the White House. Mr. Scheidler, confident that he has the most popular man in America on his side, goes forth to harass women, doctors and others connected with abortion with the most abusive language imaginable.

Mr. Scheidler stood on the sidewalk in front of my office last Oct. 21 and 22 calling me a “murderer...hit man...paid executioner.” During the next two weeks, I received a half dozen threats on my life. We had several bomb threats, and the harassment continues every day.

In a recent brief survey of abortion clinics and physicians belonging to the National Abortion Federation, I found that 30 percent of the 150 respondents had experienced serious violence (including total destruction of facilities, sometimes more than once); 26 percent have been visited by Mr. Scheidler; 45 percent have experienced increasingly aggressive harassment, frequently associated with his visits; 35 percent have lost insurance coverage; and 26 percent have received death threats or bomb threats or both. A live bomb was delivered to a Portland, Ore., clinic in December, and three more were found in the city’s postal system the same day.

More than 40 abortion clinics and doctors’ offices have been firebombed since Mr. Reagan took office in 1981. A Toledo, Ohio, clinic was burned down on May 20. A Wichita, Kan. Clinic was bombed June 9. At a national conference of anti-abortion activists in Appleton, Wis., held in 1985, participants wore buttons saying “Have a Blast.”

## He has given it a kind of respectability

Members of Mr. Reagan's Administration have said that there is no national conspiracy to terrorize abortion service providers. Those of us who are providing abortion services think otherwise. Having a brick hurled through the window of a doctor's waiting room where patients sit may seem like small potatoes, but it's terrorism. Listening to the police tell you that you must now drive home a different way each night and check the mail and your automobile for bombs is frightening. An obscene death threat at 3 A.M. is terrorism.

It is even more frightening to know that this kind of activity receives the tacit support of a powerful Government. The scheduled speakers at this week's National Right to Life meeting in Denver included Senate majority leader Bob Dole, Representative Jack Kemp and the Rev. Marion G. (Pat) Robertson, the television evangelist. All are contenders for the 1988 Republican Presidential nomination.

Mr. Wilke's sanctimonious appeal to the bombers is self-serving and hypocritical. Anti-abortion activists are plainly using terrorism, subversion and repression to interfere with the provision of abortion services. We are being terrorized by Mr. Reagan's followers, and we are terrified. Death threats in the night and bombs are real and dangerous. □

*Warren M. Hern, a physician, is director of the Boulder Abortion Clinic*