

Abortion Clinics Under Siege

by Warren M. Hern

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IN RONALD REAGAN'S "City on a Hill," abortion clinics must have bullet-proof windows. Doctors who do abortions must have bodyguards. It's "Morning in America," but women who want safe abortions must be protected by armed private security guards.

On Friday, Feb. 5, 1988, my arriving patients were greeted by bullet holes in the front windows of my waiting room. Five shots from an automatic weapon were fired into the front of my office the night before. Three bullets came through the glass into the patient area. An employee working in the office narrowly escaped injury. His job: making microfilm copies of all records in case my office is bombed.

Since Ronald Reagan took office, at least 780 violent or aggressive incidents toward abortion clinics have occurred; 57 involved bombing or arson, and 14 have resulted in complete destruction of the facilities, according to the National Abortion Federation.

In 1987, the Alan Guttmacher Institute published the results of a survey of harassment of U.S. abortion service providers. Of the 400 non-hospital abortion providers, 88 percent had experienced anti-abortion harassment in 1985; 29 percent had been invaded and vandalized; 52 percent had been forced to increase security costs; 32 percent had lost malpractice insurance, and 24 percent had lost fire and casualty insurance. "In no other U.S. setting," said the AGI authors, "are health care workers likely to be threatened for providing services that are legal."

Ronald Reagan has attacked abortion in his public speeches, writings and policies. His most important recent attack was in his State of the Union message last Jan. 25. His remarks were followed five days later by issuance of severely restrictive regulations forbidding federally funded family planning clinics from even mentioning abortion to patients.

On Feb. 2, the Planned Parenthood Federation and several clinics in Colorado filed suit to enjoin the regulations. One day later, Pat Robertson, on the Republican campaign trail in New Hampshire, said Planned Parenthood was trying to develop a "master race."

The next day, shots were fired at my office, the Boulder Abortion Clinic.

I find it necessary from time to time to work under the protection of armed private security guards. We have installed several layers of bullet-proof windows and other expensive security measures. We are now more secure, but less free.

Ronald Reagan is the first American president to make opposition to abortion a prime tenet of his political appeal, and he is the first to invoke both official and unofficial strategies to accomplish his goal.

On Nov. 7, 1980, at his first press conference after he was elected, Reagan announced one of his primary goals as outlawing abortion. On his Inauguration Day in January 1981, he met with leaders of anti-abortion groups. He was the first president to recognize and address the annual March for Life in Washington, D.C. in 1985.

The Reagan/Bush administration has shown implacable hostility to reproductive freedom and to the right to have a safe abortion in particular. The 1988 Republican platform is the third opposing abortion, and George Bush has ardently courted the anti-abortion vote.

All this since 1980 has divided the country even more deeply about a difficult, painful, personal issue that has no place in partisan politics. It has produced intolerable problems for those of us who try to provide safe abortion services for women who need them. It has done nothing to lessen our determination to do so.

It has emboldened the self-righteous and intolerant opposition to continue its harassment. The newly formed "Operation Rescue" movement has demonstrated in New York, Pennsylvania and on June 19 began a series of aggressive demonstrations in Atlanta led by the Rev. Jerry Falwell.

It may be morning in the Oval office, but out here in America, it's a nightmare.

Dr. Warren M. Hern, a physician, is director of the Boulder Abortion Clinic and author of "Abortion Practice".