

# Repressive abortion policy of Owens and GOP is similar to Taliban's 9<sup>th</sup> century attitudes

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Guest Columnist

## *Commentary*

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It's a long way from the smoldering ruins of the World Trade Center to a hand-lettered message of hate in the steep, rocky driveway of an abortion doctor in the Colorado mountains. But the message is the same: "Do what we tell you to do, or we will kill you."

My thoughts on the morning of Sept. 11, as my return flight from Toronto was suddenly canceled, were on the safety of my friends who worked in and near the World Trade Center buildings. I was also concerned for the safety and welfare of members of my medical staff, who were no stranded with me outside our country. We spent the rest of the day watching in horror the reports of death and destruction.

While still in Toronto, I learned from a neighbor that someone had posted an anti-abortion sign in my driveway a few days previously. The last time this happened, the signs were posted by a man who had stalked me with the intention of killing me. That was shortly after two of my medical colleagues had been assassinated and two others had been wounded, one critically. In 1998, another medical colleague was assassinated as he stood in his kitchen talking with his family.

The violence directed against abortion clinic workers during the past 25 years does not begin to compare to the madness that took the lives of nearly 3,000 people on Sept 11, but the attitude and philosophy of both kinds of attackers and of those making threats is essentially the same. It is a fanatic, totalitarian, mindlessness that justifies any action, any level of violence, no matter how hateful against humanity itself, to dominate and control the actions of others.

For Usama bin-Laden and al-Qaeda, America represents an idea that they hate: freedom. Their attack on the most visible American symbols of male potency, the Trade Center towers and the Pentagon, reveals the most primitive motive in the attack: to control and humiliate our society utterly by a colossal and symbolic emasculation.

The attacks on abortion doctors and clinic workers are not fundamentally about abortion: they are about power. The attacks on Sept. 11 had no reasonable or logical agenda, no civilized policy consequence that could be justified, and no military objective. They rose from a furious and inchoate will to power that destroys all in its path, including meaning itself. But hatred for the freedom the West gives to women is an important part of this rage.

In 1994, I made a presentation concerning the public health aspects of abortion at the UN Conference on Population and Development in Cairo. The Egyptian government made security at the conference tight because of local politics. I was advised to wear a bullet-proof vest because American anti-abortion radicals might be present. They were. But there was a surprise.

At the end of my talk, which was packed, members of the Islamic Brotherhood confronted me, shaking their fists under my nose and asking me if I was “ready to die.” Their behavior was alarming, and their faces were twisted with hate. They saw me as representing a threat to the domination of women by men and as a purveyor of unwanted freedom and licentiousness for women in their society. I was afraid for my life. Accompanied by security guards, I left by a back exit.

The Egyptian Islamic Brotherhood has something in common with the American anti-abortion fanatics. For both, I represent an idea that they hate: freedom. Worse, I represent, along with others, a movement that threatens male dominance and gives freedom to women.

If this hatred of freedom for women were confined to the Taliban of Afghanistan, it would be bad enough. But one American political party has used hatred of freedom for women to gain power at all levels in our country.

Since 1980, the leadership of the Republican Party has been dominated by anti-abortion fanatics and those who seek their votes. Republicans gained control of the White House and Senate in 1980 and the Presidency in 1988 with that support. Republicans took control of the Congress in 1994 with strong anti-abortion support. George W. Bush came to power with the backing of the radical right and anti-abortion extremists in the Republican Party. And so did Gov. Bill Owens of Colorado in 1998.

In his first year of office, Bill Owens cut off state funding for family planning services provided by Rocky Mountain Planned Parenthood and Boulder Valley Women’s Health Center, both non-profit groups that also provide abortion services. Owens’s subsequent actions have clarified his determination to implement the anti-abortion policies of his most radical supporters, even though it means that poor women throughout Colorado will suffer from the lack of women’s reproductive health services of all kinds. These include cancer detection services and contraception to prevent unplanned pregnancies that may end in abortion. It is a backward, repressive policy that is closer to the 9<sup>th</sup> century attitudes of the Taliban than to Colorado in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. It is a blatant use of state power to deprive women of their freedom, health, and modern lives.

I don’t think that Bill Owens put the anti-abortion sign in my driveway, nor do I think he would agree with that act. But his objectives are the same as the guy who did it.

*Note: Jan. 22, 2002 marked the 29<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the US Supreme Court’s Roe vs. Wade decision legalizing abortion in the country.*

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