



Kansas clinic under fire from anti-abortion activists

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A “for sale” sign is posted outside the Kansas medical clinic formerly operated by murdered abortion provider Dr. George Tiller, Thursday, Oct. 7, 2010, in Wichita, Kan. (Photo by Jeff Tuttle/AP)

Tuesday morning, abortion opponents went before the Wichita City Council seeking to shut down the South Wind Women’s Center, a clinic that provides abortions. Among their complaints: The clinic draws gun violence.

This struck [some](#), including the clinic's director, Julie Burkhart, as ironic. After all, South Wind opened in April in the same building that housed George Tiller's clinic. Before Tiller was murdered in church by an anti-abortion extremist in 2009, there was indeed documented gun violence in front of the clinic—by Shelley Shannon, an abortion opponent who shot Tiller.

“That’s the only gun violence that I’m aware of,” Burkhart, who has been fielding attempts to shut down the clinic since before it even opened, told MSNBC. “We talk to law enforcement regularly and I’ve never had any complaints of gun violence.”

Reached by phone, Mark S. Gietzen, chairman of the Kansas Coalition for Life and one of the petitioners, had a rather different account. He said he and his fellow volunteers had counted 18 incidents involving guns — none actually discharged — between 2004 and 2009, two of which were security staff employed by the clinic pulling guns out of a holster, Gietzen said.

He also counts as “gun incidents” the guns toted by male associates angry at women in their lives getting abortions, including, he said, a “high-powered rifle” pulled on Gietzen himself by a man angry at his anti-abortion protesting.

“I talked him out of killing me,” Gietzen told MSNBC. “That’s why I’m still here.”

But if much of that alleged violence was directly related to the presence of the protesters, wouldn't it make more sense to restrict their very own protests rather than shut down the clinic? Gietzen was unmoved.

“The fact is that this is typical about what happens at the abortion clinic,” he said. “Abortion clinics are going to bring that sort of clientele. You’re not going to have a mad husband or a Shelley Shannon showing up at a dental office.”

Gietzen insisted with some vehemence that Shannon and Scott Roeder, the man who ultimately killed Tiller, shouldn't be linked to his own anti-abortion activities. “We comply with the law,” he said. Shannon and Roeder, he said, “are law-breaking people.” You could say they're on the pro-choice side: If we choose to kill it's our choice to do whatever we want.”

Gietzen also blamed the clinic's own staff, saying that the security guards had refused to cooperate with the protesters as Tillers' had, tipping each other off about major gatherings. And Gietzen charged that an escort—tasked with protecting women en route to the clinic—had been “harassing” the protesters, including “making babies cry” and knocking down signs.

And then he issued what sounded a lot like a threat. “Even a well-meaning dog will bite at some point in time if you keep antagonizing it,” Gietzen said.

Asked what he meant by that, Gietzen said, “We have this concealed carry thing where half the people in Kansas are walking around with firearms.”

“The way this guy acts, I’m afraid that someone’s going to shoot him,” Gietzen continued, referring to the escort. “He’s asking for it. I don’t want for that to happen...It’s not good for the cause.”

Gietzen refused to say whether he or his fellow protesters are armed. “That’s not a polite question to ask an individual,” Gietzen said. “That’s why it’s concealed.”

While no date is set for a response to the petition to rezone the clinic, Burkhart said she thought it was unlikely to prevail. And if it did, she added, “We will sue the city and we will win.”

<http://tv.msnbc.com/2013/08/13/kansas-clinic-under-fire-from-anti-abortion-protesters/>