

Kan. abortion groups disagree over concealed carry

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WICHITA, Kan. Two anti-abortion groups in Kansas have distanced themselves from comments made by the leader of another anti-abortion group suggesting the state's new concealed carry law could increase the threat of shootings outside a Wichita abortion clinic.

Mark Gietzen, chairman of the Kansas Coalition for Life, said in a recent news release that the threat of shootings at South Wind Women's Center in Wichita was enhanced by the Republican-led Legislature's adoption of conceal-and-carry law expanding ways for people to take concealed handguns into public, The Topeka Capital-Journal reported (<http://bit.ly/19k28Xs>).

Gietzen said an influx of advocates with concealed guns around the new Wichita clinic meant homes would "continuously be in the line of fire." Both Kansans for Life and Operation Rescue decried the remarks.

"With the new conceal-carry laws enacted since the closure of the Tiller abortion facility, the number of armed people present on site will likely be higher — not lower," Gietzen said. "South Wind escorts antagonize and provocatively taunt the pro-life volunteers on the site in ways that make serious violence more likely."

Wichita-based nonprofit Trust Women Foundation Inc. opened the South Wind clinic earlier this year in the building owned by slain abortion provider George Tiller. The property had been used for medical purposes since 1937 and was zoned to allow a medical office when the abortion rights group bought it.

Julie Burkhart, Trust Women's executive director, told The Associated Press on Thursday that the clinic doesn't have escorts, though it does film what goes on around the clinic and has "legal observers." She said there's been a single, unfounded, complaint to police about an observer visiting a table set up by abortion opponents, as well as comments from a lawn care provider in response to verbal harassment by protesters.

As for Gietzen's contentions about taunting and potential violence, she said, "This just seems to be fabricated."

Kansans for Life, Operation Rescue and Kansas Coalition for Life have asked the Wichita City Council to change the zoning laws in order to drive out the clinic. The council took no action Tuesday.

Mary Kay Culp, executive director of Kansans for Life, said Gietzen's comments about guns were an attempt to scare City Council members into action.

"He said things nobody should say," Culp said.

Culp said her organization wasn't part of a coalition with Gietzen's group.

"Kansans for Life disagrees with and wishes to completely separate ourselves from Mr. Gietzen's controversial remarks citing the potential for gun violence at abortion clinics as a reason to rezone the South Wind clinic," Culp said.

Cheryl Sullenger, senior policy adviser at Operation Rescue, said linking a zoning debate to concealed guns and violence at abortion clinics is inappropriate. She said while Operation Rescue and KCFL have similar goals they aren't working as a formal coalition.

"I never mentioned gun violence in my comments to the City Council. I don't think I would have done that," Sullenger said.

Information from: The Topeka (Kan.) Capital-Journal, <http://www.cjonline.com>

Read more here: <http://www.charlotteobserver.com/2013/08/15/4238860/kan-abortion-groups-disagree-over.html#storylink=cpy>

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