Clinics Arsoned/Bombed 1997

Status of Investigations
See reverse for details on incidents

Feminist Majority Foundation Urges FACE Investigation
On September 25th, the morning of President Clinton's speech at Little Rock's Central High School, bomb scares were investigated in two local abortion clinics. According to news reports, the suspect rented two Ryder trucks, mimicking the terrorist tactic of the Oklahoma City bombing, and left them parked in front of the clinics. Upon arrival, bomb-sniffing dogs detected what investigators treated as explosive devices. Before finding that both trucks contained only road flares, the clinics and several surrounding buildings were evacuated. Additionally, a clinic worker at a third clinic found the door locks tarred, barring entry.

Eleanor Smeal, President of the Feminist Majority Foundation, urged this latest terrorist attempt to disrupt clinic operations be treated as a violation of the Freedom of Access to Clinic Entrances (FACE) law. Smeal stated, “We strongly believe these bomb scares should be investigated as FACE violations. This must be viewed as a terrorist attack which disrupted clinic operations and resulted in the evacuation of not only the clinics, but of surrounding businesses and government agencies as well.”

Anti-choice extremists have historically targeted the Little Rock clinics, especially since Clinton became President in 1992. In 1994, these same clinics were targeted when national anti-choice extremists converged on the city to challenge the constitutionality of FACE.

Griffin Alloges Another Gunman Involved in Murder of Pensacola Doctor
In an interview with the Boston Globe, Michael Griffin, who is serving a life sentence for fatally shooting Dr. David Gunn outside a Pensacola women's clinic in March, 1993, asserts a second gunman was involved in the attack. Griffin claims that “his shots were triggered by an initial burst from a second gunman” at the anti-abortion demonstration taking place at the time of the murder. According to the September 28th article, although Griffin does not deny his involvement in the shooting, and says he still “fervently embraces the anti-abortion cause,” he feels “he was betrayed by some of its adherents.” Griffin charges he was “framed by a conspiracy involving his associates in the anti-abortion movement, police officers, prosecutors, and his own attorney,” and through a series of motions, has been seeking a new trial. He asserts the “prosecution covered up the arrest of another suspect on the day of the shooting.” According to the Globe, Griffin “contends that descriptions of a man taken into custody by the police immediately after the shooting fit Don Gratton,” a leader in the anti-abortion movement in Pensacola. On a computer printout of the police calls that day, Griffin’s arrest is numbered 93-014390. The prior number, 93-014389 is missing from the printout which Griffin believes proves that “police wiped out records of another arrest.” Griffin said he is not prepared to charge that Gratton fired on Gunn, but he is convinced Gratton was detained and questioned by police. Gratton denies being detained.

Atlanta Bombing Suspect
FBI agents working to solve the three bombings in Atlanta, GA - the Olympic Park bombing, the bombing of Atlanta Northside Family Planning Services and the bombing of a gay/lesbian nightclub - are questioning the suspect in last week’s fatal shooting of a police officer, but they are inclined to think he is too “hotheaded” to be the bomber, according to a statement in the Atlanta Journal Constitution by Jack Daulton, special agent in charge of the Atlanta FBI office. The FBI found bomb components and militia materials at the suspect’s (Paul Lawler) home.

Orlando, FL • December 27-30
Operation Rescue plans protests at local abortion clinics and at Disney World.

Washington, DC • January 22-24, 1998
Operation Rescue National, Christian Defense Coalition and others to stage protests at the Supreme Court on the anniversary of Roe v. Wade.
Arsons/ Attempted Arsons

Portland, OR • October 19, 1997
An arson occurred at All Women’s Health Services clinic just before midnight. Cardboard was taken from the dumpster, placed next to the building and set on fire. Only the exterior of the clinic suffered damages, which were estimated to be $5,000.

Tuscaloosa, AL • July 22, 1997
West Alabama Women’s Center sustained massive damage, estimated at over $250,000, after a firebombing gutted the interior of the building. A flammable petroleum-based liquid and a lighted flare were dropped down a vent in the roof. The clinic was a target of threats/demonstrations in the past.

Portland, OR • May 27, 1997
The Lovejoy Surgicenter, a frequent target of anti-abortion protests, was set on fire suffering $250,000 in damage. The clinic received several bomb threats from 5/17-19. The caller left similar threats at the Feminist Women’s Health Centers in Portland and Eugene as well as the Center for Choice in Yakima, WA and Women’s Health Care in Boise, ID.

Yakima, WA • May 7, 1997
Attempted arson at Planned Parenthood Central WA's Yakima Family Planning Clinic.

Bozeman, MT • April 2, 1997
J ohn Yankowski was arrested for setting fire to the offices of Dr. Susan Wicklund. Damage estimated at $2,000.

North Hollywood, CA • March 7, 1997
A “Molotov Cocktail” was thrown through a window at the Family Planning Assoc. Medical Group causing $1,000 in damage.

Greensboro, NC • March 6, 1997
The Piedmont-Carolina Medical clinic was set on fire causing $50,000 in damage.

Falls Church, VA • February 18, 1997
J ames Mitchell was sentenced to 10 years for setting a Falls Church abortion clinic on fire. No one was injured, but the fire caused an estimated $25,000 in damages.

Bombings/ Attempted Bombings

Little Rock, AR • September 25, 1997
Three women’s clinics were targets of anti-abortion activity as President Clinton visited the city on the anniversary of the intergration of Central High School. At both Little Rock Family Planning Clinic and Women’s Community Health Center, Ryder trucks were parked outside the clinics, blocking their driveways. Police bomb squads responded, along with the ATF and FBI. The clinics were evacuated. Residue from road flares was found inside the trucks. A third clinic, Arkansas Health Counseling for Women had its locks tarred shut.

Bakersfield, CA • March 17, 1997
Peter Howard was arrested after driving a truck loaded with 13 gas cans and 3 propane tanks into the Family Planning Associates Clinic. Firefighters doused the flames before the tanks exploded.

Atlanta, GA • February 21, 1997
One bomb exploded and another was discovered and detonated by authorities at an Atlanta lesbian nightclub; five people were injured. A few days later, a letter from the “Army of God” claimed credit for both the February 21 and January 16 clinic bombings.

Atlanta, GA • January 16, 1997
Two bombs were set off at Northside Family Planning Services. The first bomb destroyed most of the interior of the clinic. The second bomb, one hour later, was placed near the parking lot and appeared to be designed to kill rescue workers, law enforcement personnel, or clinic staff forced outside the building.

Tulsa, Oklahoma • January 16 & 19, 1997
Two separate bomb incidents at the Reproductive Services and Adoption Affiliates clinic caused damage to the interior of the building. On February 2, 1997, intruder shot up office and medical equipment inside the clinic.

Arrests/ Convictions

Eau Claire, WI • October 15, 1997
J ames Nerdrum was sentenced to up to 60 years in a mental institution and 40 years imprisonment after making hundreds of bomb threats, slashing tires and other acts of vandalism. Police say the 278 crimes commonly followed anti-abortion and anti-pornography themes and cost more than $182,000 in property damage and investigative costs. Nerdrum vandalized a Planned Parenthood facility, robbed two video stores and a gas station.

Spokane, WA • October 1, 1997
A federal jury convicted Brian Rattigan of conspiring with three others in the bombing of a Planned Parenthood clinic and robbery of a nearby bank on July 12, 1996. Rattigan and his co-conspirators, who used the name “Phineas Priests,” shared anti-government views and used the Old Testament to justify violence. His co-defendants, Verne Jay Merrell, Charles Barbee, and Robert Berry, were convicted in July and face mandatory life prison terms at their sentencing next month.

Sacramento, California • October, 1997
Richard Thomas Andrews indicted for setting three fires to clinics in Redding and Chico, was identified in papers filed by prosecutors in federal court as a long-sought serial arsonist who has operated in the Western states since 1992. Andrews is allegedly responsible for at least eight torch incidents at seven clinics in California, Montana, Idaho and Wyoming.

September 24, 1997
The Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals issued a 2-1 ruling upholding the constitutionality of the FACE Act in United States v. Bird. In this case, Frank Bird was convicted under FACE for throwing a rock at an abortion provider’s wind-shield while yelling “I’m going to get you, I’m going to kill you.” The Fifth Circuit Court also upheld Bird’s sentence of one year imprisonment, followed by one year of supervised release on the condition that he stay 1,000 feet away from any abortion clinic.

Jersey City, NJ • September 26, 1997
Militant anti-abortion protester Joan Andrews Bell was arrested after being “wanted” since 1990 for trespassing at an abortion clinic in Pittsburgh. She has been arrested over 200 times for her anti-abortion protest activity.

Lincolnwood, IL • September 13, 1997
The Aid to Women Clinic was blocked by participants of the Pro-Life Action Network (PLAN) conference in Milwaukee, WI, which had just concluded. The following were arrested, charged with disorderly conduct, cited and released: Howard Heldreth, James Sweatt, Don Treshman, Ed Martin, Joan Andrews Bell, Amy Boissonneault, Clint Murphy, Robert Rothleisberger, William Pitts, and two juveniles.

Cincinnati/ Dayton, OH • July 15, 1997
Four anti-abortion protesters were arrested outside the Women’s Medical Center in the suburb of Kettering for blocking the clinic entrance. The protesters refused to identify themselves upon arrest, stating their names as either Jane or John Doe.

Englewood, NJ • March 15, 1997
Police arrested 17 anti-abortion activists at the Metropolitan Medical Associates clinic after they stormed a police barricade. Those arrested were charged with violating a court order, and criminal trespass.