

Pro-life leaders, groups condemn murder of Kansas abortion doctor

WASHINGTON – Pro-life advocates universally condemned the May 31 murder of a Kansas abortion doctor, with officials from several U.S. right-to-life groups saying such extreme acts only hurt the pro-life cause.

“We condemn this lawless act of violence,” said Charmaine Yoest, president of the Americans United for Life. “The foundational right to life that our work is dedicated to extends to everyone. Whoever is responsible for this reprehensible violence must be brought to justice under the law.”

Dr. George Tiller, 67, of Wichita, Kan., was fatally shot while serving as an usher at the city’s Formation Lutheran Church during morning services, according to The Associated Press.

A suspect in the shooting, identified as Scott Roeder, 51, was being held without bail on one count of first-degree murder and two counts of aggravated assault, the AP reported June 1.

In 1996, a 38-year-old man with the same name was charged in Topeka, Kan., with criminal use of explosives for having bomb components in his car trunk and sentenced to 24 months of probation, the AP reported. However, the conviction was overturned on appeal the next year after a higher court said evidence against him was seized by law enforcement officers during an illegal search of his car, the AP reported.

Tiller – whose clinic is one of just a few in the nation where abortions are performed after the 21st week of pregnancy – had been a target of abortion opponents since the 1970s. He was shot in both arms by a protester in 1993 and his clinic was bombed in 1985.

Speaking on behalf of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, Cardinal Justin Rigali of Philadelphia, chairman of the bishops’ Committee on Pro-Life Activities, expressed profound regret upon learning of Tiller’s shooting death.

"Our bishops' conference and all its members have repeatedly and publicly denounced all forms of violence in our society, including abortion as well as the misguided resort to violence by anyone opposed to abortion," Cardinal Rigali said in a June 1 statement.

"Such killing is the opposite of everything we stand for, and everything we want our culture to stand for: respect for the life of each and every human being from its beginning to its natural end. We pray for Dr. Tiller and his family," he said.

"The pro-life movement works to protect the right to life and increase respect for human life," said David N. O'Steen, executive director of the National Right to Life Committee, the largest pro-life group in the U.S. "The unlawful use of violence is directly contrary to that goal."

President Barack Obama, who supports legal abortion, also expressed his dismay at the shooting death of the abortion doctor and said such violence wouldn't be tolerated.

"I am shocked and outraged by the murder of Dr. George Tiller as he attended church services," Obama said in a statement released May 31. "However profound our differences as Americans over difficult issues such as abortion, they cannot be resolved by heinous acts of violence."