

Operation Rescue

The anti-choice movement has historically aligned itself with violent extremists. Eric Rudolph is on the FBI's Ten Most Wanted list for murdering a police officer in the bombing of a medical clinic in Alabama. He has been clearly linked to the anti-government militia movement. Paul Hill is serving a life sentence for the murder of a doctor in Florida. He is believed to be a member of the shadowy, violent Phineas Priesthood, a white supremacist group that requires its members to kill doctors, racial minorities, or gays and lesbians for entry into the "priesthood." The underground Army of God has a long history of terrorizing women's health clinics and praises those who murder doctors. It also distributes a manual containing information on how to use chemical weapons and explosives.

Operation Rescue – Randall Terry

Randall Terry founded Operation Rescue in 1988, and the group began organizing massive protests in front of women's clinics shortly thereafter. The group continued these sidewalk demonstrations throughout the late 1980s and early 1990s. An example of this is the 1991 "Summer of Mercy" blockades in Kansas. During this seven-week protest, police made 2,600 arrests involving 1,500 protestors.

Terry courted and recruited from the radical fringe of the Religious Right and the anti-government movement. He served as the Northeast Regional Co-Chairman for the U.S. Taxpayers Party in 1994 and spoke at its convention. Now known as the Constitution Party, the group combines fundamentalist Christianity with themes of the anti-government movement.

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, Larry Pratt helped Operation Rescue skirt a court-ordered freeze of the group's asset. Pratt's Committee to Protect the Family Foundation funneled money for Operation Rescue through its bank accounts and paid the group's bills. Pratt was one of the catalysts for the anti-government movement that emerged in the early 1990s. He made headlines in 1996 when Pat Buchanan was forced to dismiss him from Buchanan's presidential campaign. Pratt, who served as the campaign's co-chairman, became a liability to Buchanan when the press discovered Pratt's ties to militia members and white supremacists.

The call to violence has never been far from Operation Rescue. Terry began telling people in 1995 to "take up the sword" and "overthrow the tyrannical regime that oppresses them." Joe Foreman, one of the co-founders of Operation Rescue, signed a petition saying, "The use of lethal force is justified if it is carried out for the purpose of protecting the lives of unborn children." Another Operation activist said, "It is your God-given right to destroy any man or woman calling themselves doctors who willingly slaughter innocent children." Michael Bray masterminded a series of bombings in 1984. His targets were abortion providers and choice groups. Following the assassination of Dr. David Gunn in 1993, Bray approvingly said it was a

“rational way of following the Operation Rescue dictum: ‘If you believe abortion is murder, then act like it.’”

Terry has also served as leadership for the Coalition on Revival. Started in 1982, the group pushes Christian Reconstruction. Reconstruction believes civil law should be identical to Biblical law. The group believes that no government can exist separate from God, and Christians must hold office to push religious doctrine. Terry has called for a theocratic state founded on the Ten Commandments and a “culture based on Biblical Law.”

Operation Save America – Flip Benham

In 1994, Flip Benham took over as the leader of Operation Rescue, and the group changed its name to Operation Save America in 1999. The change in name coincided with a broadening of the group’s agenda. Instead of focusing solely on abortion, it would now oppose gays and the absence of God in public schools.

Benham has had many tussles with law enforcement in his Operation activism. He was arrested for obstructing traffic and throwing advertising materials onto the street while protesting the Walt Disney Company’s tolerance of gays in Florida in 1997.

In 1998, Benham and Operation Rescue were fined \$10 million for stalking and harassing an obstetrician and his wife in Texas. The doctor and his wife were followed and received death threats. Operation also protested in front of the doctor’s office and wife’s place of employment. These practices lasted for almost a year. Benham was ordered to pay \$170,000 of the judgment.

Also in 1998, Benham received a six-month prison term for a demonstration in front of a high school in Lynchburg, Virginia. Benham led a group of 150 students from Liberty University, founded by the Rev. Jerry Falwell, in the protest. The protestors blocked students from entering and exiting the high school, as they passed out literature and held up placards with pictures of alleged aborted fetuses.

In 2000, members of Operation Save America disrupted the service at a predominately gay church in Texas and were convicted in March 2002. Benham tried to stop the minister from administering communion during the service. He was not one of the activists that had charges filed against him.

Benham joined with Religious Right icons Jerry Falwell and Pat Robertson is blaming the terrorist attack of 9/11 on the moral decay of America. Benham focused specifically on abortion. Benham said: “Because of this open rebellion and blatant disregard for the law of God and for life, our nation is suffering under the remedial judgments of God himself. Blood is coursing down the corridors of our schools, home, workplaces, and streets.”

Missionaries to the Preborn - Matthew Trehwella

Trehwella founded Missionaries to the Preborn, his own version of Operation Rescue, in 1990. Based in Wisconsin, the organization has gained notoriety for its anti-choice methods, which

include picket signs of alleged aborted fetuses. However, there's a side to Trehwella and Missionaries to the Preborn that focuses on more than graphic signs and rhetoric. They have aligned themselves with the militia movement and most violent fringe of anti-choice activists.

In 1993, Trehwella signed a declaration stating that murdering abortion providers was legitimate. The document said Michael Griffin use of "lethal force" was "justifiable" when he murdered Florida doctor David Gunn.

Newsweek reported in 1994 that Trehwella was one of a half-dozen anti-choice activists being investigated as conspirators in the death of Florida doctor John Britton. The article sites an FBI document it obtained.

In 1994, Trehwella was a featured speaker at the U.S. Taxpayers Party's Convention. This was the same convention that Randall Terry of Operation Rescue addressed. He advocated forming church-based militias, and said, "This Christmas I want you to do the most loving thing, and I want you to buy each of your children an SKS rifle and 500 rounds of ammunition." He also recommended that parents teach their children how to assemble a rifle while blindfolded.

In June 2001, Trehwella and Missionaries demonstrated in six Montana cities as part of its "Unmasking Planned Parenthood Western States Tour." The protestors numbered about fifty.

Constitution Party of Montana – Jonathan Martin

In the wake of Missionaries to the Preborn's Montana tour, Jonathan Martin helped start Pro-Life Great Falls. The group has consistently held protests at the Planned Parenthood clinic in Great Falls, complete with the vulgar signs traditionally used by Missionaries. Martin has been listed as the contact point for Benham's tour.

Martin is also Chairman of the Constitution Party of Montana. The group combines extreme Christian fundamentalism with the anti-government "patriot" movement. It endorses "unorganized militias," or groups like the Militia of Montana. It also opposes abortion even in cases of rape in incest. Martin is running for the Montana Legislature from House District 43.

The Constitution Party of Montana is affiliated with the national Constitution Party. The national party has attracted the likes of Matthew Trehwella and Randall Terry under its former name, the U.S. Taxpayers Party [see above].

During his campaign for the Montana Legislature in 2000, Martin attacked Montana Right to Life for endorsing George W. Bush, because Bush had appointed a "pro-abortion, pro-sodomite" woman to a judgeship in Texas. Montana Right to Life still endorsed him. He also said gathering signatures to get the Constitution Party of Montana on the ballot was like "ministering and witnessing" to people.

The Constitution Party of Montana's first annual convention featured an anti-choice speaker from Michigan named Cal Zastrow. Zastrow encouraged adults to sponsor youth in the anti-choice movement, because they have less to lose by getting arrested.