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I'm an Abortion Provider in a Red State, and I Expect the Attacks on Reproductive Freedom to Intensify in Trump's America



By DeShawn Taylor, Founder, Desert Star Family Planning, LLC

JANUARY 16, 2017 | 11:00 AM



If we take President Donald Trump at his word, his administration will try to implement policies that will be a sustained assault on the

constitutional rights of all Americans, particularly its most vulnerable. In the run-up to Inauguration Day, the ACLU is publishing first-person essays by authors from communities who will be affected by President Trump's policies if he follows through on his promises. The inaugural post in our series, "Waking Up in Trump's America," is by DeShawn Taylor, M.D., a women's health care provider in Phoenix, Arizona, who discusses what's in store for reproductive rights in Trump's America.

In 2013, I opened my own medical practice in Phoenix, Arizona: Desert Star Family Planning, LLC. I had already been providing women's health care for years as a board-certified OB-GYN, but I wanted to pursue my vision of a private practice that fully integrates abortion care with general gynecological services.

Desert Star is exactly what I'd dreamed it would be: a home base for women's wellness; a safe space for LGBT people and teens; a warm, supportive environment where, on any given day, my staff and I may be called on to provide cancer screenings or abortion care or treatment for acute gynecological problems.

But I have been under assault by the Arizona Legislature since the day I opened, and Donald Trump's election means that things are only going to get worse. The truth is, I couldn't even bear to stay up late watching the election returns. Once the tide began turning, I turned in.

There are many ways a Trump administration can make life even harder and more dangerous for abortion providers like me. At the federal level, Congress could pass legislation with President Trump's support that would prohibit clinics that provide abortion care from receiving Medicaid reimbursement for the many nonabortion services we provide. If that happens, many of my patients will no longer be able to afford to come to me for care.

Trump's nominee for attorney general, Sen. Jeff Sessions, is openly hostile to abortion rights. The AG is responsible for enforcing the Freedom of Access to Clinic Entrances (FACE) Act and heads the National Taskforce on Violence Against Health Care Providers. But there is a serious question whether Sen. Sessions can put aside his personal beliefs and prosecute people who try to obstruct access to Desert Star and other abortion clinics or who engage in violence or threats of violence against people like me because we provide abortion care. I remember how sad and angry I felt when Congresswoman Gabby Giffords was shot, right here in Arizona. If someone can try to kill a congresswoman, why not me? Will Trump's AG take steps to protect me?

Trump has also repeatedly vowed to appoint Supreme Court justices who will overturn *Roe v. Wade*, which would mean that only the wealthiest among us could afford to travel to a state where abortion is still legal. Although it's hard to be a Black woman and an abortion provider in Arizona, I never regret leaving California to move to a state where there was a greater need for my services. I would only regret being forced to move back.

But in the immediate future, the biggest threat facing abortion providers is that state legislatures, emboldened by a Trump administration, will try to regulate us out of existence. I should know — it's what the state of Arizona has been trying to do since I first began providing reproductive health care here in 2009.

Because we provide abortion care, the state of Arizona subjects Desert Star — and our patients — to a slew of harmful regulations. Before we can provide a patient with the abortion she needs, she must first travel to the clinic to undergo an ultrasound and hear a script of state-mandated information designed to persuade her to change her mind. Then, she must wait at least 24 hours before she can return to get the procedure. She will almost certainly have to pay for this medical care

out-of-pocket because the Arizona Legislature prohibits both public and private insurance coverage for abortion under nearly all circumstances.



And that's just the start.

In recent years, the legislature has tried to force me to mislead my patients by telling them that a medication abortion can be reversed, even though there is no credible evidence to support that claim — which is why major medical associations like the American Congress of Obstetricians and Gynecologists opposed the law. They have tried to take away my ability to receive Medicaid reimbursement for nonabortion health care — including cancer screenings and contraception — that I provide to low-income women. They have tried to prevent my patients from receiving medication abortion according to the best medical evidence.

Thanks to the Arizonans who raised their voices against these draconian restrictions, and with help from allies like the [ACLU](#), we've been able to prevent many of these laws from taking effect. But 2017 will undoubtedly bring a new set of challenges.

The Arizona Legislature reconvened last week, and I have little doubt that legislators have more plans to attack women's health care. There will surely be more legislation designed to burden and stigmatize

patients who need abortion care, making it even more difficult for doctors like me to provide this essential care. I have little doubt that many other state legislatures will try to follow Arizona legislators' example and make it near impossible for a woman to get an abortion when she determines it's in her or her family's best interest. If, as I suspect, Trump's election means that more states are going to act like Arizona, then there are dark days ahead — for all of us.

When Donald Trump is sworn in on January 20, I'll be where I always am: at Desert Star, listening to my patients' concerns and helping them resolve whatever health care need they're facing. Indeed, my favorite part of being a doctor and an abortion provider is being able to give my patients relief. They come to me with a problem, and I have the tools to solve it.

But there are no easy solutions when it comes to bigotry or misogyny, as too many Arizonans know already. I can't reassure my Latina patients that their communities won't be subject to dragnet searches or my LGBT patients who are steeling themselves for heightened discrimination under a Trump Administration. I can't console my patients who fear that the right to control their bodies is in jeopardy. It is.

What I can do is promise to keep fighting every day to ensure that my patients can continue to access the high-quality, compassionate care they need and deserve. And I won't be the only one. There are thousands — millions — of people across this country who stand on the side of justice, and we aren't going anywhere.

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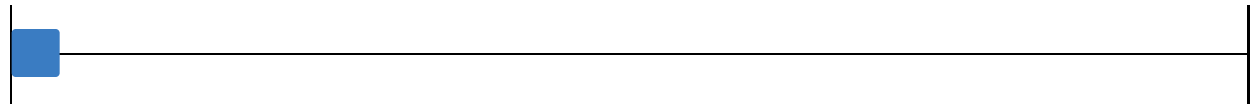


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