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The view from Trust Women's new Seattle branch is bright

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Trust Women's founder and CEO Julie Burkhart opened the Seattle arm of the nonprofit in June of last year, six months after the inauguration of President Donald Trump. (Sue Ogrocki/AP)

Trust Women's two other clinics, which provide abortions in the very red states of Kansas and Oklahoma, are under constant threat and scrutiny. CEO and founder Julie Burkhart opened the Seattle branch as a way to safeguard the work she's done, in a state that honors choice.

By [Nicole Brodeur](#) □ □

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I am sitting in a chair in the recovery room of Trust Women — a nonprofit clinic where abortions are performed. Many women have sat and will sit in this same



chair, thinking about what just happened.



The chairs face a window with a stunning view of Puget Sound. Not just the water, but the horizon and whatever lies beyond. It lends a feeling of possibility to the place, which must help the women who find themselves here.

In the chair next to me — and we're just in here to talk — Trust Women founder and CEO Julie Burkhart is taking in the same view.

She opened this arm of the nonprofit in June of last year, six months after the inauguration of President Donald Trump. It was Burkhart's way of defending against the [administration's attack on women's access to health care and specifically, abortion](#).

Trump has said [“there has to be some sort of punishment”](#) for people who have had abortions; [vowed to appoint anti-abortion jurists to the U.S. Supreme Court](#), and [sought — and failed — to cut grants to Planned Parenthood](#).

So I wanted to meet Burkhart, who was in town for last weekend's National Abortion Federation Conference, and thank her for fighting for choice.

She feels more at ease here than in other parts of the country, where lawmakers are working hard to limit access to and funding for abortion and reproductive health services.

Trust Women's two other clinics — in the very red states of Kansas and Oklahoma — are under constant threat and scrutiny.

In fact, those states top a list of those with abortion restrictions that [“lack a foundation in rigorous scientific evidence,”](#) according to the [Guttmacher Institute](#), a national research and policy institute that advocates for sexual and reproductive health. [Kansas, for example, requires clinics to tell women that there is a link between abortion and breast cancer —](#)

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which is false — and that fetuses can feel pain. Also false.

“It’s like spaghetti,” Burkhart said. “They throw it against the wall and see what sticks.”

Ohio tried to outlaw abortion outright. Kentucky, to ban it after 14 weeks. Kansas tried to ban the technique that has been used to perform abortions for decades — [safely, and with few complications](#).

If that happened, Burkhart said, “We would have to resort to using riskier and experimental techniques. And women aren’t guinea pigs.

“We will be putting women in harm’s way and that certainly contradicts their pro-life stance,” she said. “More unwanted pregnancies, more death.”

So this Seattle clinic — which opened just six months after the election of President Donald Trump — feels like an act not of defiance, but determination, and a way for Burkhart to safeguard the work she’s done, in a state that honors choice.

“It’s reaffirming that there are other people out there doing this work,” she said. “It can feel isolated.”

Burkhart recalled the day after President Trump’s election, when she sat on the phone with one of Trust Women’s attorneys, in tears.

“A lot of us across this country were so afraid of what was to become of this country and what we had worked so hard for,” she remembered. “The safety of this organization. And making sure that what we had built was not destroyed.”

Not long after, she got a call from a Seattle doctor who had been running a clinic that provided abortions. She was retiring and leaving the country: Did Burkhart want to establish a Trust Women clinic in the same space? Yes. It would serve as a foothold for the organization, no matter what happened elsewhere.

The clinic will start health services for transgender people next month; and has plans to do outreach into Eastern Washington, where access and affordability are issues in women’s health care.

“The struggle for equality and justice is a heavy lift,” Burkhart said. “And we need to make sure that whatever we’re talking about — racial equality, immigration, gay rights — we need all hands on deck. And we’re here to help.”

About the name: Trust Women. It was a phrase — a dictum — frequently used by Burkhart's mentor, Dr. George Tiller, a late-term abortion doctor who was assassinated in 2009 while he was serving as an usher at his church. ([The man who killed him, Scott Roeder, is serving a 25-year sentence.](#))

Burkhart first started working with Tiller as the chair for the Wichita Choice Alliance, where she led the community response against abortion opponents attempting to shut down Tiller's clinic in 2001. She also built and directed his political-action committee, ProKanDo, which engaged in legislative and political work on behalf of physicians and women's-rights constituents.

"He talked a lot about the fact that women can make their own decisions about their pregnancies," Burkhart said of Tiller. "And women would lead the way when it came to that decision.

"He was the doctor. He was the facilitator," she said. "Women know if they can handle a pregnancy or not."

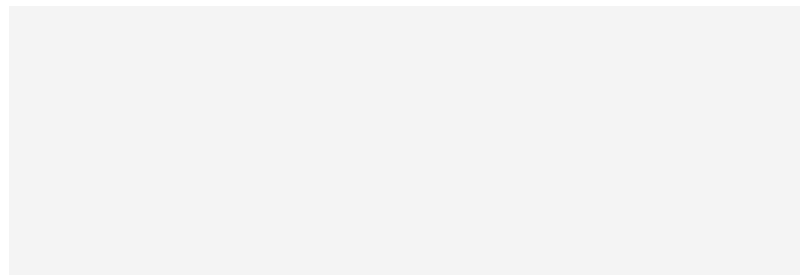
I got up to leave and took one last look at the view, then turned back to the row of chairs and thought about who would sit in them next.

"We don't need government officials telling women what is right and appropriate about their reproductive lives," Burkhart was saying.

No, I thought, women are quite capable of sorting it out for themselves, in rooms like this, with quiet and comfort and a clear view of the Sound, and whatever lies beyond.

Nicole Brodeur's column appears Tuesday and Sunday. Reach her at 206-464-2334 or nbrodeur@seattletimes.com.

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