

Summary of concerns regarding police behavior on June 9, 2018 at the Kent Planned Parenthood clinic

Presented to the Kent City Council meeting on July 17, 2018 by members of the Ad Hoc Coalition to Defend Women's Reproductive Rights

On June 9, 2018, an ad hoc coalition of eleven organizations came together to "Defend Women's Reproductive Rights." This mobilization was in response to a call put out by the ultra-right groups Patriot Prayer, Proud Boys and Joey Gibson, who announced they would rally in front of Kent's Planned Parenthood clinic to support Trump's call for de-funding this healthcare network and to stir up opposition to women's right to abortion.

The pro-feminist coalition issued a statement saying, "... Patriot Prayer and Joey Gibson's U.S. Senate campaign have been accelerating their attacks on women and reproductive rights. They are the same bigots that have been appearing with increasing frequency from Washington to California. They bring with them violence, racism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, and Islamophobia."

A July 13 Seattle Times article confirms these observations, noting that the Proud Boys regularly take part in right-wing rallies sponsored by Patriot Prayer, and reporting that:

The Proud Boys' conduct is raising concerns about assaults and intimidation by a group that feels emboldened by the Trump presidency. Those concerns were outlined in a letter sent to the Clark County prosecutor June 25 from the leaders of the Western States Center, a Portland-based nonprofit that works to promote racial, social and economic justice.

"The Proud Boys have been involved in numerous violent incidents in Oregon, Washington and across the country, leaders and members regularly spread white nationalist memes and make overtly bigoted statements," wrote Western States Center executive director Eric Ward and Board Chair Scott Winn.

Police departments across the Northwest are well aware of these groups' track record of violent racist and misogynist attacks. Therefore, it is all the more shocking that the large contingent of heavily armed law enforcement personnel in Kent on June 9 showed clear bias against the 300 reproductive rights advocates who rallied on the sidewalks in defense of Planned Parenthood. In contrast, Joey Gibson and his 25 right-wing racists who showed up were treated with kid gloves and provided with personal police escorts to and from their vehicles and the rally site in front of the clinic.

This biased treatment began with the police setting up barricades for a "free speech zone" for Patriot Prayer directly in front of the very clinic that these fanatics have vowed to shut down, and escorting them across Planned Parenthood's property throughout the day. Meanwhile,

supporters of women's reproductive rights were told to go across the street in front of the Fred Meyer - this despite the fact that the feminist coalition arrived at the clinic long before Joey Gibson showed up.

About 25 feminist demonstrators remained on the eastern corner of the sidewalk in front of the clinic that the police had not barricaded off, waving signs and banners in support of abortion rights and against white supremacists, as people driving by honked and waved in support. Security volunteers for the ad hoc coalition explained to Sergeant Dan Butenschoen that it was unconstitutional for police not to allow them to express their free speech on the sidewalk and continued waving their signs for 20 to 30 minutes without incident. The police told those on the corner that if they set one foot off the sidewalk onto the Planned Parenthood property that they would be arrested immediately, so the ad hoc coalition members were careful to stay on the sidewalk and curb.

Meanwhile Gibson and several Proud Boy members arrived, escorted across the clinic lawn by police. They were carrying white supremacist flags, had guns strapped on, and set up their sound system inside the police barricade. They proceeded to put on a music soundtrack, alternated with occasional rambling right-wing speeches. We feminists responded with loud non-stop chants in support of women's rights that went on for some time, until a large number of police lined behind us with billy clubs unprovoked and told us to move. Seconds later, the officers lunged at the crowd, yelling, physically forcing them across five lanes of traffic and jabbing those directly in front of them in the back with their clubs. It was with great difficulty that ad hoc coalition members were able to stay upright and not trample those in front of them. Then, just as the group reached other side of the road, one policeman started spraying pepper spray directly into people's faces. (His badge was covered up so it was not possible to see his name or which police force he was affiliated with.) Those being shoved across the street had not and did not resist or make any threatening moves against the police, but were treated with extreme brutality and unnecessary force.

Thankfully, volunteer medics quickly came to the assistance of those who were seriously injured by the debilitating chemical spray, including retired union carpenter Patrick Burns of Organized Workers for Labor Solidarity, who, along with a member of Radical Women, had to be driven away for further treatment. After this encounter, reproductive rights activists persisted with their demonstration for another hour until the right-wing protesters left.

During that hour, the police maintained a solid line of officers for the entire stretch of road where the ad hoc coalition members were chanting and waving signs. The police were from Kent, Auburn, Renton, Tukwila, the Port of Seattle, plus King County sheriffs and the Valley Civil Disturbance Unit. There were even snipers stationed on the roof of Fred Meyers! The only exception was when several Proud Boys, who had crossed the road wearing their distinctive uniforms, walked toward the western end of the feminists' picket line. At that moment there were no police at that end of the line, and the Proud Boys attacked the volunteer security people who would not allow them into the crowd. A scuffle ensued, and suddenly the police reappeared and grabbed a young security volunteer that had been knocked to the ground. They released him promptly after the woman in charge of coalition security demanded they let him

go and instead go after the Proud Boys who had attacked him. The police did not, however, make any attempt to stop the Proud Boys.

This display of bias and brutality against human rights defenders, while misogynist fanatics and outright white supremacists are escorted down the streets of Kent (a city that is about half people of color, including many immigrants and a large African American population), is completely unacceptable.

Since June 9, coalition members have been unable to get any clear answer on how to file a formal complaint. Those addressing the Council today ask that the Kent City Council take immediate steps to investigate what happened and to ensure it is never repeated. We call on you to take the following steps:

1. Withdraw the City of Kent from the Valley Civil Disturbance Unit, which appears to have no accountability to the City Council or the community.
2. Stop the use of chemical warfare as a policing technique.
3. Enforce a policy that all officers' badges and name tags must always be clearly visible.
4. Establish an elected civilian review board with investigatory and enforcement powers over the police department to ensure that there is means to adequately address complaints and issues of bias and brutality. We also urge King County to establish a similar board to oversee the Sheriff's Office.

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