

Prosecutors to Charge PPH Shooter With First-Degree Murder

The man accused of shooting three people to death and wounding nine others at a Planned Parenthood clinic in Colorado was due in court on Wednesday to face formal charges expected to include multiple counts of first-degree murder.

Robert Lewis Dear, 57, has been held without bond since surrendering to police at the end of a bloody five-hour siege on Nov. 27 that authorities said began when he opened fire with a rifle in front of the clinic, then stormed inside.

In addition to multiple counts of murder and attempted murder, Dear is expected to face a host of other charges, including assault and firearms offenses stemming from the shooting spree in Colorado Springs.

It was the first deadly assault on a U.S. abortion provider in six years – since the 2009 assassination of a doctor at Kansas church. No Planned Parenthood staff were injured in the rampage.

The dead included a U.S. Army veteran and a stay-at-home mother of two who happened to be in the clinic's waiting area as well as a policeman from a nearby university who joined local law enforcement in rushing to the scene. Five other officers were among the wounded.

A search warrant accompanying police affidavits filed in the case has been placed under court seal, and authorities have yet to publicly disclose a motive for the shooting. However, several media outlets, citing law enforcement sources, have reported that Dear uttered the phrase "no more baby parts" in statements to investigators following his arrest.

Planned Parenthood executives have pointed to those reports in asserting that Dear, a native of South Carolina who once earned a living as a self-employed art salesman, was acting on an anti-abortion agenda.

The national non-profit group, whose clinics provide a wide range of reproductive health services in addition to abortion, has come under renewed pressure from conservatives in Congress this year seeking to cut off federal funding for the organization.

Planned Parenthood came under fire earlier this year after an anti-abortion group posted online videos it said showed the group selling tissue from aborted fetuses. Planned Parenthood has said it has done nothing wrong and has said the videos were deceptively edited.

El Paso County District Attorney Dan May said after an initial court hearing for Dear last week that it was too early to decide whether to seek the death penalty. {eo}

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