

FBI probing reports of anti-abortion conspiracy

By DAVID JOHNSTON
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WASHINGTON — Setting aside a longstanding reluctance to involve itself in cases of abortion-related violence, the FBI has begun a broad inquiry into accusations that the use of force against women's clinics and their doctors is the work of a conspiracy by anti-abortion militants.

A confidential teletype sent to all 56 FBI field offices on Saturday evening — one day after the fatal shooting of a doctor and his security escort outside an abortion clinic in Pensacola, Fla. — said the bureau had information, "volunteered" by abortion-rights groups, indicating that about six anti-abortion militants might be posing "a conspiracy that endeavors to achieve political or social change through activities that involve force or violence."

The teletype listed well-known anti-abortion figures, including the Rev. David C. Trosch, Michael Bray, C. Roy McMillan, Matthew Trewhella, David Crane and Donald Spitz. All of them signed a "justifiable homicide" declaration that supported killing doctors who perform abortions.

In a telephone interview from Mobile, Ala., Trosch, a Roman Catholic priest whom the church has suspended because of his advocacy of lethal force against abortion doctors, denied any conspiracy.

"The pro-aborts have been presenting this view since the killing of

Dr. Gunn," said Trosch, referring to Dr. David Gunn, an abortionist who was shot to death outside another Pensacola clinic in March 1993. "There is absolutely no conspiracy by anyone. I'm sure of it."

The teletype set off the first full government inquiry of accusations that a campaign of terror is under way at the nation's abortion clinics.

The inquiry was brought on by pressure from the Justice Department, the FBI's parent, whose senior leaders, including Attorney General Janet Reno, are unequivocal supporters of abortion rights.

On Friday about 5 p.m., less than 10 hours after the killing of Dr. John Britton and his security escort, James Barrett, outside the Pensacola Ladies Center, Reno spoke with FBI Director Louis Freeh. Freeh then set the investigation in motion, said one law-enforcement official.

Doctor lauded, jeered

FERNANDINA BEACH, Fla. — A handful of abortion opponents demonstrated yesterday at Britton's funeral. "May he rot in hell," one protester said.

At the funeral service, Britton was remembered as a generous, humorous and loving man.

David Pickens, Britton's son-in-law and a missionary in Colombia, told mourners that the doctor's death was "an immense human injustice."

Information for this story also was gathered by The Associated Press.