Abortion clinic business grew during session

While legislators discussed strict anti-abortion laws, the number of women seeking abortions at Delta Women's Clinic more than doubled, the clinic's administrator said Tuesday.

The rise in demand for abortions started two weeks ago after state lawmakers passed a bill that would have outlawed nearly all abortions.

"I guess they wouldn't like it, but they are helping our business," said Delta administrator Esther Mcguire.

"In the past two weeks, we have had more patients than we do this time of year by nearly threefold," Mcguire said.

On a typical July day, she said, 15 to 20 women seek abortions at the clinic. Last week the clinic averaged 30 to 40 abortions per day.

Although the demand for abortions has increased at the Delta Women's Clinic, Janice Oubre, a nurse at the Acadiana Women's Clinic, said the number of women seeking abortions there has been typical for this time of year.

McGuire said many women don't understand the legislative process enough to realize that there are no anti-abortion measures in effect yet.

After a strict anti-abortion bill was vetoed by the governor, the Legislature quickly passed another bill that made exceptions for rape and incest victims and when the life of the mother is threatened.

The bill has gone to Gov. Buddy Roemer, but he has not signed it into law yet. Even if Roemer does sign it, the law most likely would be tested — and delayed — in the courts.

"Women are so afraid this will become illegal that they are making the decision earlier," McGuire said.

McGuire said the clinic staff members are doing their best to calm people down and to reassure them. In addition to a heavier patient load, McGuire said the clinic is fielding a deluge of telephone calls about the anti-abortion legislation.

What most callers want to know is whether it is still legal to have an abortion, she said.

"It's not just the questions, but the panic that you have to deal with," she said. "People are afraid out there."

If the Louisiana law should go into effect, pro-choice activists predict that women will cross the state line to get abortions.

"It's ironic, people from Mississippi are going to drive to Louisiana for the lottery and people from Louisiana will be driving to Mississippi for terminations," Mississippi Women's Clinic administrator Lida Brown told the Associated Press.

In Arkansas, the Committee for Reproductive Choice announced Monday it would run advertisements concerning availability of abortions there, and would arrange rides for Louisiana women who want abortions.

McGuire expressed concern that if Roemer vetoes the bill, abortion opponents may become more active in attacking women verbally outside the clinic.

Standing next to the clinic parking lot on Tuesday was an anti-abortion demonstrator displaying a page torn from a magazine with pictures of aborted fetuses. As women left the building, the demonstrator, Richard Mahoney, shouted thanks to them for leaving the clinic.

Mahoney, who said he goes to the clinic for a couple hours five days a week, also said the clinic has been busier and pointed to the parking lot so full that cars were double parked.

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