

Blockbuster pro-life movie 'Unplanned' banned from Canadian movie theatres

Canadian movie distributors have de facto censored the movie *Unplanned* from screening in theatres here says the movie's producers.

"We have been effectively blocked from distributing the film in Canada," said producer Lisa Wheeler at an Ottawa news conference May 8.

Unplanned is based on the Abby Johnson's memoir *Unplanned: the dramatic true story of an Planned Parenthood director*.

"What we're seeing is that the film industry in Canada mirrors the film industry here in the United States, in terms of being more politically progressive, left leaning and pro-choice than the population at large," said Chuck Konzelman, the film's writer/producer/director in an email interview.

"So our project is essentially anathema to them, and they see excluding us from Canada as 'positive good'... effectively enacting de facto censorship, without right of appeal."

The movie has exceeded all expectations at the box office, earning about \$18 million in its U.S. run, he said.

The two largest distributors in Canada cited 'content' as the issue, "not lack of consumer demand," Konzelman said.

"And this follows on the heels of universal rejection every Canadian distributor we approached, and whose participation is required – by law – in order to exhibit a film theatrically throughout much of Canada," he said.

"In fact, we can't even get a rating by any of the provincial film boards, since one of the mandatory items on the application for each province is for us to list our distributor."

However, since the May 8 press conference, the Alberta government has given the movie a 14A rating with a warning of disturbing content.

In Edmonton, [a private screening of *Unplanned*](#) will be held May 14 in the Expo Centre. The event starts at 6:30 p.m. and admission is free. The screening is sponsored by Harvest Ministries International.

"I would like to say I'm surprised, but I'm not," Abby Johnson told the news conference the day before the National March for Life. "I have to wonder what they're afraid of."

Last September, Johnson was the guest speaker at benefit for the [Alberta Life](#)

[Issues Society](#), which runs [The Back Porch](#), an Edmonton pregnancy resource centre.

Johnson said she left Planned Parenthood in October 2009 for two reasons. The first was that she was told “we needed to double our abortion quota, the number of abortions we had to sell,” she said, noting that policy went against the mantra around abortion that it should be “safe, legal and rare.”

But the coup de grace for Johnson, in a gripping scene portrayed in the film *Unplanned*, was viewing an ultrasound-guided abortion of a 13 week pre-born child.

“Seeing that child fight and struggle for his life against the abortion instrument,” made her realize “there was life in the womb, humanity in the womb.”

As a “proud feminist,” Johnson said she realized “what I had seen in the womb was a grave injustice.”

“I now go around the world, speaking about against abortion and the abortion industry,” said Johnson, who is the co-founder and director of And Then There Were None, an organization dedicated to helping abortion workers “get out of their jobs.”

Her organization has helped about 500 abortion workers leave the industry. Since the movie *Unplanned* played in 2,000 screens in the U.S. even more abortion workers are contacting her.

Johnson said she is deeply troubled by the lack of legal protection for the unborn in Canada.

“I’m also deeply concerned that many people here have not been able to speak publicly, because they are concerned about punishment,” she said. “That is not democracy; that is oppression.”

Johnson said she knows of Canadian women who have come to the U.S. for late-term abortions paid for by Canadian tax dollars. The fact these women have to leave Canada for the procedure is a sign Canadians are uneasy about the issue and that is far from “settled,” Johnson said.

She pointed out Canada abolished slavery in 1834. “What would have happened if people in Canada had convinced themselves they not going to concern ourselves with slavery because the issue is settled?”

“It should concern all of us,” Johnson said. “We should never look at any form of injustice and call it settled.”

Wheeler said there are two ways Canadians can see *Unplanned*. They can rent buses and drive to the United States, or independent groups and parishes can

obtain a license to screen the movie.

"We're not defeated by this," Wheeler said. "Canadians want *Unplanned* here."

Neither of Canada's big chains have any plans to exhibit *Unplanned*.

"The film *Unplanned* presently does not have a distributor in Canada to market and undertake the necessary work, including for example securing the applicable provincial sensor certifications, to release the film across the country," said Jack Gardner, vice-president of marketing, sales and content programming for Landmark cinemas.

"At one point, the film was to be distributed in Canada by Level Films, and since that time, the producers have unsuccessfully secured a partner to distribute the film in Canada."

"The producers have inquired as to Landmark's interest in distributing the film directly, and we are seeking additional information in regards to evaluating this scenario as we do not distribute films, but rather exhibit films in partnership with a films' distributor," he said.

A spokeswoman for Cineplex said no distributor had approached them about exhibiting *Unplanned*.

Konzelman said either chain could let distributors know they were interested in showing the movie and *Unplanned* a "distributor would jump to the fore."

"Given the censorship in place, individual sponsorship is the only way in which we will be able to show in Canada," Konzelman said. "We will be granting licences for individual showings, at a time and place of the sponsor's choosing – which can be a theater, if desired, or a parish hall, or any other venue."

Anyone interested in arranging for a sponsored showing should send an email to chuck@unplannedmovie.com