

Death threats force B.C. theatre to cancel screening of pro-life movie 'Unplanned'

Death threats have forced at least one movie theatre company to cancel public screening of the controversial pro-life movie *Unplanned*.

Salmar Theatres in Salmon Arm, B.C. cancelled the screenings in two of its theatres. The general manager did not wish to comment further, but a board member of the Salmar Community Association told the *Salmon Arm Observer* the board pulled movie out of concern for the manager's personal safety.

"We have a track record of showing things from a variety of points of view... we try not to preclude things because of whatever personal opinions may exist on our board or something like that," Chris Papworth told the newspaper.

"What's different here... certainly in the past, there hasn't been an effort to dox employees or, specifically, the general manager, by releasing their personal information on social media and then encouraging people to go after them as the one responsible for some heinous act."

"We just aren't prepared for those levels of hostility towards our general manager," Papworth said.

B.J. McKelvie is a Fredericton pastor and president of Cinedicom, the Canadian distributor of the film about former Planned Parenthood director Abby Johnson who became a pro-life activist after witnessing an ultrasound-guided abortion.

He said: "They were originally going to (screen it) and were able to endure a lot of negative publicity. They got a lot of positive support as well. Then things took a turn. There started to be more serious threats towards managers and the families of theatre owners."

Police have been contacted, and McKelvie said they were asked not to talk about the specific incidents. McKelvie said he's shocked by the threats.

"I've never heard of this before," he said. "Not in Canada and I've been in this industry a long time."

McKelvie told The Canadian Press that The Movie Mill in Lethbridge has also received a lot of threats.

Len Binning – president of The Movie Mill – said that his theatre, and others, will be screening *Unplanned* as scheduled. He told Grandin Media on July 8 that he's received emails both in support of the movie and against it. He declined

to comment further.

Unplanned will be released nationally on July 12. It premiered in the U.S. at the end of March, and producers say the film has defied box-office expectations.

As of July 7, the *Unplanned* Canada website shows the movie will be screened in Edmonton: Cineplex South Common (July 12-18), Carnival Cinemas in Red Deer (July 12-18), as well as the Jewel Theatre in Stettler (July 20-21) and independent theatres in Lethbridge (July 12-18), Barrhead (July 13 and July 15), Lloydminster (July 12-18) and Leduc (July 12-18).

Edmonton screenings listed so far by Cineplex South Common are:

Fri., July 12: 12:30 p.m., 3:30 p.m., 6:30 p.m., 9:15 p.m.
Sat., July 13: 12:30 p.m., 3:30 p.m., 6:30 p.m., 9:15 p.m.
Sun., July 14: 12:30 p.m., 3:30 p.m., 6:30 p.m., 9:15 p.m.
Mon., July 15: 12:30 p.m., 3:30 p.m., 6:30 p.m., 9:15 p.m.
Tues., July 16: 12:30 p.m., 3:30 p.m., 6:30 p.m., 9:15 p.m.

In Saskatchewan, *Unplanned* will be shown at Cineplex Cinemas Normanview (July 12-18) and Cineplex Scotiabank Theatre in Saskatoon July 12-18. Check your local listing for showtimes.

Most independent theatres, however, are holding firm, with about 20 planning to screen *Unplanned* so far. McKelvie said July 8 that he received 10 or 11 requests from independent theatres to run the movie that very day.

"The theatres aren't scared," he said. "We've got word back, they're a little concerned about protestors and that. It's just a movie and everyone has a right to go see a movie if they want to or choose not to go see it."

Both Landmark Cinemas and Cineplex Odeon are standing firm allowing screenings in select theatres across the country for a week beginning July 12.

On July 8, Cineplex president and CEO Ellis Jacob issued a statement saying the decision to screen *Unplanned* was "a complicated one and it was not made easily or lightly."

"Canada is a country that believes in and rallies behind freedom of expression, but that isn't always an easy thing to do and it certainly doesn't always make you popular," Jacob said.

"In this instance many of us have had to set aside our own personal beliefs and opinions and remember that living in a country that censors content, opinions and points of view because they are different from our own is not a country that any of us would want to live in," he said, noting the company would screen the film in 14 of its 1,700 auditoriums.

The Abortion Rights Coalition of Canada (ARCC) released a statement June 25 that has been quoted uncritically by mainstream news outlets calling *Unplanned* a “dangerous piece of anti-abortion propaganda.”

“The film’s vicious falsehoods against providers could incite hatred and violence against them, including here in Canada,” said Joyce Arthur, executive director of the Abortion Rights Coalition of Canada.

Alissa Golob, co-founder of It Starts Right Now – a pro-life political action group – complained on Facebook July 4 that CTV and *Huffington Post* were “reporting fringe abortion advocate Joyce Arthur fictitiously warning threats against abortion providers will happen if the movie is shown in Canada, with zero evidence to back it up.”

“Apparently ‘pro-choice’ activists are not in favour of a woman’s right to choose to tell her biographical story and the right to choose to see the film,” Golob said

Katie Telford, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau’s chief of staff, panned the screening on Twitter in a July 6 tweet.

“The arguments made below to promote the film . . . are not free speech arguments,” Telford said, retweeting a pro *Unplanned* post by Saskatchewan Conservative MP Brad Trost. “The film was being promoted by conservative politicians because it was anti-choice. Nice spin though.”

Earlier, Telford had tweeted the “Controversial anti-abortion film *Unplanned* to hit more than 24 Canadian theatres, and “this is happening, at least in part, thanks to support received by federal Conservative politicians.

The story will be updated as more information becomes available

-With files from Grandin Media