



Abortion Rights
Coalition of Canada

Coalition pour le droit à
l'avortement au Canada

Your Voice for Choice

Canada's only national political pro-choice advocacy group

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Misbegotten Jubilee Medals Encourage Crime

Governor General Must Retract Two Medals Given to Habitual Anti-Abortion Criminals

NATIONAL – Despite Prime Minister Harper's "tough on crime" stance, his Governor General David Johnston has seen fit to allow two convicted criminals to receive Queen's Diamond Jubilee medals – one of whom committed another crime only one week after receiving the medal. The two medallists, Linda Gibbons and Mary Wagner, are habitual offenders who violate court injunctions in Ontario that protect patients and staff from harassment and violence as they enter an abortion clinic.

60,000 Diamond Jubilee medals were recently awarded to recipients in Canada. Governor General David Johnston allowed each Member of Parliament to nominate 30 medal recipients, but without any apparent oversight other than asking the MPs to "choose responsibly."

On October 18, it was revealed that two of the medals were awarded by hardline anti-choice Conservative Member of Parliament Maurice Vellacott (Saskatoon-Wanuskewin) to convicted criminals Linda Gibbons and Mary Wagner. Both women are currently in Toronto prisons – Gibbons was arrested on Oct. 30 for breaching a clinic's safety injunction, while Wagner was already in jail after being charged with mischief and breaching court orders in August. Gibbons has spent about 10 years out of the last 20 in prison, while Wagner has been in and out of prison since 1999, including in BC.

"Gibbon's recent arrest shows that giving medals to convicted criminals acts as a stimulus to crime," said Joyce Arthur, Executive Director of the Abortion Rights Coalition of Canada (ARCC). "For the Honourable Governor General to allow criminal behaviour to be rewarded with medals is beyond outrageous." ARCC has sent an open letter to the Governor General and the Prime Minister, demanding that they immediately withdraw the two medals. (<http://www.arcc-cdac.ca/action/GG-Harper-Jubilee-medals.pdf>) In addition, two online petitions demanding retraction of the medals have garnered over 3,400 signatures so far, including many international signers.

“The awarding of these medals is a profound embarrassment to the Governor General’s office and to the government of Canada,” said Arthur. “It also puts an ugly stain on the entire Jubilee medal program, devaluing all the other medals. We’ve sent a letter to Her Majesty the Queen to inform her of this scandal that is sullyng her name, asking her to please intervene to ensure the medals are retracted.”

“It’s important to note that these two women do not have a just cause,” said Peggy Cooke, an ARCC spokesperson based in Toronto. “Court cases have shown that protesters outside of abortion clinics violate the privacy and dignity of patients and put the health and safety of patients and staff at risk.” Those documented harms resulted in the 1994 Dieleman court injunction that Gibbons and Wagner now frequently violate in Toronto, as well as the upholding of the *Access to Abortion Services Act* in BC, via the 1996 Lewis case.¹

Some people have been making inappropriate comparisons to Dr. Henry Morgentaler, who was arrested several times for operating illegal abortion clinics in the 1970’s and 1980’s, but received the Order of Canada award in 2008. Cooke noted that: “Unlike Dr. Morgentaler, Gibbons and Wagner have never been vindicated or pardoned in any way – and they never will be, because they are violating women’s human rights. Dr. Morgentaler was acquitted by four juries, and although one judge overturned an acquittal and sent the doctor to jail, he was later completely exonerated in his struggle for women’s rights,” explained Cooke. The 1975 Morgentaler Amendment is a federal law that prevents appeal courts from overturning a jury’s not-guilty verdict, while the 1988 Morgentaler decision by the Supreme Court of Canada threw out the abortion law that the doctor had been violating, because its requirements put women’s health and lives at risk.

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¹ *Ontario (Attorney General) v. Dieleman* (1994), 117 D.L.R. (4th) 449 (Ont. Ct. (G.D.)).
R. v. Lewis, [1996] 1 S.C.R. 921. April 25, 1996. <http://www.westcoastleaf.org/userfiles/file/1996-SCC-Decision-R.-v.-Lewis.pdf>

