



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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April 8, 2017

Mayor Greg Dionne and City Council
1084 Central Avenue
Prince Albert, SK
S6V 7P3

Dear Mayor Dionne, and City Council,

Please do not approve the “Celebrate Life Week” proclamation, or raise an anti-abortion flag on the City’s guest flagpole. The media is reporting that you intend to fly this flag again this year, in direct violation of the City’s own flag policy. The mayor appears to be giving his personal and unilateral approval for the flag, but Section 6.07(c)(ii) of your Flag Protocol Policy states that “Flags of commercial, political, or religious organizations require City Council approval.”

Further, the mayor is repeating the same mistaken ideas about the flag that he voiced last year, even though I had comprehensively rebutted his errors in my May 15, 2016 letter. I’m resending you this letter as an attachment, as it explains the problems with the flag and the “Celebrate Life Week” proclamation. In particular, the mayor is wrong to prioritize the right to freedom of expression. As I had explained, fundamental rights must be balanced with each other when they conflict, and depending on the circumstances (and usually restricted to a particular time, place or manner), the right of people to be free from discrimination can outweigh others’ right to free speech.

In the PA Daily Herald on April 4, the mayor said the flag opponents had an incorrect definition of discrimination. In fact, as I explicitly noted in my 2016 letter, it’s the mayor who does not understand what discrimination means under the law. I had explained why City approval of the flag and proclamation was gender discrimination under the *Canadian Human Rights Act* and *Saskatchewan Human Rights Code*. For greater clarity, the Canadian Human Rights Commission provides this definition:

“Discrimination is an action or a decision that treats a person or a group negatively for reasons such as their race, age or disability. These reasons are known as grounds of discrimination.”

The 11 grounds under the *Canadian Human Rights Act* include sex and sexual orientation, which covers women including pregnant women, and transgender people who can get pregnant. When a government approves a flag that targets and intimidates women and challenges their Charter rights, that is clearly an “action or decision that treats a person or a group negatively.” It therefore meets the definition of discrimination under the law.

Another issue explained in our 2016 letter, but which the mayor again gets wrong, is his suggestion of raising a pro-choice flag too. This would not resolve the issue because the anti-choice flag is still discriminatory and against city policy. The only correct action is to decline the application to fly the flag. Although a pro-choice flag would be an entirely appropriate way for the City to show support for and recognize women's rights, applying for such a flag in order to compensate for or compete with an anti-choice flag sends the wrong message. It implies a moral equivalency between the views when there is none. Perhaps local pro-choice activists in Prince Albert would consider submitting an application for a pro-choice flag once the City permanently disallows the anti-choice flag.

Once again, I urge the City of Prince Albert to take the decision to never again approve an anti-abortion proclamation or guest flag, and I also ask the Mayor to please issue a public apology for his continuing misinformed comments, and for the many years the flag was raised in contravention of City policy.

Thank you very much for your kind consideration.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'J. Arthur'.

Joyce Arthur
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Attachment: May 15, 2016 letter to Mayor and Council from Abortion Rights Coalition of Canada