

Hon. Consiglio Di Nino: Would the honourable senator take a question?

Senator Neiman: Certainly, senator.

Senator Di Nino: Will the extension to the time also require an extension to the budget?

Senator Neiman: Yes, it will. We will be putting a supplementary budget before the Standing Committee on Internal Economy, Budgets and Administration for consideration. It will be quite small in comparison to what is usually asked for when dealing with such reports.

The Hon. the Speaker: Is leave granted, honourable senators?

Hon. Senators: Agreed.

[Translation]

Hon. Eymard G. Corbin: Honourable senators, I would like to speak to the motion.

The Hon. the Speaker: Is leave granted, honourable senators?

Hon. senators: Agreed.

Senator Corbin: Honourable senators, I wish to address the request for an extension. It is clear that this Senate committee, which is examining the issues of euthanasia, assisted suicide and, although this was not mentioned in the order of reference, the question of palliative care, is doing groundbreaking work. So far, no parliamentary committee, in the House of Commons or in the Senate, has considered these issues, which are a matter of considerable public debate.

The committee received its order of reference in February, if I am not mistaken, and has been very diligent in its analysis of these issues and all the considerations and parameters involved.

Personally, I would not really mind if the chair of the committee were to come back to the Senate in February or March and ask for another extension.

As I said just now, we are doing groundbreaking work in this area. These are literally matters of life and death. They are fundamental issues that go to the very heart of our social values, of the kind of country we want. They concern our relationship with others as individuals, the relationship of the individual with society, and the respect society should have for the individual and for life itself.

Of course I will support the motion of Senator Neiman, the chair of the committee. I do not want the committee to feel rushed to finish its work. I do not think deadlines should be set, because the question is too important to be treated superficially. The committee and its members should have a chance to consider all the aspects and repercussions of this question.

I agree, and we humbly admit, that we do not have the expertise to explore certain areas in committee, except perhaps for Senators Keon and Desmarais who are both physicians and are following our progress most diligently. Senator Desmarais is not an official member of the committee, but he has taken it on himself to follow very closely the debate on these issues within the committee.

We do not have specific expertise in pharmaceutical research, for instance, including the development of substances that would reduce human suffering, especially in life's last stages when the pain is sometimes unbearable.

There is also the matter of jurisprudence. Senator Beaudoin is more knowledgeable than I am, since he himself is an eminent legal expert. Therefore, there are areas that will require further research and, in any case, our committee will be making recommendations to that effect.

I think that the committee should feel free, not necessarily to take undue advantage of the time and resources granted by the Senate, but to continue its work beyond the date requested, if necessary. In other words, I am giving advance notice that if we have to ask for another extension, I would not want anyone to wonder what is going on in this committee. Did they not have enough time to do their job and do it well?

It is not a matter of time or money we are dealing with here. It is not an environmental issue, although consideration of environmental issues requires a great deal of time and substantial resources. The question of euthanasia, assisted suicide and palliative care is such a fundamental one. It touches on morals, ethics, the law, as well as other sectors. The committee should have all the freedom it needs to feel comfortable and submit the best possible report in the circumstances.

There is no doubt that this report will have a very serious impact on public opinion, which is now rather confused by all kinds of decisions made by our courts, and by truly regrettable and tragic incidents. The role we want to assume in studying this issue is to shed light on the various concepts of euthanasia, assisted suicide and palliative care.

That is why, in supporting Senator Neiman's motion, I urge the authorities in place, who sometimes put pressure on committees to work faster and submit their reports to the Senate, to go easy this time.

We will probably manage to complete our investigation and draft our report by March 15. That is very likely, and would be desirable. This is not a subject we want to be immersed in indefinitely, believe me! It is enough to face the vital problems of daily life without being wrapped up in death and dying for weeks and months at a time. I am anxious to get it over with. I, too, will have to die someday, and that will be enough.