

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Monday, June 7, 1993

The House met at 11 a.m.

Prayers

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

[English]

CRIMINAL CODE

PHYSICIAN ASSISTED SUICIDE

Mr. Raymond Skelly (North Island—Powell River)
moved:

That, in the opinion of this House, the government should urgently consider amending the Criminal Code to permit physician assisted suicide when:

- (a) it is requested by the patient;
- (b) the patient is terminally ill and will experience a painful death;
- (c) two independent physicians certify that the patient's condition is terminal; and
- (d) the office of the Attorney General for the province has reviewed the case.

• (1110)

He said: Mr. Speaker, the motion before us today is a variation on a number of motions that have been put forward in this House. The member for Fraser Valley West managed to put forward a motion, convince the House to support it on second reading and carry it through to a very useful committee study which dealt with the issue in great depth.

Today is the last opportunity for the House to consider this matter. The matter is also before the Supreme Court of Canada. It has been brought there by a very courageous woman, Sue Rodriguez, who suffers from the disease commonly known as Lou Gehrig's disease.

This disease is fatal. As she describes it in *The Globe and Mail* of May 21, 1993 the reason she has brought this forward is, in her words, because: "I simply do not want to die a gruesome death". It is with a great deal of personal courage and a commitment to others who will

find themselves in the same circumstances that this matter has been brought to the Supreme Court of Canada.

I would also like to thank Nicki Segal, an intern who has done a great deal of work on the research and presentation of the material that we are going to be considering in the House today.

The issue that Sue Rodriguez raises in the Supreme Court of Canada, and which she has taken through every level in the court system, is essentially physician assisted suicide. She is asking that she be given the right to have her physician assist her in committing suicide rather than face the gruesome death this disease will inflict upon her.

Suicide is not illegal. There are those who have sought suicide in order to avoid a degrading and painful death. They have sought to have their physicians assist them with this action.

The other day I came across the case of a woman who had a friend who spent virtually every day in the hospital with her as the woman suffered from the same disease. The patient's physical condition had deteriorated to such a degree that only this friend could communicate with her. Every single day she asked to die. It is an important issue for this House.

Right now the Criminal Code prevents someone from assisting another in a suicide. Apparently the law goes back 101 years. It does not contemplate the realities of our society today where about 75 per cent of deaths are attributable to chronic degenerative diseases such as cancer, AIDS and a variety of other diseases. As we have been more and more successful in preventing certain kinds of diseases, these diseases are forming a major part of the health spectrum. They are characterized by a complete loss of control and quite often by a very serious and painful death.

In some cases, where an individual specifically requests it, people find themselves in a situation in which determining the time at which life ends can improve the quality of life. It can prevent death in great pain and degradation because of the complete loss of control