

*Adjournment Debate*

representatives must deal with. The Minister of Justice said on February 16 that he would make sure this House had an opportunity at an early date to deal with this matter. Some months later at the national convention of the Liberal Party of Canada, delegates voted overwhelmingly in favour of a resolution urging the government to allow for a free vote on the issue of euthanasia and physician assisted suicide.

• (1955)

In September of last year the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice, who will be responding today on behalf of the government, said during the course of a debate on my private member's bill to change the Criminal Code: "We have been assured by the Minister of Justice that all parliamentarians will be given the opportunity to consider these issues in a meaningful way. I am confident that in due course we will be presented with the opportunity to do so".

On February 16 of last year the Minister of Justice said: "In emphasizing the urgency of this question, I am sure doctors could tell us there are a number of people right now facing terminal illness who want to have clarification". He was right then and he is right now.

It is unconscionable that the government, almost two years after having promised to allow the House to seriously deliberate on this issue, to vote in a free vote, is still not prepared to allow that decision.

One of those who is seeking a change in the law is Austin Bastable. Mr. Bastable has written twice to all members of the House. He wrote in late September and again at the end of last month, pointing out that the quality of his life is continuing to decline. He does not wish to endure the prolonged natural death that awaits him.

Mr. Bastable points out that palliative care is not a meaningful option for him. He pleads with the House and he pleads with the government to honour the commitment made to allow a free vote, to allow debate on this issue of fundamental conscience.

The member for Vancouver Centre also assured Canadians and her own constituents there would be a free vote. I call on her to honour the commitment made by the Prime Minister, by the Minister of Justice and by the parliamentary secretary to ensure Canadians have a voice in this fundamental issue of life and death.

**Mr. Russell MacLellan (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the hon. member for Burnaby—Kingsway has not said anything which I would contest with respect to me or the Minister of Justice. It is still the intention of the Minister of Justice to allow this debate.

The hon. member has requested that the Minister of Justice advise the House when members will have the opportunity to

review the issue of physician assisted suicide, including the provisions of section 241 of the Criminal Code.

Both the hon. member and the Minister of Justice have referred to the important work undertaken by the special committee on euthanasia and assisted suicide which tabled its report in June of this year. The terms of reference provided that it examine and report on the legal, social and ethical issues regarding euthanasia and assisted suicide.

The report is lengthy and contains recommendations concerning palliative care, pain control, sedation practices, withholding and withdrawal of life sustaining treatment, advanced directives, assisted suicide and euthanasia.

Of the recommendations presented in the report, there are a number of legal implications unanimously agreed on by committee members. This was not the case with respect to their recommendations concerning assisted suicide.

While the senators were unanimous in their view that counselling suicide, subsection 241(a), should remain an offence, they were not unanimous in respect of the provision of subsection 241(b). As the Minister of Justice has indicated, there was difficulty in achieving consensus with respect to some of the most fundamental questions that arose in the course of the committee's study.

Specifically, with respect to the issue of assisted suicide, a majority of the committee recommended that subsection 241(b) of—

**The Deputy Speaker:** The hon. member for Edmonton East.

MEDICARE

**Ms. Judy Bethel (Edmonton East, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, in discussions with people in Edmonton East over the past number of months, one concern keeps coming up with increasing regularity: where is medicare headed in Canada?

Canadians value the system of universal health care. Medicare is one of the fundamental elements of our Canadian identity and of our shared commitment to fairness, equity and compassion.

• (2000)

However, Canadians recognize that the health care system must adapt and evolve within the guiding principles of the Canada Health Act. It is not enough to say that we spend \$72 billion on health care without knowing whether we are spending it in those areas where it makes the most difference to Canadians.

Residents of Edmonton East want governments at the national and provincial levels to work together to ensure accessibility and quality in health care and to sustain a health care system that respects the five principles of the Canada Health Act: universality, accessibility, comprehensiveness, portability and public administration.