

*Private Members' Business*

I want to remind the House that in a videotaped statement sent to a parliamentary committee of this House back in November, Sue Rodriguez had this to say:

I want to ask you gentlemen, if I cannot give consent to my own death, then whose body is this? Who owns my life?

ALS is a particularly horrible disease. Phil Bissell, president of the Victoria Chapter of the ALS Society of B.C., recently described the disease as follows:

One woman is now at the stage where she cannot move a muscle. Every day she gets propped up in front of a television at the foot of her bed.

Bissell said, according to a newspaper article, that he saw her eyes move once at a meeting but that is the only time he has ever seen her move. He also said:

When some people lose the ability to swallow, they refuse to be fitted with a stomach tube and die in about 10 days. That means starving to death.

Later Sue Rodriguez had this to say:

Despite my losses, I do not want pity. All I ask of my fellow Canadians is understanding and compassion. Understanding that they too may some day be in a position similar to mine.

I believe this subject raises complex legal, ethical and moral questions. I also believe that this matter ultimately belongs here for debate, here for decision, here in the House of Commons. Lately the House has fallen into the situation of reacting or responding to issues that are decided in the courts. A good example is abortion. I say Parliament should not be afraid to deal with these matters.

[*Translation*]

Why do we need an act of Parliament? Because until now, many patients have had to turn to the courts in order to get the permission to die with dignity. I already mentioned the case of Nancy B., in Quebec City. Nancy B. had asked the court to have the life-support system that was keeping her alive unplugged. Those kinds of procedures require a lot of energy, time, effort and even money on the part of patients. We have to pass a law that would eliminate all those problems and protect physicians as well. Right now, in this kind of situation, physicians can be accused of murder under the Criminal Code. We have to change that.

[*English*]

There are already a number of private members' bills before the House. Bill C-203 of the hon. member for

Fraser Valley West—and I see him in the House tonight—has already been debated. It made it to a committee after the House. Unfortunately it was blocked coming out of the committee by some members and it never got back to the House for a vote.

• (2010)

That bill is restricted to the withdrawal and cessation of treatment and the provision for palliative care. It would have allowed physicians to follow patient directives without fear of legal repercussions. That could be called a more passive euthanasia.

Bill C-261, standing in the name of the member for Saskatoon—Clark's Crossing, would have gone further and made provision for doctor-assisted suicide. It was debated in this House for one hour and that debate is now finished.

Both bills were very specific in restricting any life-ending procedures to voluntary circumstances. The patient must be making the request of his or her own accord.

Both members, and I want to congratulate them, have done much work on this matter. They have carried the debate at a very high standard.

The member for Burnaby—Kingsway has also quite recently tabled a private member's bill.

I believe that my motion is unique because not only has it won the draw to be debated but an all-party committee of the House made it a votable motion. We could have a vote before the summer recess, but it depends on whether the House is prorogued or what happens.

We are now in the first hour of the debate and after another hour and 40 minutes we are to have the vote.

I worded the motion very carefully so that the government, this one or a future one, would get a clear sense of the House and hence of the Canadian people on this issue. I anticipate some good debate on the motion. Indeed I can anticipate some of the arguments against it: The possibility of abuse, a slippery slope, the Hippocratic oath, and so on. Needless to say, I think these arguments can and will be rebuffed.

I would draw to members' attention a good book on the matter, for those who still read books. It is called *The Right to Die: Understanding Euthanasia* by Derek Humphry and Ann Wickett.