

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Monday, March 22, 1993

The House met at 11 a.m.

Prayers

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

[*English*]

EUTHANASIA

TERMINALLY ILL PATIENTS

The House resumed from Friday, February 26, consideration of the motion of Mr. Waddell (p. 16093):

Mr. Waddell: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order.

This matter is votable today if five members rise. There has been an agreement that the vote, if it is to come, will be deferred to six o'clock to make it more convenient for members. I wanted to say that before the debate begins.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. DeBlois): The House has heard the terms of the motion. Is there unanimous consent to defer the vote until six o'clock?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Mr. Chris Axworthy (Saskatoon—Clark's Crossing): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to rise and participate in the debate on the motion:

That, in the opinion of this House, the government should consider the advisability of introducing legislation on the subject of euthanasia and, in particular, of ensuring that those assisting terminally ill patients who wish to die not be subject to criminal liability.

This matter has been raised and discussed in this House a number of times over the last year. In fact this is the fourth time it has been raised. The debate on each occasion has been an interesting one. It has been carried

on with great seriousness, compassion and caring for the issue at hand and for those people who face a long and agonizing death from a terminal illness.

Canadians have spoken out consistently in favour of some changes to the legislation, to the Criminal Code. These changes would permit Canadians who are nearing the end of their lives, who are faced with a prognosis that is discouraging and does not suggest any opportunity for improvement in their condition causing either physical and emotional pain and suffering or both, and who have a firm commitment and desire to do so, to end their lives, seek assistance in ending their lives if it is not possible for them to do so themselves.

In response to a Gallup poll question, which Gallup has been asking for the last 20 years, dealing with the legalization of physician assistance in dying, consistently over the last decade 75 per cent of respondents to the Gallup poll have argued in favour of some changes to the legislation.

• (1110)

In many phone-in radio shows and television shows that I have done on this subject, that 75 per cent figure is approximately the ratio in which the respondents on the radio and television shows presented their arguments. About 70 to 75 per cent of people phoning in to radio and TV shows that I have done supported liberalizing the law with regard to physician assistance in dying.

It is time that this Parliament acted on this issue. It is rare that such a large proportion of Canadians are of a common mind about anything, especially an issue of this importance. It is time that this House responded to that very large majority view.

Over the last little while we have seen some tragic cases in which Canadians have had to plead to courts to have the permission to end their lives when they are living in intolerable pain and suffering.