

day will come when Parliament will in a serious legislative way have to face this issue and make a decision.

Mr. Lyle Kristiansen (Kootenay West—Revelstoke): Mr. Speaker, the motion before us of my colleague, the member for Port Moody—Coquitlam, is an important one. It is an issue which I am sure causes a great deal of anguish and personal difficulty to many members of the House.

Any subject that deals with personal, spiritual, religious and moral values is always a difficult issue to deal with in a public place and in a permanent way and Parliament is within the limits of any human act. It is one institution that is called upon to render those kinds of judgments.

It is important to recognize first of all the subject of this 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.

It is important to recall that there are at least four members of Parliament from both sides of this House, the member for Port Moody—Coquitlam, the member for Saskatoon—Clark's Crossing, the member for Fraser Valley West, and the member for Burnaby—Kingsway, who have motions along these lines before this House. There may be other members.

It suggests to me and I would suspect to most other members that there is a feeling in our communities that Parliament should be asked to render a careful judgment on this issue in the not too distant future.

There is the case in British Columbia of Sue Rodriguez who suffers from ALS, Lou Gehrig's disease, and her struggle before the courts and on the cameras. It has brought to the attention of the Canadian people, from one end of the country to the other, the very agonizing choices people feel compelled to make.

In the speech of my colleague whose motion this is he pointed out: "People used to die at home mainly of communicable diseases. They received good palliative care from concerned family and friends. Now people die in hospitals surrounded by batteries of life-saving equipment. Seventy-five per cent of deaths are caused by chronic degenerative diseases such as cancer, heart disease, AIDS, strokes and Alzheimer's disease".

Private Members' Business

The change in circumstances that paragraph outlines has taken place in the issue of life or death. People choose to continue to exercise their option and their choice for life has changed dramatically over the last number of years, even in the last very few years.

I know people in my area, and others from whom I have heard by letter and by phone, generally have indicated they feel that technology has changed to such an extent that some of the religious values that at one time were imposed and generally accepted now have to be called into question. The nature of life itself has changed because of our technology.

I suggest that people are asking us to act with care and flexibility. The courts are asking us to act and render a decision. Surely in light of the knowledge we have, our consciences must demand that we act. How we act is a different question. But if we move ahead with this motion and if it were to receive the support of this House, all that it asks us to do is to consider the advisability of introducing legislation on the subject of euthanasia. In particular this would be to ensure that those assisting terminally ill patients who wish to die would not be subject to criminal liability.

• (1135)

Surely, unless we feel a very strong religious compulsion to deny people the choice in any circumstances, we ought to be able to give our support to such a motion. It simply asks the government and, through the government, Parliament and all Canadians to seriously consider the many issues and come up with the most carefully designed legislation and guidelines that we can.

We are not an ecclesiastical court. If we were, we might be justified in saying no, but we are not. Therefore we must ask ourselves whether we have the right to deny a human being who, being of sound mind, determines that at a given point of artificially induced continuation of life they wish to terminate it rather than continue in a state of existence they find unbearable. I suggest the answer is no. We do not have the right to deny them that choice, a choice that only they should make.

If they have requested technical or medical assistance in exercising that free choice and that choice has been witnessed after a period of extensive personal and family counselling which we have a right to insist upon, then they ought to have that choice.