

The *Globe and Mail* published this letter on June 17, 2016

Re. "Senate Passes Bill C-14" (June 16):

Senator Serge Joyal, in proposing to remove the end-of-life requirement from Bill C-14, spoke of minority rights. He is correct. Even the Americans, by whom Justice Minister Jody Wilson-Raybould was inspired when she was looking around for ways to "tighten up" the Supreme Court's recommendation, have seen that the terminal-illness criterion protects a majority (cancer victims) at the expense of a minority (victims of degenerative diseases such as ALS, MS and Huntington's).

A whole new group, Final Exit Network, sprang up to serve the excluded sufferers. Let us hope that Canada can learn from our neighbour's mistakes, instead of repeating them.

Ruth von Fuchs
President, Right to Die Society of Canada

Some amplifications from the writer:

1)

Of course the people who designed Oregon's death-with-dignity law (which has been substantially copied by the other American states that have legalized some form of medical aid in dying) were not consciously thinking in an anti-minority way. They were just trying to create a law that would be acceptable to legislators and doctors and voters. (Earlier U.S. proposals, many of which were quite similar to what our Supreme Court suggested, had been rejected.)

Perhaps they had met some people like the young taxi driver who took me from my Winnipeg hotel to the set where Women's Television Network was to be filming a show on the right to die, sometime in the 1990s (I cannot remember the exact date). As often happened with taxi drivers, he asked me what the show was about, and I gave him a brief explanation. He gravely nodded agreement, adding "... and if they're dying anyway..."

Clearly, this was what made things OK for him. And I suspected that he was far from alone in his thinking. A few years later I developed the idea in a letter to the man who was Manitoba's Minister of Justice at that time. (Go to the Pro and Con section within Researchers' Buffet, on this website, and choose "The Terminal-Illness Criterion.")

2)

Psychological comfort is not the only reason why the "alpha version" of a right-to-die law often applies only to people for whom the dying process has already begun or is at least very likely to start soon. There is a widespread assumption (often an unconscious one) that life is not just a right but a duty – a sort of constantly-renewed indentured servitude resulting from some implicit contract with the universe. Even though we did not ask to be born, we are obliged to put up with whatever adversities and miseries are dealt out to us, until we become physically unable to carry on. Life is thought to be like high school – if you do not attend, the truant officer will come after you, unless you have a note from your doctor. But in reality, life is like college – if a certain course or program turns out to be disappointing or worse, you can drop that course or withdraw from that program.