

**Bill C-384,
An Act to Amend the Criminal Code (right to die with dignity)
April 20, 2010**

Mr. Michael Savage (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, Lib.):

Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have the opportunity to speak to this bill this evening. It is a bill whose progress I have followed with particular attention and the opportunity to speak tonight is one that I am very appreciative to have.

I want to say at the outset that I will not be voting for this bill. I do not support this bill and I do not support its intent. I do, however, want to commend the member, who has proposed this bill and who has led this fight, for her diligent work on this file, her sincere and informed opinion and understanding of this issue, but I believe it is one of those issues where people who have equal interests can have different points of view. It is a sensitive issue and it may well be an issue that needs a more fulsome debate in this country.

I want to speak to this bill from two points of view. I want to speak to it from a personal point of view. Like most members of the House, I have had experience with people who have died with dignity. It has had a profound effect on my life and the lives of my family and it has certainly had a profound effect on how I view this bill. I want to talk personally in a way that I would not normally about my own situation. I want to talk about my parents.

My parents both had cancer. I do not believe that cancer beat them. I think they beat cancer even though cancer took their lives. My father was diagnosed with inoperable cancer in July 2001. The prognosis was very bleak but he started an aggressive treatment of chemo. He had chemo treatments 24 hours a day and it worked. My father entered a remission period and had a remarkable period of remission in his life. While on remission, he visited Africa and Russia. He did the social development work that mattered very much to him. We felt as close to my father in that period as we ever did.

In November 2002 the cancer returned, and a few weeks later my mother was diagnosed with bowel cancer, one week before Christmas. I am one of seven children. My two sisters became full-time caregivers for my parents from Christmas 2002 onward. By mid-January, my mother was in palliative care, although she was at home, and our family was honoured to care for her. We cared for her in her home. On March 31, 2003, she passed away. Three days after her funeral, my dad was told that his chemo treatments were no longer advised and he came off chemo and entered palliative care as well. He passed away on May 13, six weeks to the day after my mother.

I tell this story because my parents died at home, in peace and sure that they were headed to a better place. We knew as their children that they were ready to leave this world. They both fought cancer with great courage and neither one of them were people to give up without a fight. They felt entirely in control, not only at the end of their life but in control of their death.

It is hard for anybody who has seen people they love die, like so many have, and not be impacted by that. I want to speak to how that impacts my view on this bill because my parents both made a decision. I can recall the conversation with my father when he said that he would no longer be eating. He was at home and he had decided that he would no longer eat. He knew he was ready to go. I do not think he ever actually said to us that he was going to die in two or three days but he was in control of that part of his life and he knew it was time. Likewise, my mother made those same decisions. The opportunity for us as family to be with them in those circumstances was an opportunity I cherished.

When I think about people my age with parents, it seems that one of two things happens. They either die in circumstances quicker than we would like or sometimes they take longer in their passing than they would probably like for the sake of their own family.

However, I do not believe that we needed this legislation to allow my parents to have control of their death. To go to a place that they were ready to go to was a decision that they

made, were comfortable making and were able to make under the laws that existed and under what they considered to be the God that they were prepared to join.

I also do not like this bill because a number of people I represent in my capacity as the critic for human resources, particularly in the disability community, are very concerned about this bill. They do not know exactly where it will lead. At the very least, they think there should be a more serious debate about this before final decisions are made. It should be something that is consulted widely and taking into account the various levels of palliative care.

I do not think anybody here would say that our palliative care system is as strong as it should be. My parents went through this process in Nova Scotia. My father, as a medical doctor, had pioneered some of the palliative care back in the 1970s. He was at the bedside of many people when they passed away and was a big believer in palliative care. When he passed away we were very fortunate in that we are a reasonably well off family. We are not rich but we are comfortable. There are seven kids. Every day, every one of us would go and talk to our mom and dad and be with them when they needed help. We had a prayer session three times a day with a great gospel from the Benedictine monks called the *The Glenstal Book of Prayer: A Benedictine Prayer Book*.

We took great comfort from all of those things, but the palliative care system is not strong enough. Many people in Nova Scotia and in the rest of Canada simply do not have access to palliative care or even, in some cases, home care that we need to have. That is where I believe our efforts should be.

Let us look at what other nations are doing with the issue of euthanasia. Let us consider what supports we have for people in the community. The experience I had with my parents led me to believe that if there is one thing that we should all strive to have in Canada, and that we as parliamentarians should fight for, it is the opportunity for people to die at home if they wished to. Most people cannot afford that because its costs money to have night nurses and day nurses.

For us, because there were seven children and because we had parents who made it easy, we were able and in fact honoured to provide that service to our parents, perhaps as some small, tangible appreciation for all they had done for us.

Let us focus on palliative care and home care. Let us provide the supports that people need in their time of need. Let us be very mindful of people with disabilities, particularly people who are not always able to make decisions on their own and who rely upon others for support, guidance and the everyday aspects of their lives.

I do not support this bill. I truly do commend the member and I commend all people who have expressed their views on this debate. My view comes from my personal experience and my concern for people who are concerned that this bill might impact negatively upon their lives. For those reasons, I cannot support this bill.