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NT Voluntary Euthanasia Society Inc

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NEWSLETTER

October 1998

When Territorians vote at the referendum on Statehood in October, many of them will do so with their right to Voluntary Euthanasia firmly in their mind.

Kevin Andrew's action sponsoring Federal legislation to overturn the NT Rights Of The Terminally Ill Act was a clear demonstration to us all why the Territory needs Statehood.

Even opponents to Voluntary Euthanasia were incensed and outraged over the patronising attitude displayed by Federal politicians whom we did not elect, overturning a democratic decision by the Northern Territory Legislative Assembly.

It was clear that up until the Federal Parliament's heavy handed action, Territorians were ambivalent towards Statehood. Few really care about who runs our two National Parks, owns uranium or which Government administers Aboriginal Land.

(Rightly or wrongly they do not see these issues directly impacting on their lives).

Editorial

The Case For Statehood Voluntary Euthanasia

Yet 75% of Territorians believe they have a right to the Voluntary Euthanasia option, an option denied them whilst we remain a Territory.

These facts have not been lost on those who prepared the advertisements promoting Statehood, hence the constant reference to the Federal Parliament's power to overturn our laws.

During the brief period the Rights Of The Terminally Ill Act was in force, 4 people used the law to take control and end their horrific suffering, dying with some dignity at a time of their own choosing.

Our hearts must go out to those who have suffered and would have used or been comforted by simply having access to the Voluntary Euthanasia option since the Territory law was overturned. We also hope that no one close to us finds themselves among the two percent who face a miserable lingering death in the next two and a half years we have to wait until our Legislative Assembly has the power to again implement Voluntary Euthanasia Legislation.

VOTE

YES

TO

STATEHOOD

Another V.E. Bill For The N.T.

It seems the Legislative Assembly will have to consider Voluntary Euthanasia Legislation again following Statehood.

Until recently it was thought that the Rights Of The Terminally Ill Act would automatically resurrect upon Statehood because the Territory Parliament has never repealed the law despite the Federal Parliament declaring it void.

We now understand that only those NT Laws 'IN FORCE' at the time of Statehood will be preserved after we become a state, meaning a new Bill will have to be introduced, debated and passed before our right to Voluntary Euthanasia is once again restored.

Final clarification of this point can only be made when the wording of the Bill to make the Territory a state is made available by the Federal Government.



Japan Holds the Record

The Japan Society for Dying with Dignity, founded in 1976, has 80,800 members, according to its June 1997 newsletter.

This makes it the largest such organisation in the world.

In 1996 it got 11,600 new members (many of them couples) and lost 5,000 due to death or resignation.

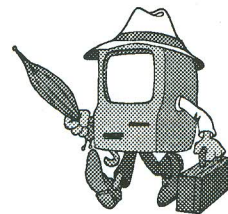
Nitschke Stands Against Andrews

Dr Philip Nitschke's campaign to stand as an Independent against Kevin Andrews in his Blue Ribbon seat of Menzies in Victoria has received support from across the country.

Contributions to help fund the campaign have rolled in from all over Australia demonstrating the breadth of outrage felt by those who believe that the Northern Territory's Voluntary Euthanasia law should never have been overturned.

A Morgan Poll in August in Kevin Andrews seat shows that 74% of his constituents support the option for Voluntary Euthanasia for competent adults. A similar poll in the same Electorate back in February 1997 just after Andrews introduced his Private Members Bill in the House of Representatives also revealed 79.9% support for Voluntary Euthanasia.

Philip Nitschke may have little chance of unseating Kevin Andrews but he deserves our support for his extraordinary commitment to our cause and shaking those who cruelly removed this compassionate option for our terminally ill.



Free Internet News Service

To receive daily news reports on (mostly) U.S. happenings, simply Email to:

jh@mail.islandnet.com

putting nothing in the subject line and in the message text say only "subscribe right to die" and your name.

Oregon Aftermath

The citizens of Oregon battled long and hard to have their wish for Legalised Physician Assisted Suicide for competent terminally ill adults.

At a Citizens Initiated Referendum in 1994, 51% voted in favour of a Death With Dignity Law. Immediate legal challenges by Church and Right to Life organisations prevented anyone using the Legislation for 3 years. Simultaneously with the U.S. Supreme Court finally ruling the law was valid, Oregon state politicians opposing Voluntary Euthanasia sponsored a second referendum to repeal the first one. A bitter public battle in which opponents outspent supporters of Voluntary Euthanasia 4 to 1 preceded this referendum in November last year (1997) **The result was a clear rebuff to politicians who don't listen.** This time 60% voted in favour of retaining the Death With Dignity Act.

Since the law took effect 10 months ago, at least 8 people have fulfilled the requirements and taken lethal drugs prescribed by their doctor to end their suffering.

Health care experts say the implementation of the Death With Dignity state law has helped sensitise physicians to the need for more advanced planning for comfort of the dying and has radically altered the form of their treatment. Since 1994, when voters approved the first assisted-suicide referendum, the state has increased its medical use of morphine by more than 70%, moving from 11th to first in morphine distribution to retail druggist.

Death in acute-care hospitals have fallen dramatically, with more than 60% of people who die doing so at home or in nursing homes, according to the Oregon Health Department.

Nearly a third of Oregonians who die end their lives under hospice care, up from 21% in 1994, according to the Oregon Hospice Association. Preliminary data for 1997 show an estimated 9,000 patients died in hospices, pushing the state to third in the nation. Hospices, which traditionally have opposed physician-assisted suicide, are adopting a more tolerant view of the practice. All 57 Oregon hospices now accept patients who say they intend to end their lives with drugs prescribed by doctors under the new law and a few allow employees to be present at suicides, said Ann Jackson, executive director of the Hospice Association.

In addition, health experts say, there is a growing use of the state's innovative Physicians Orders for Life Sustaining Treatment, a standardised form that allows the elderly and ill to reject intrusive medical interventions ranging from tube feeding to the use of ventilators. "There is no question there have been dramatic improvements in end-of-life care for dying patients, and these improvements are directly attributable to passage of the law", said Barbara Coombs Lee, a nurse and lawyer who helped write the Death With Dignity Act and is director of the Compassion in Dying Foundation, a national group that counsels terminally ill patients on assisted suicide. "It really is a shift of power from the physicians to the patient."

In a bid to block Oregon's landmark assisted suicide law opponents have lobbied Federal politicians and a Bill has been introduced in Congress which if passed would threaten doctors with deregistration if they prescribe terminally ill patients drugs to end their lives.

Resenting Federal interference, Oregon Democrats say the Bill violates state rights and would discourage doctors from prescribing drugs that would ease pain for terminally ill patients. More than 20 medical groups representing over 500,000 doctors, nurses and pharmacists oppose the Bill before Congress.

MICHIGAN NEXT ?

Voluntary Euthanasia or Physician Assisted Suicide For Competent Terminally Ill Adults is an option available today in the Netherlands (population 18m) Switzerland (population 6m) and Oregon (population 3m).

What will be the next jurisdiction to adopt these enlightened and humane practices ?





Lobby groups and sympathetic politicians are working hard to sponsor appropriate legislation in many states across the U.S, however Michigan is most advanced with a Citizens Initiated Referendum being put to a vote on November 3.

Proposal 'B' as it is called, would if supported by a majority legalise the prescription of a lethal dose of medication to terminally ill, competent informed adults in order to commit suicide.

Details of the proposal include the involvement of a psychiatrist, 2 doctors (one a specialist in the disease), a seven day cooling off period, and an oversighting committee.

THE NT VOLUNTARY EUTHANASIA SOCIETY OBJECTIVES

The NTVES objectives are:

-  Promote a knowledge and understanding of the Rights of the Terminally Ill Act, the Natural Death Act and other related legislation to the members and general community.
-  Promote palliative care services in the Northern Territory to ensure voluntary euthanasia is not invoked due to poor palliation.
-  Cooperate with other associations with compatible objectives.
-  Develop and maintain a relationship with the NT Government and other related interested parties/groups which enables the Society to provide effective and timely input to legislation and regulatory processes and policy developments.

NT Voluntary Euthanasia Society - MEMBERSHIP/RENEWAL APPLICATION

I, of.....

..... Telephone Home Bus.....

hereby make application to become a member / renew my membership of the NT Voluntary Euthanasia Society. As a member I agree to abide by the rules and support the objectives of the Society. My cheque/money order for \$15 is enclosed.

☐

Tick box if receipt required

Signed.....

Date.....

Make cheque payable to NT Voluntary Euthanasia Society, and mail with completed form, to NTVES, PO Box 2734 DARWIN 0801

Office use only: Approved/Not approved..... Receipt No.....