

Tilson wants to hear more about Assisted Dying bill

By Bill Rea

The federal government last week received approval in principle for its proposed legislation on medically assisted dying, but there's still opposition to what's been presented.

Only 20 Conservative MPs were in favour of the motion, and Dufferin-Caledon MP David Tilson was among them, although he called it an "awful bill."

He pointed out the bill is still in second reading in the House of Commons, and it still has to be looked over by the justice committee of the House. Tilson is anxious to see what amendments they propose.

"It's probably one of the most difficult issues I've ever come across in my political career," he commented.

This issue also hits home with Tilson.

His father died of amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS), which is also known as Lou Gehrig's Disease. Tilson pointed out a person wishing to be assisted in dying has to be an adult, competent and consenting. By the fourth year of his illness, Tilson's father couldn't speak, so he wouldn't have been able to give consent.

He also pointed out the bill doesn't cover dementia, which his mother, who lived to be 95, had.

Tilson said when his mother was in her early 90s, she thought she might be losing control of her mind, and she didn't want to die like that.

Tilson pointed out if the legislation were to fail, there would be a void in the issue of doctor-assisted suicide. "I believe we need a bill," he declared.

But Tilson does have problems with what's been presented.

"I believe it's poorly drafted," he said, commenting it contains no mention of palliative care, hospice or funding these programs. He was also concerned there are no protections included for health care workers.

"We need to hear what the committee's suggesting," Tilson said, adding he wants to hear legal opinions on whether it complies with the Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

"I'm not pleased with the bill," he remarked. "I'm still up in the air on how I'm going to vote on the bill."

He said the issues of palliative care and hospices might be resolved at committee.

"If they're not resolved, I might vote 'no'," he said.

The government was anxious to move on with the matter. The Supreme Court last year set a June 6 deadline to have a new law enacted. Tilson said he had suggested the government seek an extension from the Court. "They're not going to do that," he commented.

"We'll wait and see what the government does," he commented. "I want to see what they're going to do."