

Tebbit: Right to

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die will send us on a road to hell

By **Tamara Cohen**
Political Correspondent

LORD TEBBIT, whose wife was left paralysed by an IRA bomb, made a moving intervention against assisted dying yesterday, warning that 'the road to hell is paved with good intentions'.

The Tory former Cabinet minister was addressing a marathon ten-hour debate in the House of Lords on whether terminally ill patients should be helped to die if they wish.

Since his wife Margaret was seri-

allowed to kill themselves with a lethal dose of drugs prepared - but not administered - by a doctor.

His proposed law, he said, contained enough safeguards to prevent abuses and would be used in 'limited' circumstances to alleviate terrible suffering.

He said it is completely different from the euthanasia laws in Holland and Belgium, which he rejects.

A patient would be allowed to take their own life only if they are judged to have the mental capacity to make the choice - and after an examination by two doctors.

A record 130 peers put their

used only 80 times last year. But opponent Baroness Grey-Thompson, the Paralympic gold-medallist, said that as Oregon has only 3 million people, if the same trend was replicated in the UK some 1,600 people a year could take their own lives in doctors' surgeries or Dignitas-style clinics.

Many raised concerns about whether the agreement of two doctors would really be sought.

Lord Tebbit highlighted the disclosure last year that doctors were secretly authorising abortions on grounds of sex selection, by pre-signing forms for women they

names down to speak at the Bill's second reading. In the end, 65 spoke in favour of changing the law and 62 opposed it.

On both sides of the debate, peers told of the appalling suffering of loved ones.

Baroness Campbell of Surbiton, who has battled a degenerative disease for half a century, said she had been given six months to live on many occasions and told the Lords that the prospect of assisted dying was 'frightening'.

The model Lord Falconer has followed is that introduced in the US state of Oregon, which he said was

had never met. The Bill will be scrutinised by the Lords in committee later in the year and Lord Falconer, who called yesterday's debate a 'historic day', said he hoped MPs would have a vote on the issue.

But even if the Bill does reach MPs, the looming General Election next May makes it unlikely it will ever become law in its current form.

The Mail reported last week how a Dutch academic who used to support euthanasia warned the UK not to adopt assisted dying. Theo Boer said: 'Once the genie is out of the bottle, it is not likely ever to go back in again.'

**DON'T MAKE
OUR MISTAKE**

As assisted suicide bill goes to Lords, top Dutch regulator who once backed euthanasia warns Britain it leads to mass killing

Last Thursday's Daily Mail

ously injured by the Brighton bomb in 1984, he said he had come to know the 'moments of black despair which prompt those words, "I would be better dead so that you could get on with your life".'

But he implored fellow peers not to change the law, as he feared it would be a 'breeding ground for vultures' seeking to profit from the deaths of frail elderly relatives.

He described the case of an elderly lady he spoke to who said she wished to leave her assets to charity, as she had no children, but feared her family would find a way to claim them.

"You see", she said, "I have no children but I have several vultures awaiting my death". This Bill will be a breeding ground for vultures, individual and corporate. It creates too much financial incentive for the taking of life.'

Lord Falconer of Thoroton, a long-term campaigner for the right to die, has proposed that people with less than six months to live be



Plea: Lord Tebbit and wife Margaret, who was left paralysed by the Brighton bombing

Emotional issue divides House

FOR

'Many people, caring so much for those they leave behind, are dying earlier and alone because they fear implicating their loved ones in a criminal enterprise. They hoard pills or put a plastic bag over their head when they are alone. It is time for a change in the law.'

Lord Falconer of Thoroton, who proposed the Bill

'When suffering is so great, when patients know they are at the end of life, make repeated pleas to die, it seems a denial of loving compassion which is the hallmark of Christianity to refuse to fulfil their own clearly stated request.'

Lord Carey, former Archbishop of Canterbury

'I get very angry when those who oppose the Bill misrepresent what it is actually proposing and fail to mention how limited its aims intentionally are. It applies only to those who are already terminally ill yet still in sound mind who want, as we all surely do, some control or say in the manner of their own death. It has nothing to do with coercing vulnerable old people into killing themselves.'

Labour peer Lord Howarth

AGAINST

'The Bill would provide a route to great savings in public and private expenditure, and to a great pressure on the elderly, the sick and the disabled to do the decent thing and cease to be a burden on others. Those who care for such people are all too familiar with the moments of black despair that prompt those words, "I would be better dead, so that you could get on with your life".'

Lord Tebbit, former cabinet minister whose wife was left paralysed by the Brighton bomb

'This Bill has broad categories into which almost anyone can be shoe-horned and it comes within a whisker of full-blown euthanasia. Are there safeguards? No, there are only broad categories into which you will find some doctor who would state that almost anyone fits.'

Baroness Finlay of Llandaff, former president of the Royal College of Medicine

'Once we decide some lives are not worth living, there will be irresistible momentum to extend it.'

Lord Condon, former Metropolitan Police Commissioner