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# Wisconsin Update

Newsletter of Compassion & Choices of Wisconsin

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Vol. 18, No. 1 Supporting the option of aid-in-dying for the terminally ill March 2008

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## Libertarian Speaks Out for Death With Dignity Bill

By Jim Maas

*(Jim Mass is a member of the Executive Committee of the Libertarian Party of Wisconsin. His article was posted on [wausaudailyherald.com](http://wausaudailyherald.com) on January 29, 2008. Mr. Maas lives in Rothschild, WI. It has been edited only with respect to the title of the piece, which was Allow Us to Meet Death as We Prefer, the removal of a quote from H.L. Mencken and format).*

There are people who do not hesitate to push the power of government into nearly every facet of our lives, and even our deaths. Do we own our own bodies? If not, who does? Wisconsin Senate Bill 151, the "Death With Dignity" act, would allow terminally ill patients with six months or less to live to request life-ending drugs from their physicians. The Assembly version of the bill is AB 298. The proposals would rescind Wisconsin's present law which allows the state to intervene in the patient-physician relationship,

Oregon already has a death with dignity law. It gives people the ability to have some control over their death under certain conditions. The assisted-suicide measure has many provisions and requirements but essentially, it allows terminally ill people to end their pain and suffering by taking their own lives under a physician's supervision.

There are two fundamental principles which provide the basis for all Libertarian political platforms. Libertarians believe that: Every person has complete, unequivocal and inalienable sovereignty over his own life and person; and that no individual,

Visit [www.compassionandchoiceswisc.org](http://www.compassionandchoiceswisc.org) for the latest information regarding end-of-life issues.

group or government may initiate force against any other individual as a means of achieving political or social goals. We believe that all individuals have the right to control their own lives and live, or die, in whatever manner they choose, as long as they do not interfere with the identical rights of others.

Apparently, this is considered a controversial topic to some. We know there are religious arguments that advise against an individual seeking suicide for any reason. Laws against assisted suicide spring from our cultural unwillingness to face the reality of death, and the belief of some religions that "only God can take a life." However, there is a significant and growing percentage of secularists, non-Christians and liberal Christians who do not accept these theologically based arguments. They support compassionate policies under which those whose quality of life is nonexistent have the right to decide to seek medical assistance with ending life. For mainline and liberal Christian denominations, pro-choice statements have been made by the United Church of Christ and groups of the Methodist Church. The Episcopalian, Unitarian, Methodist, Presbyterian, and Quaker movements are among the denominations in favor of allowing individual decision making in cases of active euthanasia.

(Continued on p. 3, **Libertarian Speaks**)

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### April Public Meeting of C&C of WI

The April Public Meeting of Compassion & Choices of Wisconsin will be held in Madison at the First Unitarian Society on Saturday, April 19, 2008 at 9:30 A.M. See the meeting notice on page 5. Come to the meeting and bring a friend.

## Report on the State Senate Committee Hearing on the Death with Dignity Bill

On January 23, 2008, a hearing was held on the Bill by the Senate Committee on Public Health, Senior Issues, Long Term Care and Privacy. The Chairman of the Committee is Sen. Tim Carpenter (D-Milwaukee), who is one of the co-sponsors of the Bill.

The first speakers in favor of the Bill were Sen. Fred Risser (D-Madison) and Rep. Frank Boyle (D-Superior), who are also co-sponsors of the Bill. They have sponsored the Bill for 16 years. Boyle told the Committee that the hearing was the first hearing on the Bill in a decade. Risser urged his

colleagues to approve the Bill and send it to a vote in the Democratic-controlled Senate.

Compassion & Choices members Jim Allen, Brian McCarthy, Jim Greenwald, Linda Meyer and Karen Deiro spoke in favor of the Bill. Susan Armacost of Wisconsin Right to Life and an attorney for Pro Life Wisconsin and a host of others spoke against the Bill. Speakers for the Bill were outnumbered by those against by more than 2 to 1 and persons registering for the Bill numbered 15 as opposed to 29 against.

The hearing was covered by Ryan J. Foley of the Associated Press and his article on the hearing appeared in the Wisconsin State Journal the next morning.

The Committee has not scheduled a vote on the Bill.

### Fund Raising Honor Roll

Late last year, one of our members pledged to donate \$1,000 to C&C of WI if the total donations from other members equaled or exceeded that amount. You did it. Here is the honor roll of members who contributed:

- |                  |                 |
|------------------|-----------------|
| Jim Allen        | Shorewood Hills |
| Dick Grum        | Stoughton       |
| Allen Birmingham | Janesville      |
| Shirley Williams | Ripon           |
| Judy Stevens     | Wausau          |
| Jim Greenwald    | Madison         |

The total amount of the donations, including the challenge pledge, was \$3750.

### Board Supports Washington State Initiative

At its recent meeting, the Board decided to send \$2500 to *Compassion and Choices of Washington* in Seattle, in support of its efforts to put the Washington State Death with Dignity Initiative on the November 2008 ballot.

### Compassion & Choices of Wisconsin Board of Directors

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## Right to Die Advocates Expressed Their Views on WISC-TV

On February 26 and 27, 2008, right to die advocates expressed their views about death and dying on WISC-TV. The station broadcasts on Channel 3 in Madison and was shown as 10 o'clock nightly news features.

Elinor Cowhig, 80, of Middleton, said, "When I was 14, my mother died, and she died a terrible death. People who should have known better stood around and said, 'Well, we can't give her any morphine – she'll become an addict.' Who cared at that point? I mean, the woman was dying and they didn't help her."

Cowhig said her mother suffered an entire year.

"I had to sit by her bed and watch her toss her head and say, 'God, let me die,' and nobody would," Cowhig said.

"When an old person or terminally ill person just wants to quietly exit, I just don't see anything wrong with that," she said.

Dick Grum, 73, of Stoughton, said "Humans should have the ultimate right to decide how they're going to depart. I'm not afraid of dying. It's the way I go that I'm concerned about."

Grum said that he watched his mother and other relatives die a slow or painful death, and he doesn't want to do the same. So, like his group, Compassion & Choices of Wisconsin, he's pushing for physician aid in dying.

Beside the interviews with Cowhig and Grum, the two reports covered a wide assortment of footage and commentary on developments in the right to die movement.

## Booth Gardner, Former Governor of the State of Washington, Says We Can Win

"Too many of us have witnessed terrible suffering of a loved one who is struggling with a terminal illness. Their last months and weeks are too often spent incapacitated by the hopeless progression of diseases like cancer. Many cry out for an end to it all.

It is time we give our loved ones the ability to take control over their end of life decisions. They deserve our compassion.

That's why I need your help today to put the Washington State Death with Dignity initiative on the 2008 ballot. I have joined with three organizations—Compassion and Choices National, Death with Dignity National Center and Compassion and Choices of Washington—to put the Washington State Death with Dignity initiative on the 2008 ballot.

The Oregon law has been in effect for over a decade. Research shows that palliative care for terminally-ill patients in Oregon has improved since the law passed. Physicians now refer more patients to hospice care and this service is hugely important for both the patient and the family during difficult times. The evidence is clear: The Oregon Death with Dignity law encourages everyone involved to help people make the best decisions about their final days.

Continued on page 4 **We Can Win**)

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## (Libertarian Speaks continued from p. 1)

Life is precious. How we use, manage and eventually say good-bye to our lives should be our own business, not the state's. I hear opponents say that the Death with Dignity Bills send the wrong message. I suspect that the last thing on the mind of a terminally ill patient is about sending messages. Send a message to your state legislator about what you think about death with dignity.

(We Can Win, continued from page 3)

We can mobilize voters in Washington. Washington's Death with Dignity law would be a big step in the national strategy to expand compassionate end-of-life care options for all Americans. Our victory will energize our movement and allow us to continue to aid loved ones across the country.

This year is critical for those on the side of dignity and compassion. The citizens of Washington, by a large margin, agree that we must use the initiative process in 2008 to extend compassion to more people; to let the voters decide that compassion for our loved ones is a priority during this elections cycle. With high voter turn out expected and a credible majority in favor of this law, we can win. I ask for your help.

This is our next step. How is the time. Washington is the place. Can you support our effort?

As the former Governor of Washington, I have fought many political battles throughout my life but this may be my most important. It's about the ability to make the final significant decision in life. Residents who are terminally ill in Washington should have the same right to choose a dignified, peaceful end as our neighbors in Oregon.

Now is the time. Help us ensure compassion and dignity for all in end-of-life decisions. Your contribution is critical to our movement, please be generous today."

Members and friends of C&C of WI can join in this effort. If you wish to donate by check, please send your contribution to YES! On I-1000, 4041 Roosevelt Way NE # B, Seattle, WA 98705. You can contribute online by going to [www.itsmydecision.org](http://www.itsmydecision.org). Contributions to YES! On I-1000 are not deductible for federal income tax purposes.

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### **The Memorial Society of Wisconsin Is Under New Leadership and Has a New Name: the Lighthouse Memorial Society**

**By Dick Grum**

*(Dick Grum is a long time board member of Compassion & Choices who lives in Stoughton)*

In the mid 1980s, John Blake, of Egg Harbor, WI, started the Memorial Society of Wisconsin (MSW) to obtain funeral services at a reasonable cost for members of the Society. A number of funeral homes agreed to cooperate because the concept gave them a larger consumer base in their geographic area. I worked with John on this project because it assisted people in obtaining services they could afford, without detracting from the dignity of the process and causing financial hardship. About eighteen months ago, due to failing health and old age, John Blake had to pass the leadership to someone else. The leadership of MSW was taken by Ms. Dorie Geniesse. It has been renamed the Lighthouse Memorial Society (LMS) because it is being expanded to adjoining states. As with the MSW,

the registration fee and yearly dues are modest. Ms. Geniesse has made improvements which will make the Society more effective for the membership. The LMS will facilitate the processing of the death certificate and other permits. It will monitor funeral home services to members to be sure that the formal agreement between the participating funeral home and the LMS is followed as to costs and services. After having a number of informational meetings with Ms. Geniesse, I am confident that she has the commitment, energy, and expertise to provide the leadership for the LMS. The Lighthouse Society can be contacted at: Lighthouse Memorial Society, Ltd. 5018 Milward Drive, Madison, WI. 53711. Call Toll Free 1-888-828-8220, or visit [info@lighthousems.org](mailto:info@lighthousems.org). You may find it worth your while to check this out!

### **Summer Program Will Be in Mequon**

Rev. Matthew Nelson, a C&C board member, will speak from the pulpit at the Unitarian Church North on Sunday, August 10, 2008 at 9:30 A.M. More details will be in the June newsletter.

**Notice of Public Meeting**

**Compassion & Choices of Wisconsin Will Hold a Meeting for Members and the Public.**

Saturday, April 19, 2008  
First Unitarian Society, West Living Room  
900 University Bay Drive, Madison, WI

**Robynn James**, Assistant Vice-President of Compassion & Choices, will speak on *How Generosity is Transforming the End of Life Choice Movement*.



9:30 A.M. Coffee and Conversation  
9:45 Announcements  
10:00 Program

The meeting is free to all. Members are urged to come to the meeting and bring a friend. For driving directions to the meeting or if you need a ride, please call Betty at (608) 833-2774 or Jim at (608) 233-7867.

**Compassion & Choices Membership Form**

**Yes! I want to join Compassion & Choices \***  
**\_\_\_ \$45 Individual \_\_\_ \$60 Couple \_\_\_ \$450 Life Member \_\_\_ \$600 Life Couple Member**

*Please supply complete address:*  
Name/s \_\_\_\_\_  
Address \_\_\_\_\_  
City \_\_\_\_\_  
State Zip \_\_\_\_\_  
Telephone ( ) \_\_\_\_\_  
E-Mail \_\_\_\_\_

Make Checks Payable to and Send To:  
**Compassion & Choices**  
P.O. Box 101810  
Denver, CO 80250-1810  
Or Call: 1-800-247-7421  
Visa or MasterCard accepted  
**Dues are not tax deductible**

\* The payment of dues includes your membership in **Compassion & Choices of Wisconsin**. You are invited to call **1-800-247-7421** if you cannot afford the \$45 membership. Every effort will be made to accommodate your circumstances.

### **Please Send Us Changes In Your Address, Telephone Number and Email Address**

I have started to notice that each monthly bill I get is sure to ask me if I have had a change in address. We will not ask you each month but we hope you will let us know when there are changes.

C&C of WI does not maintain its own membership lists. Membership lists and donor lists are maintained by C&C at its Denver offices.

Therefore, if you have changes of address, telephone number or email address, please send them to the membership office by calling 1-800-247-7421 or sending an email to [jsanders@compassionandchoices.org](mailto:jsanders@compassionandchoices.org) or send a letter to Compassion & Choices, P.O. Box 80250, Denver, CO 80250-1810.

If we have your email address, we will be able to notify you quickly of events.

### **Would You Like an Email Copy of the Newsletter Besides the Paper Copy?**

For those of you who like to receive information by email, we can now send you a copy of the newsletter by email. Everyone would still receive a paper copy of the newsletter. You might want to receive an electronic copy so you could send an article in it or the membership form in it to a relative or friend and ask them to join our organization. Or you might like to keep a copy in your computer for future reference. Persons, who are more knowledgeable about computer use than me, might well have other uses for which they might put an electronic copy of the newsletter. If you would like an electronic copy of the newsletter, send your request to the editor by email and I will put you on the list.

All members will receive a paper copy of the newsletter as now, even those who also get an electronic copy.

*See address label for your membership expiration date.*

[www.compassionandchoiceswisc.org](http://www.compassionandchoiceswisc.org)

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