**People with disabilities often fear they’re a burden.**

**That’s why legal assisted suicide scares me.**

**by Ben Mattlin**

***California's End of Life Option Act went into effect on June 9 of last year ... Months before the California vote, a colleague and I met with a representative of a state legislator ... to urge a "no" vote.***

***Our reasons, simply put: Legalization of assisted suicide unduly threatens people with severe disabilities and health care costs, like us. In a country where the right to receive health care is under attack and medical costs continue to rise, offering the option of legal suicide is the last thing we need.***

**Ben, thankfully there is a large number of caring people in California who disagree with you. People in horrible pain are only asking that they be given the same rights as a dog or a horse. And then someone like you comes along, selfishly ignoring their pleas for pity, and tells them that they must suffer as long as possible until nature takes its course and relieves them of their agony.**

**That’s real humane of you Ben.**

**(I hope Ben doesn’t own any horses)**

***Looking back over the past year, I concede that I've felt no ill effects of the law's passage.***

**Ben, yet you continue your crusade to make others suffer horribly. Why?**

***Yet that doesn't mean I'm put at ease or have changed my mind.***

**Ben, we certainly wouldn’t want you to feel ill at ease. By all means, let’s continue to force people to live in agony until death mercifully ends their suffering ... as long as it keeps you from having to feel uneasy.**

***The state's Department of Public Health recently reported that 111 people died under the act last year ... That's roughly one person every two days. Of those, slightly more than half, or 65 of them, had cancer. The rest? It's a mixed bag. Fully 20 had unspecified neuromuscular conditions, perhaps not unlike my own and my fellow advocate’s multiple sclerosis.***

**Ben, if you had your way they would all still be here against their will, suffering terribly. But what a small price for them to pay so that you don’t have to feel “uneasy.”**

**You have to be one of the most selfish, uncaring human beings on the planet, Ben. Your disease didn’t just rob you of your health; far worse ... it stripped you of your humanity.**

***What's more, the law's so-called safeguards give me scant comfort.***

**Ben, and as we have all just learned, your comfort is far more important to you than the suffering of your fellow human beings.**

***They require you to be mentally competent, age 18 or older, and diagnosed as having six or fewer months to live. I could qualify.***

**Ben, I’m only part way through this vile, inhuman article ...**

**and I already feel like checking to see if I qualify.**

***If I ever get so depressed about my life that I'd consider ending it***

**Ben, not possible. This article made it very clear that there is only one life on Earth that has any meaning to someone like you ...**

**and that is your own.**

***which is not impossible, considering how difficult and expensive it can be for someone like me to survive, not to mention to maintain a good sense of self-esteem in an able-bodied and often inaccessible world.***

**Ben, self-esteem is not your problem. That is the one thing you will never run out of. Empathy for others on the other hand ....**

***I want to have the same suicide prevention interventions in place that everyone else has. Only fair, right?***

**Ben, can you produce any evidence ... that you don’t?**

***Other safeguards also feel like mere lip service. For instance, you must make two separate verbal requests and one written request of a doctor, at least 15 days apart, though the law doesn't mandate any long-term relationship with that doctor. Furthermore, you must be able to self-administer the poison, but there is no oversight of that. Besides fear of coercion,***

**Ben, what evidence do you have to justify your fear of coercion?**

**That is a serious accusation, bordering on accusing people of homicide.**

**You had better be able to back that up ... can you?**

***I have concern about those who down the drug prematurely out of fear of one day being unable to self-administer. Make no mistake: Fear of debility underlies most support for this law. Consider Brittany Maynard, the 29-year-old Californian with brain cancer who moved to Oregon in 2014 to take advantage of its right-to-die law before California had one. (The publicity she received is one of the reasons we have the law now.) In press reports, Maynard's husband, Dan Diaz, said she ultimately ingested her lethal medication when she became afraid she'd soon lose the ability to down it herself: "If a seizure or a stroke occurs as her symptoms get worse, if she loses the ability to self-administer, if she suffers a stroke and she loses the ability to stand, walk or swallow, all of a sudden she's now trapped in her own body, and she's trapped dying the very way she was trying to avoid."***

**Ben, earlier you wrote:**

***“you must be able to self-administer the poison, but there is no oversight of that.”***

**Ben, maybe those legislators were smarter than you give them credit for. If Maynard had been unable to administer the medication to herself, is there any doubt that her husband would have secretly helped her?**

**In that scenario, the only doubt that comes to my mind, would be in the case that she had been unfortunate enough to be married to you.**

**This article has made it crystal clear – you would have watched her die, painfully, slowly, for as long as it took.**

**The fact that you can even look yourself in the mirror shows the limitless ability of some humans to control their gag reflex.**

***That's a lot of scary “ifs”! I don't judge Maynard, but I can't help wondering whether she would've made the same choice if our society prioritized providing assistive technology, or palliative care and hospice care that ease pain management.***

**Ben, what evidence do you have to indicate that our society does not prioritize providing those things?**

**Especially considering ... that we *do* provide those things.**

***How many people like me — people who live full and active lives without the ability to walk or stand or swallow easily — did she talk (and really listen) to?***

**Ben, when she ended her life, she was able to do it herself ...**

**and that is what proves that you are dead wrong.**

**To use her suffering and death to try to justify your own selfish views is abominable.**

**You are really one nasty little piece of work, Ben.**

***Proponents of right to die, such as Matt Whitaker, director of the California chapter of Compassion & Choices (formerly the Hemlock Society), assert the law is "working well." What they mean is that people are using it. But that doesn't really indicate they're better off because of it.***

**Ben, that is their decision to make ... not yours.**

**(I am fighting as hard as I can to keep profanity out of my replies.**

**But the more I read ... the harder it gets)**

***Conditions like Maynard's and mine are expensive to treat on an ongoing basis. Death is cheaper.***

**Ben, death is cheaper for *every* living person ... not just the disabled. Life is expensive for everyone: that’s why we have to work.**

**(I am counting to 10 now, before each reply that I type)**

***Sure, anybody who tries to push someone toward seeking death under this law is liable for felony prosecution. Yet a lack of adequate health insurance coverage alone sends a pretty strong signal.***

**Ben, it does more than just send a signal; it kills.**

**When Republican governors refused the Medicaid expansion, it cost the lives of tens of thousands of Americans.**

[**http://www.dailykos.com/story/2014/01/31/1270171/-Harvard-Study-States-Medicaid-expansion-refusal-will-kill-nbsp-thousands?detail=email**](http://www.dailykos.com/story/2014/01/31/1270171/-Harvard-Study-States-Medicaid-expansion-refusal-will-kill-nbsp-thousands?detail=email)

**If I had to guess, between all those governors, I’ll bet not one lost even one minute of sleep.**

***I understand the appeal of letting people on the brink of death have the right to go out on their own terms.***

**Ben, this all boils down to you wanting to force your beliefs on the most vulnerable, weakest people in our state, just because it makes you feel “uneasy” and “uncomfortable.”**

**If you don’t want Euthanasia then DON’T DO IT. It really is that simple. No one is going to force you. As you admitted earlier, it is a felony to push someone to do it. The problem is, that you want to prevent others from having access to technology that can end their suffering.**

**In the United States there are more suicides than there are murders. Before this humane law passed (that you fought so hard against) those people were forced to blow their brains out, jump to their death from rooftops, overdose on drugs, or step in front of a train. But in your mind, that is all worth it if it keeps you from feeling uneasy.**

**Thankfully, legislators and Governor Brown possess the empathy that you lack, and they did the humane thing.**

***But I've personally experienced the myriad often unspoken pressures to move aside, get out of the way, relieve others.***

**Ben, it sounds like you need a new circle of friends.**

**But after reading this article and seeing what kind of a person you really are, I can understand why many of them may have been leaving pictures of Heaven on your desk.**

***And if I had to be kept in a dreary institution — a very real possibility for millions of people like me, if the schemes to slash Medicaid become law — I might request a terminal dosage myself! The struggle to go on living would become too burdensome for me, perhaps even downright impossible. On days when every breath is a monumental struggle, it can be tempting to give up. I don't want that option to be too easy.***

**Ben, that’s why they built multiple safeguards into the law; some of which, you yourself mentioned earlier.**

***Those of us who may be closer to death have as much right to protection from suicidal wishes as anyone else.***

**Ben, what “right” are you referring to? Who has the right to protection from suicidal thoughts? And how did they get it?**

***A better option, for me, is to ensure that people with ongoing conditions are as welcome and valued as anyone else, and indeed that they are assisted in living their lives to the fullest. Shouldn't that be the first priority?***

**Ben, euthanasia is not the first priority ... it is the last.**

**All you have accomplished in this article, was to expose yourself as someone who is trying to stop others from ending their unbearable suffering.**

**And for that, Ben, there is no shame too great to heap upon you and this disgusting article.**

[**https://www.vox.com/first-person/2017/9/21/16307868/assisted-suicide-disabilities-legal**](https://www.vox.com/first-person/2017/9/21/16307868/assisted-suicide-disabilities-legal)