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Dutch Parliament passes euthanasia bill

THE HAGUE, Netherlands (AP) — The Dutch Parliament approved a bill legalizing euthanasia Tuesday, positioning the Netherlands to become the first nation to openly let doctors help suffering patients end their lives.

Advocates of patients' right to die voiced praise for the vote, but many Christian groups and others condemned it. The Vatican said the law "violates human dignity."

Fending off concerns the Netherlands could become a haven for patients from abroad seeking to end their lives, Dutch officials stressed that foreigners would be unable to meet strict standards under the law for allowing euthanasia.

"There is no possibility for foreigners to come here for euthanasia," said Wijnand Stevens of the Justice Ministry. "The criteria call for a long-term doctor-patient relationship. They are just too strict for that."

All 100 seats in Parliament's public gallery were full for Tuesday's vote, in which legislators announced their votes aloud as requested by a Christian party opposed to the bill.

After the 104-40 vote in Parliament's lower house, the bill was expected to win approval by the upper house early next year and become law.

With the law, the Netherlands would formalize the tolerance it has long held toward euthanasia —

thousands of cases are reported every year here and many more go unreported. In 1993, legislators passed a set of guidelines that doctors could follow to carry out euthanasia and — it was understood — go unprosecuted.

"Doctors should not be treated as criminals. This will create security for doctors and patients alike."

— Els Borst
Dutch health minister

Still, euthanasia was a crime punishable by up to 12 years in prison. The new legislation largely adopts the informal guidelines, which say the patient must be feeling unrelenting suffering and know all the medical options.

"Doctors should not be treated as criminals. This will create security for doctors and patients

alike," said Health Minister Els Borst, who drafted the bill.

"Something as serious as ending one's life deserves openness," she said after the vote.

In doctor-assisted suicides, the patient administers a lethal dose of medication to himself or herself. Under the new Dutch law, a doctor may give it directly to the patient.

Opponents in the Dutch parliament denounced the bill, saying it challenges God's will by giving doctors the power to decide over life and death.

"This is a black day in the history of our Parliament," said lawmaker Bas van der Vlies of the State Reform Party SGP. "We believe as Christians that our lives are not in our hands, that we cannot ourselves decide. We must wait for God's leadership."

The Vatican said the law was "a sad record for Holland," and spokesman Joaquin Navarro-Valls said it "violates human dignity."

"It's cheaper to kill people than to take care of them," scoffed Lori Hougens of the Washington-based National Right to Life Committee, adding: "We are very, very saddened" by the law.

Under the new Dutch law, a patient must be undergoing unrelenting and unbearable suffering, be aware of all other medical options and have sought a second professional opinion. The request must be made voluntarily, persistently and independently.

News in Canadian crashes into

REVELSTOKE, B.C. (AP) — A tour bus headed on with a transport a tunnel on the Trans-Canada Highway, killing at least 10 people, a regional official said Tuesday.

Another 17 people were injured, some seriously, when the bus crashed into a wall of rock. The bus was carrying 27 people, including a school group from Kamloops.

Royal Canadian Mounted Police would not comment on the crash Monday in the town of Revelstoke, about 25 miles southwest of Kamloops. The bus was carrying 27 people, including a school group from Kamloops.

"You can imagine the chaos," said Dan Hume, a member of the Revelstoke fire department. "There were people everywhere. It was not a good thing to see."

Princess recovers fairy tales for

OSLO, Norway (AP) — A fairy tale reader on television will be special experience.

Princess Martha Louise, 29-year-old daughter of King Harald V and Queen Sonja, is reading 10 programs of children's tales for broadcast by television network NRK.

The series is being called "Princess in Fairy Tales."

The princess came up with the idea for the programs because she loved fairy tales as a child.

Israeli Parliament votes to hold new elections

JERUSALEM (AP) — Israel's Parliament voted overwhelmingly Tuesday to hold new elections after Prime Minister Ehud Barak — his government shaken by two months of street battles with the Palestinians — reluctantly agreed to hard-liners' demands for an early vote.

Polls have shown elections would be a risky proposition for Barak, as his minority government has been steadily losing support.

Many Israelis seem to perceive

Barak as ineffective in ending the bloodshed.

However, a vote would probably not be held before spring, giving Barak time for a last-ditch effort to forge a peace agreement with the Palestinians. Elections could serve as a referendum on the agreement.

Palestinian officials said they were hopeful an accord could be reached before the elections.

The 120-member legislature voted separately on five bills calling for

early elections.

Four of the bills were approved by more than 70 members of the house. Only three legislators were opposed, and the rest abstained.

The date for elections will be set in the coming days by party leaders. Barak said the vote could be held as late as nine months from now, while several opposition lawmakers said they expected elections in May, two years after Barak took office.

Parliament had settled into a long

debate on the five bills Tuesday evening when Barak made an unexpected appearance before the lawmakers. In a speech, Barak announced that he would no longer resist the opposition push for elections.

Recent polls have indicated that if elections were held now, Barak would be defeated by any opposition candidate, including opposition leader Ariel Sharon and former Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

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