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Final Exit Network

HONORING THE PAST. EMBRACING THE FUTURE.

Final Exit Network (FEN)

IN THIS ISSUE

Legal Corner

Different Leaders, Different Results: MAID in America

A bill allowing for medical aid in dying recently passed the Nevada Assembly with bipartisan support. It now heads to the Senate, but its future remains uncertain as it faces a likely veto from Nevada's governor, who vetoed MAID legislation that the legislature passed in 2023.

Polling shows bipartisan support, with 82% of Nevada voters in favor of the option of medical aid in dying. Constituent support caused at least one former opponent to vote "yes" to the bill. However, with the governor remaining opposed to the bill and not enough votes to override his expected veto, it seems unlikely that medical aid in dying will be legal in Nevada anytime soon.

Delaware paints a different picture as a new governor is poised to sign legislation passed this year. Last year, similar legislation did not go into effect due to the veto of the then-governor.

The Delaware bill is modeled on laws now in effect in 11 US jurisdictions requiring two doctors or other authorized clinicians to certify the patient is mentally fit, making an informed decision, and acting voluntarily. The patient must be within six months of death and able to ingest the medication.

If you have topics you'd like to see addressed in a future Legal Corner, please email us at info@finalexitnetwork.org.

Tune in to the "Seeing Death Clearly" podcast to hear FEN's Lowrey Brown and Brian Ruder share powerful personal stories and discuss how FEN supports those seeking autonomy at the end of life—especially when medical aid in dying isn't an option.

They dive into self directed dying, caregiver challenges, and the importance of choice, dignity, and compassionate guidance. Listen at: www.endoflifeclarity.com

From the Executive Director

Dear Readers,

With gratitude and reflection, I am announcing my retirement as Executive Director of Final Exit Network. As I enter my seventh year in this role, I look back on the goals set together with the Board when I first began. Thanks to the dedication, passion, and tireless work of our team, volunteers, and supporters, many of those goals have been achieved. Now, the time has come for me to step back and welcome new leadership into this role.

I hope you will indulge me in some reminiscences. In my first article for the Fall 2019 issue of this magazine, I observed how the turn of seasons resonates with beginnings and endings. Like a student at the beginning of a school year, I spent my early days at FEN learning "who's who" among board members, volunteers, and staff.

Next came learning the operational nuts and bolts. *Who receives and pays invoices? What are the logins and passwords for our online tools? Who writes articles for FEN's main communication–the FEN magazine?* FEN's magazine production process is a case in point. For production of the first magazine under my watch, I thought I had everything covered–articles written and edited, layout complete, mailing list and copy sent to the printer. Then the printer contacted me. Where was the postage check? I didn't know that prepaying postage was part of the process, but I do now!

With a better handle on operations, I turned my attention to improvements. FEN's website became more user-friendly, our database was upgraded to provide more complete information, and bookkeeping was transferred to an accounting firm with expertise in small businesses and nonprofits. In addition, we created the Infinity Society to honor those who choose to remember FEN in their estate plans, and began robust fundraising campaigns that have allowed FEN to explore research opportunities, expand programs, and increase visibility. Finally, we focused our communications strategy to amplify our mission and engage new members.

As FEN has matured, with solid processes in place, we've moved on to exciting projects that benefit our members and raise our profile in the end of life community, including tremendous projects like our EOL Workshops and the Chosen Death Forums. We've provided speakers for several state right to die groups interested in learning more about what FEN does. And the board just held its first-ever retreat to develop a proactive plan for moving forward during the next few years.

With this accomplished, it seems a perfect time for me to step away and allow someone with new energy and vision to move FEN forward. I've been so fortunate to work with supportive board members, engaged volunteers, and collegial staff. I will miss the daily interaction with them as they have become, as Ann Mandelstamm famously said, "my tribe."

Serving as Executive Director has been one of the most meaningful and fulfilling chapters of my life. Throughout my tenure, I have witnessed the unwavering passion and resilience of our members, volunteers, and advocates. Together, we have advanced the conversation around the right to a peaceful and dignified death and strengthened the foundation of this vital organization. I am immensely proud of all we have accomplished.

I leave with full confidence in the strength of Final Exit Network. Our mission is more important than ever, and I have no doubt that the organization will continue to thrive in the capable hands of our leadership team, board members, and dedicated supporters.

I extend my heartfelt thanks to each of you for your trust, support, and commitment to this cause. And I hold warm memories of my husband, Craig, whose ALS journey triggered my passion for this movement. Though I am retiring from my role, I will always remain an advocate for the right to self-determination at life's end. I look forward to watching FEN grow and make a lasting impact in the years ahead.

With appreciation,

Mary Ewert
Executive Director

Persistent but Patient

BY BRIAN RUDER, BOARD PRESIDENT

Final Exit Network is built on a strong foundation. One of our founders, Derek Humphry, is recognized as the father of the USA Right to Die Movement and a leader in the world movement. Founded by Derek in 1980, the Hemlock Society was the first right to die organization in the US and at one time had over 45,000 members. Derek was instrumental in getting the first Medical Aid in Dying law (MAID) passed in Oregon in 1994. His book, *Final Exit*, published in 1991, was on the New York Times bestseller list for 14 weeks. The book's success was an early indication of people's desire to know more about how to manage their end days.

A few years later, Dr. Faye Girsh, another founder of FEN, started the Caring Friends Program within the Hemlock Society to provide more hands-on education to people interested in managing their death. Caring Friends was the predecessor of Final Exit Network, which started in 2004. Faye and Derek were both presidents of the World Federation of Right to Die Societies.

The right to die movement worldwide and in the US has experienced different levels of acceptance. The first law in the US went into effect in Oregon in 1997. The Oregon law has been the basis for all MAID laws passed in the US and requires that a person be within six months of dying to use the law. This requirement is a significant limitation, especially for people with dementia and neurological diseases. Fewer than one percent of the people in states with MAID laws die using the law. In other areas of the world, we see different numbers. For example, in the Netherlands, whose law went into effect in 2002, over four percent of the people dying there use the law because it has become more socially acceptable and integrated into their medical system.

In this country, society believes that any person who chooses to hasten their death must be mentally unstable. If a FEN client tells the wrong person about their plans to hasten their death, they can end up having the police take them in for mental health evaluation. This societal attitude makes it difficult even for rational people to consider hastening their death.

So, what can we do to make choice in dying more socially acceptable? We can encourage people to discuss with their families how they feel about dying and death. We can make sure people know all their legal and peaceful options for dying. We can get the medical profession and the academic world to talk about the pros and cons and ethics of a chosen death. And we can get more stories of rational people choosing to die on their terms into mainstream media.

Finally, we need to recognize that the right to die movement is still in its early stages. Women obtained the right to vote in 1920, but not much happened to expand their rights until 50 to 60 years later when Title IX legislation was passed. Today, women have a seat at the table in nearly every industry, and continue to work toward retaining and earning more rights. So it is with the right to die movement. We need to be persistent, but patient.

FEN Explores the Road Ahead

The FEN Board of Directors recently gathered in person for a comprehensive two-day meeting, which included a joint session with the Exit Guides and provided a valuable opportunity for fellowship among FEN's dedicated volunteers.

FEN brought facilitator David Tabak in to assist with strategic planning. At the April meeting, Tabak presented the results of extensive background work, including more than twenty interviews with board members, staff, consultants, volunteers, and representatives of affiliated organizations. These interviews formed the basis of an analysis of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats that FEN faces.

With this foundation, discussions about programming, finances, governance, and communications unfolded, guiding the board as it develops strategies to achieve FEN's mission through the objectives that emerged from the discussion. Finally, board members discussed specific actions to execute these strategies.

More insight on the outcomes of the retreat will be featured in FEN's 2024-25 Annual Report, to be published later this year.

Pictured *at left (top to bottom):*

- Board members Michael Klingler, Chris Palmer, and Anita Winsor.
- FEN team members Mary Ewert, Lowrey Brown, and Heike Sanford.
- Board member Gary Wederspahn was recognized for his service.

Pictured at right (L-R):

- Back row: Michael Klingler, Brian Ruder, Chris Palmer, Anita Winsor, Gary Wederspahn, Janis Landis.
- Front row: Mary Ewert, Lowrey Brown, Heike Sanford. Missing: Randee Laikind

Thanks to FEN team member Michelle Kalapodis for taking this year's photographs!

Please share with your networks: as part of FEN's planned leadership succession process, the Board has retained an executive recruiting firm to conduct a nationwide search for a new Executive Director. For more information, please visit: petergraysearch.com/jobs.

Derek Humphry's Legacy

BY FAYE GIRSH, FEN CO-FOUNDER

Derek Humphry, founder of the National Hemlock Society in 1980 and co-founder of FEN (established in 2004), died on January 2, 2025 at the age of 94.

Without Derek's publications, his attempts to change the law to allow aid in dying, and without his powerful voice, there arguably would be no right to die movement in the US.

I was close to Derek and feel this tremendous loss to our movement. I first met him when I invited him to speak at a conference I held in 1986 where the two of us, over lunch, agreed to make San Diego a Hemlock Society chapter. I headed the chapter with an enthusiastic team until I moved to Denver in 1996 to head Hemlock USA, a position Derek held until 1991.

As you may know, Final Exit Network is based on many of the ideas in Derek's bestseller *Final Exit*, and the organization is modeled after the Caring Friends program that we started in the national Hemlock Society five years before its dissolution. FEN is in its 21st year and is prospering. Derek allowed the then-new organization to use the well-publicized name of his famous book.

Derek spoke all over the world about his book *Final Exit*, demonstrating the inert gas method and advocating for the right to die with dignity. In California, he entrusted the San Diego chapter of the Hemlock Society (HSSD) with the task of gathering enough signatures to place the first-ever assisted dying law on the state ballot. Despite our tireless efforts, we succeeded only on the second attempt—only to narrowly lose the vote.

HSSD also contributed $35,000 to support Washington State's successful ballot initiative. Additionally, from national Hemlock's funds—sustained largely by sales of Derek's books—he financed the salary of the director of Oregon's Death with Dignity campaign for three years before their first ballot initiative was ultimately unsuccessful.

The fight for assisted dying legalization has always demanded perseverance, vision, and substantial fundraising. Derek embodied all of these qualities, and his absence will make this battle even more challenging.

Always seeking alternatives when legal options were unavailable, Derek founded NuTech—an informal organization of scientists, engineers, divers, and other experts dedicated to developing innovative methods of self-deliverance. NuTech meetings were held alongside gatherings of the World Federation of Right to Die Societies, an organization Derek co-founded with the Japanese Right to Die group in 1980, later serving as its president.

The Hemlock Society USA remained active until 2005, when it merged with another organization to form Compassion & Choices. After stepping down as head of Hemlock in 1991, Derek established ERGO (Euthanasia Research and Guidance Organization). Until recently, when he closed it due to declining health, ERGO served as a resource for his books and videos and provided a daily email update on assisted dying news from around the world.

Before his involvement in the right to die movement, Derek was a British journalist and author who wrote extensively on race relations. His advocacy for end of life choice began in 1975 when his wife, Jean, was diagnosed with terminal breast cancer. She asked for his help in dying, and he granted her request. He later chronicled her illness and his role in the book *Jean's Way*, a courageous and deeply personal account of their experience.

The success of *Jean's Way* led Derek and his second wife, Anne, to establish the Hemlock Society. Working from their garage in Santa Monica, they named the organization after the poison Socrates chose to drink rather than accept exile for his so-called crime of corrupting Athenian youth. When Derek and I launched our local Hemlock chapter, he spearheaded an effort to pass California's first physician aid in dying law by gathering thousands of signatures for a ballot initiative. Our grassroots campaign, though initially unsuccessful, attracted international attention as the first of its kind. While it took years to place a legal initiative on the ballot, Derek, through Hemlock, provided crucial support for the successful legalization efforts in Oregon and Washington.

In 1991, Derek published *Final Exit: A Guide to Self-Deliverance for the Terminally Ill*, which became a New York Times bestseller. The book provided a means for desperate individuals to achieve a peaceful death when they were ineligible for legal assisted dying or lived outside the few states where such laws—though restrictive—existed.

The method of hastened dying Derek described, and later demonstrated in the Final Exit video, involved the inhalation of an inert gas. While he preferred a legal option such as physician-administered lethal injection, he recognized that many would need a simple, self-directed alternative. FEN adopted this inert gas method, which was first introduced through Hemlock's Caring Friends program.

Derek's legacy is one of courage, advocacy, and unwavering dedication to the right to die with dignity. His contributions changed the course of the movement, and his absence will be deeply felt.

Let's honor Derek's legacy by helping people die better, learn about their choices, and expand our laws.

In honor of his deep compassion, tenacity, and courage, we will move forward together toward a good life and a good death.

I met Derek Humphry several times in the past two decades at Final Exit Network events where he was a featured speaker, telling the story of how he got involved and the founding of the Hemlock Society.

Today the movement for end of life liberty is large and worldwide, and FEN leads the way with its commitment to advancing the social acceptance of an individual's right to comfortably end their own life when faced with intractable suffering or a loss of selfhood through dementia. FEN's Exit Guide Program exemplifies the simple moral truths that suffering at the end is often extreme and that nobody has the right to tell another human being, "Sorry, you must suffer until you die." Thank you Derek, for all you did, including and especially being one of the founding members of Final Exit Network. It's our turn now to carry on your work.

– Ed Gogol, FEN Volunteer

In Memoriam

FEN would like to take a moment to honor the recent passing of three long-time volunteers whose dedication, compassion, and unwavering support were instrumental to our mission. These remarkable individuals gave generously of their time, empathy, and wisdom, embodying the values of kindness and respect that define FEN. We extend our heartfelt condolences to their families, friends, and all who were fortunate enough to know them.

Join us as we remember:
Anne Hammond, Interviewer and Exit Guide
Susan McGrail, Coordinator and Exit Guide
Jerry Metz, Medical Review Committee and Exit Guide

In Their Own Words

Gratitude for a Well-Planned Act

BY MARIA AMUNDSON AND AMY COLEMAN

Our mother, longtime FEN volunteer Ann Mandelstamm, planned her completion of life so beautifully that it transformed one of life's greatest losses for us into an act of acceptance, bonding, and grace.

It didn't start off so smoothly. Years earlier, when she first mentioned her intention to end her life in her mid-80s, we were surprised. Shocked, actually. We hadn't heard of terms like self-deliverance, final exit, or completion of life. We knew about medical aid in dying, but our mother didn't have a life-threatening or debilitating illness. We associated the concept of taking one's life with despair, while she had a dynamic, healthy life rich in interests, activism, community, and friends. She had sharp mental faculties and high energy, and we couldn't understand how or why she would contemplate "leaving time on the table" by ending her life before it was absolutely necessary. (Granted, we weren't clear about what "absolutely necessary" even means in this context.)

All that said, our mom was not in perfect condition by her early 80's. At that point, she had lost vision in one eye due to a hemorrhage. Nerve problems in her lower legs caused numbness, nighttime cramps, and occasional falls. She claimed that she was experiencing cognitive weakness and some embarrassing bodily changes, though those were not so noticeable to us. This constellation of challenges threatened her sense of independence and agency. She was well aware of the odds of stroke and the inevitability of human decline. Both of her younger sisters were slipping into dementia, one of them deeply. We told her she would never be a burden and we would happily care for her if she would let us. But she was fiercely independent and could not abide the idea of living with assistance or losing her autonomy. She feared helplessness and lack of agency much more than the idea of death.

Luckily for us, our mother had the advantage of being a longtime FEN coordinator who had responded to inquiries and spoken with countless people about their lives, families, and end of life choices. This gave her deep insights and the experience to help us, her own family, navigate our way through. In retrospect, a few crucial aspects made all the difference:

Time to think it over

She brought up the topic with more than enough advance notice—in this case, years in advance. It is no doubt a difficult topic for anyone to raise with loved ones. She found ways to raise it gently, in quiet and relaxed moments together. She knew that coming around to understand and accept her choice would be a process, and she tried to make sure we were free of immediate pressure. We had enough time to progress from disbelief to understanding, and beyond this to grow to respect, support, and deeply admire her courage to live by her principles.

Patience

We had a lot of questions and a few persistent, probably annoying, objections. She addressed them all patiently, some of them multiple times, with empathy and clarity. Her responses were comfortingly consistent. She clearly had thought through most of these herself, and discussed them with FEN friends and other like-minded people. She no doubt was rolling her eyes (to herself) by the fifth or sixth time we raised "leaving time on the table," or "you'll never be a burden," but she never showed it.

Respect for differences

Our mother realized that family members would have different feelings and reactions. She privately approached each of us, plus our sibling and a dear cousin, to better understand how much each individual wanted to know about or discuss her plans, particularly when and how the exit would take place. She treated everyone's different preferences with utmost care. The two of us wanted to know everything and to stay in close contact about all the planning. The others accepted and supported her decision but didn't want to know about her plans or timing at all. One of them changed her mind closer to the exit, which also was fine. We all had some level of anticipatory anxiety, which is natural with the idea of an impending loss of a loved one, but each of us felt "heard" and ended up experiencing the level of knowledge most comfortable.

Planning

In true former-teacher form, our mother assembled a binder chock full of detailed information, instructions, account numbers, and other plans for her death and the period after. She arranged and prepaid for her cremation. She was clear with her preferences for her remains and memorial, and how she wanted us to go about distributing some of her favorite possessions. She planned the day of her exit exactly as she wanted it. She left notes and information for the first responders. Even the medical examiner who came to the scene later told us that she became "misty-eyed" by "how thoughtful and beautiful her ending was."

While our mother was clear that she made the decision to complete her life for herself, we realize that her choice was also protective of our family. We have seen others watch their parents suffer through dementia, stroke, and long hospital and facility visits. We've witnessed the toll that a painful, protracted end can take on loved ones. She often said it took years to dim the traumatic mental images of her own parents at the end of their lives, who were diminished by devastating long-term illnesses. Our mother didn't want those things for herself, and she didn't want that for us. Though we would have been happy to care for her every day of her life, no matter what the circumstances, in retrospect that was an incredible gift. The pain of her absence for us is real, but it is suffused only with rich memories of her endlessly curious, adventurous, and deeply loving self.

Our mother's wise approach to discussing her exit with us allowed us to experience her final year more fully and vibrantly than we could have imagined, and to accept and support her choice for death on her terms. We relished every moment, and we laughed, shared memories, and cried together. It gave us the opportunity to help her prepare, too. For all of the immediate family, nothing was left unsaid or undone at the end—it was a lovely and expected closure. Although no amount of planning or knowledge ever reduces the loss of a beloved parent, the effort our mother put into planning her final exit made it a particularly beautiful, graceful, and peaceful ending to a remarkable life.

Ann (above left) with part of her "FEN Tribe," Deborah A. and Randee Laikind.

A Period of Extremes

BY WALLY KLATCH, FEN MEMBER

This is the third installment of this series, which first appeared in the Fall 2024 FEN magazine. Wally was diagnosed with mild cognitive impairment and is sharing his journey with early-stage dementia.

March 15, 2025 —"It was the best of times, it was the worst of times." It feels like this is the station I'm at in my journey with dementia. With all due respect to Charles Dickens I'll add, "It's a time for me to be."

Given that dementia is part of my life and will be until my life ends, "the best of times" means that I'm at what I call my "Golden Moment," the moment at which the positive aspects of dementia are most present and the horrible aspects haven't yet arrived. The decline in my brain activity has led to a rise in my feeling activity, which has let me feel what I feel and do what I feel. It has reduced the amount of noise that gets into my brain and freed me up to relate to things that are more valuable to me, and it has allowed the word "Release" to be part of my daily feeling.

"The worst of times" is feeling that what is to come is getting closer. I have made my choice about how my life will end and am completely whole with that decision. My continuing brain deterioration led me to go find the materials I will use to end my life—a strong indicator of what is coming. I'm looking at the world and my activities as something temporary and perishable rather than as a given in life. I'm thinking of my family and how difficult it will be for all of us as I make this passage.

"A time for me to be" is to give myself a place that's good for me, in between the best and worst of times. I find that often the Denver Botanic Gardens is a beautiful place where I can feel the flow of living that I am so much valuing, including the transitory nature of life and the flow of dying.

I am being pulled by the best of times and by the worst of times, and this has led to a time for me to simply be with the fulfillment that brings.

Volunteer Spotlight: Gary Wederspahn

BY SYLVIA LINDMAN, FEN VOLUNTEER

Volunteer Gary Wederspahn has made an enormous personal and professional commitment to Final Exit Network. His term as a board member, which began in 2015, ends June 30. As chair of FEN's Outreach and Education Committee, he established the speakers' bureau, The Good Death Society Blog, the official YouTube channel, and FEN's LinkedIn page. These have brought in new members and helped spread the word about choice in dying. Yet despite these achievements, what he truly values is that success is due to the work of many. "None of our accomplishments in outreach would have been possible without the work of my fellow volunteers," he said.

Gary has been active in the end of life movement since joining the Hemlock Society in the 1980s. Long involved with civil and human rights, he spent much of his career as a country director in the Peace Corps, then worked as a corporate marketing and training director. He has published a book and over 80 articles on intercultural communications.

Gary's international experiences introduced him to the customs and beliefs around death and dying in other countries. "In a lot of places where I've lived, death is considered a normal part of life, like birth," he said. Returning to the United States was a culture shock. "We had commercialized death," he found. "That was one reason I joined Hemlock."

Gary has been a member of FEN since its genesis. In 2015 he was living in Minnesota when FEN was sued by the state for providing Exit Guide services to a woman there. Ultimately, a judge ruled against FEN. That was a trigger for Wederspahn. "It offended my sense of right and wrong, and I joined the board to be more active," he said.

He is proud that some twenty speakers now reach over 3,000 people a year, and the blog exceeds 334,000 views. "The people who see it become regular readers and subscribers, and we link them to our other social media and the FEN website," he said. "The idea is that the blog should be a funnel moving people into FEN."

After his board service ends, Gary hopes to stay involved with The Good Death Society Blog, advocating for individual choice at the end of life. "As long as you're competent to make that decision, it can be 'do everything for me' or do nothing, or hastening your own death," he said. "I believe people should do what they want to do, but I don't believe they should try to have me do what they believe."

L-R Kathy, Ann, Gary, Kristen

Gary has been married 62 years to Ann, who also had an international career, including many years with the United Nations, primarily with UNHCR, the refugee agency. They lived in seven countries and worked in 25 others over the years. Their two daughters were born and reared to adolescence in Latin America.

The children grew up in a household where choice was valued and supported. It rubbed off. "Dad's passion and focus have inspired many, including myself, "said Kristen Jochum, Gary and Ann's younger daughter. The older, Kathy Chinn, draws on her background in public health as a volunteer with Planned Parenthood, while Kristen is involved with FEN. She gave up a corporate position to work as a hospice doula. She feels a spiritual calling to help with end of life transitions. "For my father it's a matter of personal choice and rights," she said, "and for me it's a matter of spirit."

Although much remains to be done, Gary credits FEN for making some good progress in becoming a respected and trusted public resource. "We fight way above our weight," he said. "We have far more of a presence in the end of life movement than if we didn't have so many volunteers donating their time. I hope FEN continues to be a volunteer-driven organization."

The Aid in Dying Landscape in the USA:

BY MARY EWERT, FEN EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

The threat to end of life choice in the US is higher than at any time in the recent past. With an unfriendly federal administration having just taken power, and voters in the State of West Virginia narrowly approving an amendment to prohibit aid in dying in that state, the barriers to aid in dying freedom seem monumental.

The opposition to aid in dying is well-funded and relentless in its efforts to roll back this basic human right that is supported by a majority of Americans. As part of this effort, a new agenda proposed for the incoming administration—Project 2025 (www.project2025.org)—was developed by the Heritage Foundation, a conservative public policy institute.

Although President Trump has denied involvement with Project 2025, the Project's website states that the first Trump administration embraced "nearly two-thirds of Heritage's proposals within just one year in office." Many of the current administration's cabinet picks have connections to Heritage. And the president's pick to head the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), Robert F. Kennedy Jr., is now in charge of a proposed overhaul of this major arm of the executive branch of the US government. Project 2025 healthcare-related topics* include the following opposition to aid in dying:

- "…Physician-assisted suicide (PAS) is legal in 10 states and the District of Columbia. Legalizing PAS is a grave mistake that endangers the weak and vulnerable, corrupts the practice of medicine and the doctor–patient relationship, compromises the family and intergenerational commitments, and betrays human dignity and equality before the law."
- "…every human being possesses inherent dignity and worth, and our humanity does not depend on our age, stage of development, race, or abilities. The Secretary must ensure that all HHS programs and activities are rooted in a deep respect for innocent human life from day one until natural death: …euthanasia (is) not health care."

These statements are unsurprising given the influence of conservative religion among Project 2025 leadership.**

There is also concern that a bill restricting what activists and nonprofit organizations can say or do will be reintroduced in a receptive congress. Of particular concern to Final Exit Network (FEN), given its reliance on First Amendment free speech, is the new administration's actions to target nonprofits with politically motivated investigations and pass legislation to restrict their activities.

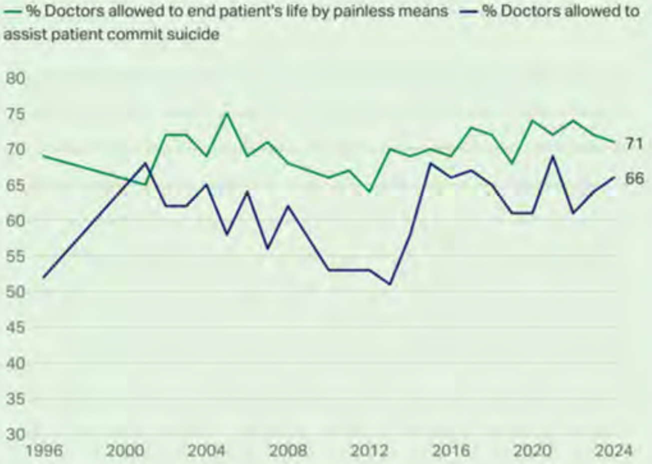
As Final Exit Network moves into 2025, we recognize the potential challenges a new administration may pose to our mission and services. Will we need to adjust our approach? Will certain states, like West Virginia—where a recent constitutional amendment prohibits medical aid in dying—become inaccessible to us?

First and foremost, we will not panic. Our commitment remains steadfast. We will continue to serve individuals in all states. The demand for our services is not dictated by political shifts but by the realities of aging, rising healthcare costs, and personal autonomy. With one in three individuals over 85 experiencing some form of dementia—and memory care costs exceeding $10,000 per month—it is critical that our work continues. For those who do not wish to endure cognitive decline, it is distressing to see their life savings depleted by for-profit institutions that prolong their suffering against their wishes. People deserve dignified, affordable, and compassionate options for managing their final days, and we remain dedicated to ensuring they have them.

What FEN does is legal, safe, and peaceful. It is legal for a person to hasten their death and for their loved ones to know they are going to do it. It is not legal to provide the means or physical assistance, neither of which FEN does. Our guides are trained to follow the policies and procedures outlined in the guide program handbook, which is reviewed annually by our board. Our role is to provide information that empowers individuals to make informed choices about how and when they die. While West Virginians may have legally restricted their right to medical aid in dying—a decision we find puzzling—Final Exit Network's right to speak, educate, and support individuals remains protected under the First Amendment to the United States Constitution.

Americans' Support for the Legality of End-of-Life Interventions

Support higher when intervention described as ending a patient's life by some painless means than allowing a doctor to assist a patient in committing suicide



1947-1990 results for "doctors should be allowed ... to end the patient's life by some painless means" trend are not shown.

Full question wordings:
--When a person has a disease that cannot be cured, do you think doctors should be allowed by law to end the patient's life by some painless means if the patient and his or her family request it?
--When a person has a disease that cannot be cured and is living in severe pain, do you think doctors should or should not be allowed by law to assist the patient to commit suicide if the patient requests it?

GALLUP

Full Report: https://news.gallup.com/poll/648215/americans-favor-legal-euthanasia.aspx

We remain committed to diligence and thoroughness in our application and guide processes. Our clients will continue to receive clear, accurate information about their safe and legal options, including medical aid in dying laws, travel to Switzerland, and voluntarily stopping eating and drinking. We will make sure that clients are having those difficult-but-meaningful conversations with their close loved ones and making informed decisions that align with their values. Our mission balances personal autonomy with the importance of relationships, all while safeguarding our organization for the future.

Finally, we plan to spend more time on educating people on the legality and importance of choice in dying. Although we are not active in the political arena—the Death with Dignity National Center and Compassion & Choices are the two major US groups active in politics—what we at Final Exit Network do is advocate **through our actions**. People should understand their options, regardless of what they finally choose to do. Most people today will let nature, or more accurately the medical system, take its course and will die in a hospital or in their residence with hospice care. But some of us will choose to die on our own terms. For those who make that choice and meet our criteria, Final Exit Network will continue to stand as a source of guidance and support.

*www.medscape.com/viewarticle/what-project-2025-would-mean-health-and-healthcare-2024a1000eke?form=fpf
**www.theguardian.com/us-news/article/2024/jul/26/kevin-roberts-project-2025-opus-dei

A version of this article first appeared in the Dignitas newsletter (Switzerland), in February 2025. It has been updated to reflect initiatives implemented by the current administration.

FEN: Uniquely Positioned for the Future

Who Do You Trust?

BY JANIS LANDIS, PAST PRESIDENT

*Or, more precisely, **whom** do you trust?*

When it comes to major decisions—especially those concerning personal autonomy—most Americans lack confidence in institutions. According to a recent Gallup poll, trust in government, healthcare organizations, and other traditional authorities remains at historic lows.

This skepticism is particularly relevant in the conversation about end of life choices. In every jurisdiction where medical aid in dying is legal, the process is strictly regulated—requiring government authorization and the participation of the medical profession.

But what is granted by authority can just as easily be revoked by authority.

The future of right to die legislation remains uncertain. Shifting political climates and evolving medical policies could threaten existing legal options. However, **Final Exit Network (FEN) is uniquely positioned to face that future.**

Average Confidence in Major U.S. Institutions, 1993-2024

Figures are the average percentage of U.S. adults who have a great deal or quite a lot of confidence.

The average includes the 14 institutions rated consistently by Gallup since 1993 -- the church or organized religion, the military, the U.S. Supreme Court, banks, the public schools, newspapers, Congress, television news, organized labor, the presidency, the police, the medical system, the criminal justice system and big business.

GALLUP

Full report: https://news.gallup.com/poll/647303/confidence-institutions-mostly-flat-police.aspx

Unlike other death with dignity organizations, FEN does not depend on legislation or the approval of corporate medical entities. We stand alone in putting you—the individual—firmly in control. Our approach allows each person to make their own end of life decision and access a scientifically proven process that is safe, effective, and painless.

So when the time comes to make this deeply personal choice, ask yourself: *Who do you trust to support your choice?*

- The government?
- The medical profession?
- Final Exit Network?

If your answer is FEN, rest assured—you are in good hands. We are the only organization that truly respects your right to choose. And no matter how the political winds may shift, we will remain steadfast in our commitment to personal autonomy and self-determination.

Death and Dying in the Media

-Beverly E. Thorn-

Before I Lose My Own Mind:
Navigating Life as a Dementia Caregiver
(Girl Friday Productions, 2025)

"This book is a way of remembering Walt, even as he was forgetting." With that line, Thorn describes her arduous journey with her husband, Walt, as his cognition declined. Thorn says she "wrote this book because it is the book I needed, and it is the book I still need." Begun three months after Walt's death, and still writing and learning almost four years later, Thorn carefully chronicles Walt's (Alzheimer's) pre-diagnosis period beginning in 2004 through his death in 2020, and beyond. Personal and practical, it serves as a document of their journey as well as a valuable road map for others who are in a similar caregiver role, one that Thorn is still struggling to find peace with. Her candor, dry humor, and no-nonsense prose make the potentially challenging material very accessible.

Describing the seven stages identified in the Global Deterioration Scale (GDS), Thorn disambiguates Alzheimer's as the most dementia-causing disease, but stresses it is not dementia, which is simply defined as a set of symptoms associated with problems in thinking. Along the way she offers helpful advice on how to deal with well-meaning family, friends, or physicians, whom she characterizes as minimizers, teachers, or solvers. She explores when to bring in home care, therapy, and/or support groups—for the caregiver. Walt's journey, and thus Thorn's, is further complicated by additional health emergencies, COVID, and other life situations. After Walt's death, Thorn pursues certification as an end of life doula, which, although she's not ready to support others yet, she says helps with her own grief.

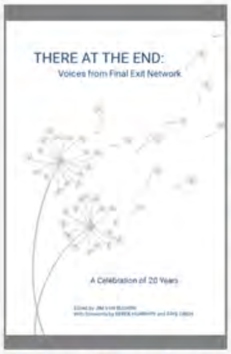
The book is unique in that it directly discusses Walt's options for a chosen death, including Swiss clinics and Voluntarily Stopping Eating and Drinking (VSED). Thorn is generously frank about her and Walt's positive experience with Final Exit Network. "Wow, these people came all this way," she writes," at considerable expense to their organization, to help walk us through this humane and nonviolent means for self-deliverance, and we just blew them and their whole mission off!" Although Walt ultimately ruled out FEN, Thorn remains a lifetime member and donor.

In addition to being remarkably forthcoming about the ups and downs of her emotional, years-long journey, Thorn concludes each chapter with "facts and insights" and "resources." Appendices add immeasurably to the book's usefulness: "A Checklist of Tasks to Help the Reader," "A Sample Addendum to Living Will," and a Dementia Directive by Katy Butler. A table of contents and/or index would have greatly facilitated access to specific information. A highly credentialed clinical psychologist, Thorn has a well-designed website that includes caregiver resources (along with images of her and Walt), and she promises updates. *Before I Lose My Own Mind* is a valuable addition to the growing body of literature which includes Lew Cohen's *Winter's End: Dementia and Dying Well* (2024) and W. Lee Hansen's *Forgetting and Forgotten: Dementia and the Right to Die* (2023)—both previously reviewed in FEN magazines.

FEN's *Good Death Society* Blog Exceeds 334,000 Views

In March 2025, FEN's blog reached a milestone: 334,000 views on its site! Established in 2017, the blog has posted nearly 400 articles by more than 180 authors focusing on end of life issues since it began.

To read current and past articles, go to
www.thegooddeathsocietyblog.net



Get your copy of the FEN anthology *There at the End* today!

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Platinum
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2025
Candid.

OUR MISSION

To educate qualified individuals in practical, peaceful ways to end their lives, offer a compassionate bedside presence, and defend their right to choose.

OUR VISION

That any competent person unbearably suffering an intractable medical condition has the option to die legally and peacefully.