

affection the community of Little Italy feels for this native son.

Mr. Pica's love, understanding and compassion for others have earned him the loyalty and admiration of many friends. It is said by his friend that if you look up the meaning of the word kindness in the dictionary, you find John Pica. His list of friends have included such names as Truman, Kennedy, Schaefer, Nixon, Reagan, D'Alesandro, McKeldin, and Schmoke.

Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to salute John Pica for the honor he has brought to the Italian-American community by his many accomplishments and commitment. He deserves this award for the contributions he has made in the spirit and tradition of its namesake, Thomas D'Alesandro.

MEDICARE MEDICALLY
NECESSARY DENTAL CARE ACT

HON. STENY H. HOYER

OF MARYLAND

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, April 10, 1997

Mr. HOYER. Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to introduce today, along with Congressmen CARDIN and STARK, the Medicare Medically Necessary Dental Care Act. This bill will improve health care for thousands of senior citizens and save the Nation millions of dollars in Medicare costs.

Under current law, Medicare cannot pay for outpatient dental work. However, untreated dental problems can lead to expensive complications when other unrelated procedures are performed. The failure to treat these conditions has both a high cost in suffering for seniors and a high price tag for Medicare.

The Medically Necessary Dental Care Act would permit Medicare to pay for dental care when it is necessary to prevent complications in valvular heart disease, cancer of the head or neck, lymphoma, leukemia, and organ transplants. While expanding dental coverage in these areas is estimated to cost nearly \$17 million, the act would save Medicare about \$117 million by preventing further complications. The bill would also give the Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services the authority to expand coverage of medically necessary oral health care in connection with other medical problems if the Health Care Finance Administration determines that the dental coverage will result in cost savings to Medicare.

Take the case of Alma, a senior citizen in Baltimore who underwent a heart valve replacement surgery. Not long ago, she went to the University of Maryland medical system emergency room with a racing heart, fever, chills, and pain in her mouth. Alma was diagnosed with an acute abscess over her upper front teeth which had led to a systemwide infection. She was hospitalized, and will have to undergo 6 weeks of intravenous antibiotics to knock out the infection. In addition, she will probably have to have her heart valves replaced again.

In many ways, Alma is lucky. Dental infection is a common cause of complications in heart valve replacement patients, and some die before their infection can be stabilized. Medicare covered the cost of Alma's hospitalization, and will pay the \$20,000 to

\$40,000 bill if her heart valves have to be replaced again. But all of this could have been avoided by a simple dental checkup and treatment before her first surgery.

A few years ago, James, another Maryland senior, was diagnosed with neck cancer and treated with radiation therapy to his head and neck. Over time, James started to feel pain in his lower jaw, and to have difficulty opening his mouth. His doctor diagnosed a jaw fracture, caused by radiation-related complications of previously infected teeth. To cure the problem, James underwent three surgeries, including removal of a portion of his jaw and a hip graft to replace it. Removal of James's infected teeth before radiation would have cost less than \$300, but Medicare covered the actual cost of \$27,950.

This bill is supported by the American Association of Hospital Dentists, the American Society for Geriatric Dentistry, the Academy of Dentistry for Persons With Disabilities, the American Association of Dental Research, the American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry, the American Association of Dental Schools, and the American Association of Public Health Dentistry. More importantly, it will save taxpayers millions, while improving the quality of life for senior citizens. I urge my colleagues to join me in supporting this important legislation.

DETERIORATION OF HUMAN
RIGHTS IN BELARUS

HON. CHRISTOPHER H. SMITH

OF NEW JERSEY

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, April 10, 1997

Mr. SMITH of New Jersey. Mr. Speaker, over the last year, we have witnessed a steady deterioration in the human rights situation in Belarus. Belarusian President Alyaksandr Lukashenka has flouted international commitments by infringing on the human rights of the citizens of Belarus. He has violated elementary human rights and freedoms, such as freedom of speech, assembly and association, and has stifled democracy by clamping down on the media, on the democratic opposition, and on fledgling nongovernmental organizations. Lukashenka has amassed near-dictatorial powers, using an illegitimate constitutional referendum held last November to extend his power, disbanding the Parliament and creating a new legislature and constitutional court subservient to him.

The international community has widely censured Lukashenka for his blatant disregard for international commitments. The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe [OSCE] has repeatedly called upon the Government of Belarus to respect human rights and democratic principles, to enter into dialog with the opposition and to ensure freedom of the media. The chairman in office of the OSCE has stated that neither the preparations for the November 1996 referendum nor the new constitution comply with OSCE norms, principles, and commitments. The OSCE hopes to send a mission to Belarus this month if it receives assurances that the mission can meet with members of the opposition.

Mr. Speaker, unfortunately, the human rights situation in Belarus has taken a turn for the worse in recent weeks. Last week, on April 3, the leadership of the Commission on Secu-

urity and Cooperation in Europe—Helsinki Commission—wrote to President Lukashenka expressing our dismay at recent developments in Belarus and urging President Lukashenka to reverse the deterioration of human rights in his country and live up to obligations freely undertaken as an OSCE member.

Mr. Speaker, I request that the letter be included in the RECORD.

COMMISSION ON SECURITY AND
COOPERATION IN EUROPE,
Washington, DC, April 3, 1997.

His Excellency ALYAKSANDR LUKASHENKA,
President, Republic of Belarus,
Minsk, Belarus.

DEAR PRESIDENT LUKASHENKA: We are writing to express our heightened concern about the further deterioration in the human rights situation in your country and to protest a series of actions by your government in blatant violation of OSCE principles and norms.

Within the last few weeks, two American citizens, including a U.S. diplomat, have been expelled from Belarus. First Secretary Serge Alexandrov was unjustly and illegally detained and expelled for observing an opposition rally, a routine practice of diplomats. A few days earlier, on March 16, Belarusian Soros Foundation Executive Director Peter G. Byrne was prevented from reentering Belarus, detained, held incommunicado for over 12 hours in flagrant violation of diplomatic and consular conventions in effect between the United States and Belarus, and forcibly expelled the next day. Mr. Byrne ostensibly was expelled for illegal activity, but in reality, was expelled for supporting efforts to develop Belarus' fledgling civil society.

These expulsions come on the heels of other repressive actions, including arrests and beatings of demonstrators who have been protesting your policies over the last few months. Organizers of these rallies, such as former Chairman of Parliament Mechyslau Hryh have received stiff fines or have been arrested and jailed for up to 15 days. We are alarmed by reports of beatings that resulted in injuries and detentions of several hundred protestors and journalist during yesterday's demonstrations in Minsk.

We are deeply concerned about the Belarusian Government's restrictions on the right to freedom of speech and assembly—as manifested by your March 5 decree which also bans the display of Belarusian national symbols at rallies—and the arrest of peaceful protestors, as well as journalists, at a number of these rallies. We are also alarmed by the political intimidation of leading opposition figures, as illustrated by police visits to their homes demanding they admit they violated a presidential edict that restricts demonstrations, and by police searches of various political party headquarters. In February, two opposition leaders were attacked in Minsk in separate incidents by unidentified assailants under suspicious circumstances. Also, we have received reports of the intimidation of university professors and other examples of crude threats by police against democratic activists.

We are especially troubled by the plight of Henadz Karpenka, Deputy Chairman of the 1996 parliament and chair of the opposition shadow cabinet, who was on a hunger strike to protest the special police guard placed outside his ward in a hospital where he is currently a patient.

Another example of apparent intimidation is the March 10 decree calling into question important tax exemptions granted to the Belarusian Soros Foundation and other nongovernmental organizations and the March 18 announcement that all nongovernmental