

Meritorious Service Medal, the Air Force Commendation Medal, and the Air Force Achievement Medal. He also holds the Joint Meritorious Service Award with one oak leaf cluster, and the Air Force Outstanding Unit Award with Combat "V" device and four oak leaf clusters. His service awards include the Air Force Good Conduct Medal, the Air Reserve Forces Meritorious Service Medal with ten oak leaf clusters, the National Defense Service Medal with two bronze service stars, the Southwest Asia Service Medal with three bronze campaign stars, the Air Force Longevity Service Award with eight oak leaf clusters, the Armed Forces Reserve Medal with the gold hourglass device and three Mobilization "M" devices, the Small Arms Expert Marksmanship Ribbon and the Air Force Training Ribbon. His Foreign Service awards include the Kuwait Liberation Medal from the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the Kuwait Liberation Medal from the Government of Kuwait. Chief Benson's New York State military awards include the New York State Long and Faithful Service Award with five shield devices, the New York State Desert Storm Service Medal, the New York State Defense of Liberty Medal and the New York State Exercise Support Ribbon with two "E" devices.

Without question Mr. Speaker, Chief Benson is a very special person. He willingly served his nation, exuding loyalty and pride. For his unrelenting service, Chief Benson can retire knowing he has earned such a status. I would like to wish him well in his retirement years, as he will now be able to spend more free time with his Stephanie, daughter Natalie and two sons, David and Jason. Thank you Chief for all your years of hard work and dedication.

TRIBUTE TO MR. ROBERT  
COULTER "DINK" ELDRIDGE

**HON. JOHN J. DUNCAN, Jr.**

OF TENNESSEE

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Thursday, April 3, 2003*

Mr. DUNCAN. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to offer a tribute to one of Knoxville, Tennessee's finest citizens. Many in this body and around the Country will not recognize his name, but when Mr. Robert Coulter "Dink" Eldridge, Sr. passed away at the age of 85 on February 21, 2003 this Nation lost a great American. Many Knoxvilleans join me in mourning his death.

Dink Eldridge graduated from the University of Tennessee in 1940. During his final years at the University, he managed the Volunteer Football team as they went undefeated in regular season play and participated in the Orange Bowl, the Rose Bowl and the Sugar Bowl. More than victory marked his time with the Volunteers however. Those who knew him at this time also remember his dedicated leadership and desire to see every athlete reach his fullest potential.

In addition to his time managing the Volunteers, Dink managed the East Army All Star football team at Yale University with the great General R.R. Neyland.

In 1942 Dink Eldridge was called to serve his Nation in the United States Army where he served with distinction as a second lieutenant in the Tank Corps. Here again, Dink proved his willingness to serve his fellow man and was awarded both a Purple Heart and Bronze

Star medal for his efforts. After a brief period away from the military, Dink was called on again, this time in the Korean War.

During his professional career, Dink demonstrated a deeply held commitment to excellence. Following his early days as a lineman for Bell Systems, Dink steadily rose in his career. While his supervisory work for Bell took him to cities across the State, Dink was eventually able to return to Knoxville where he served as District Engineer until his retirement in 1971.

Like many leaders, Dink was unable to remain retired for long. In 1986, he was named president of the Concord Telephone Exchange. Dink provided steady leadership to this organization during a period of tremendous growth and remained president until his second retirement in 1993.

With this said, Dink is possibly best known to the people of East Tennessee for his dedicated work in the community. His generosity of time touched countless lives. Through his work on the executive board of the Great Smoky Mountain Council of the Boy Scouts of America and as President of the Bearden Little League Baseball league alone, Dink passed his love of Country and community onto a generation of young people.

In everything Dink did, he strove for excellence in himself and sought to inspire the same in those around him. I am proud to have known Dink for many years, but I am even more proud to have called Dink Eldridge a personal friend.

To his wife Anna Yvonne I say thank-you for being such a supportive and loving part of his life and to his children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren, I simply say continue carrying the banner of service your father and grandfather held so high.

HONORING HUNTINGTON  
HISTORICAL SOCIETY

**HON. STEVE ISRAEL**

OF NEW YORK

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Thursday, April 3, 2003*

Mr. ISRAEL. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to acknowledge the 100th anniversary of the Huntington Historical Society.

The Huntington Historical Society was founded by the local community as an outgrowth of the collection of artifacts gathered together in 1903 for exhibition at the celebration of the Town of Huntington's 250th anniversary. The exhibition was so well received by the community that the exhibition committee decided to keep its collection together and found a Society whose mission would be to preserve the heritage of the Town of Huntington, by maintaining museums, collections and a research center, by educating the public about Long Island's regional history, and by promoting the preservation of historic buildings and sites.

The society serves the dual role of being a repository for the treasures of Huntington's founding families while also reaching out to the community to provide a sense of place and identity in a rapidly changing area proud of its deep historic roots. In addition, the Huntington Historical Society is distinguished as one of the oldest repositories of local history in the New York metropolitan area.

I commend the Huntington Historical Society for their dedication to the historical preservation of the great town of Huntington, and congratulate them on their 100th anniversary.

PRESIDENT SHEVARDNADZE'S  
STATEMENT WELCOMED, BUT  
ACTION ALSO NEEDED

**HON. CHRISTOPHER H. SMITH**

OF NEW JERSEY

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Thursday, April 3, 2003*

Mr. SMITH of New Jersey. Mr. Speaker, today I want to acknowledge and welcome the March 14th statement of the President of Georgia, Eduard Shevardnadze, pledging his commitment to religious freedom for all Georgians and promising the punishment of individuals complicit in mob attacks on religious minorities. (I am submitting the statement for the RECORD below.) President Shevardnadze made this pledge during an ecumenical service in Tbilisi's Evangelist-Baptist Cathedral Church, attended by leaders of the Georgian Orthodox, Armenian Apostolic, Roman Catholic, Lutheran and Baptist churches and many individuals from the diplomatic community. The U.S. Ambassador to Georgia, Richard Miles, also attended and addressed the gathering. Reportedly, so many people came that hundreds had to listen via loudspeakers in the churchyard.

The service was initially planned for late January, but defrocked priest Basil Mkalavishvili and his crowd of thugs assaulted worshipers and clergy an hour before it was scheduled to begin—as they have been doing with impunity since 1999. Individuals were beaten as they tried to leave, with rocks and stones being reportedly thrown. While President Shevardnadze quickly condemned that attack, ordering the Interior Minister, the Prosecutor General, State Chancellery Head, and the Security Council Secretary to investigate and punish the perpetrators, no arrests or prosecutions followed.

Despite Georgia's appalling record on religious tolerance for the last few years, I hope President Shevardnadze's speech at the Baptist church signals a new determination to arrest and aggressively prosecute the mob leaders and their henchmen. He promised that "as the President of Georgia and a believer, I shall not restrict myself only to a mere expression of resentment. I do promise that the President and the Authorities of Georgia will do their utmost to grant every person freedom of expression of faith." Driving home the point further, Mr. Shevardnadze declared, "the state will exert its pressure on whoever comes in defiance of this principle. You may stand assured that the aggressors will be brought to justice."

As Co-Chairman of the U.S. Helsinki Commission, over the past three years I have watched with increasing alarm the escalation of mob violence. On September 24th I chaired a Commission hearing focused on this disturbing pattern. The Jehovah's Witnesses have borne the brunt of attacks, along with Baptists, Pentecostals, Adventists and Catholics. Most disheartening has been the government's indifference; victims throughout the country have filed approximately 800 criminal complaints, without one criminal conviction.

Despite a series of statements by President Shevardnadze, Georgia's Minister of Interior

and Prosecutor General appear unwilling to effectively enforce the rule of law, refusing to arrest mob leaders like Mkalavishvili and Paata Bluashvili and not attempting serious prosecutions. For example, the trial of Mkalavishvili has dragged on for more than a year, without a single piece of evidence considered yet. I would hope the provision of adequate and visible security, which took months to organize, will continue and that the prosecutor will begin his case shortly. Also, the inauguration of trial proceedings against Bluashvili in Rustavi is positive; I trust the delays and shenanigans seen in Mkalavishvili's trial will not be repeated there. I also urge the Government of Georgia to arrest and detain Mkalavishvili, Bluashvili and other indicted persons who continue to perpetrate violent criminal acts against religious minorities.

Undoubtedly, President Shevardnadze's presence at the March 14th service and his statement illustrate his personal commitment to religious tolerance and basic law and order. Yet, while I appreciate his gesture, it is time for real action. If the attacks are allowed to continue, it will only become more difficult to rein in this mob violence. If presidential orders are repeatedly ignored, it will only further weaken the government's ability to enforce the rule of law. And, of course, we must not forget the plight of minority religious communities that continue to live in a state of siege, without any real protection from their government. Ironically, it appears that minorities religious communities are freer to profess and practice their faith in regions of Georgia not under the control of President Shevardnadze's government.

In closing, I urge President Shevardnadze to fulfill his most recent commitment to punish the aggressors, thereby restoring Georgia's international reputation and upholding its international commitments as a participating State in the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe.

I and other Members of Congress are acutely interested in seeing whether the Government of Georgia will actually arrest the perpetrators of violence and vigorously prosecute them.

REPRESENTATIVES OF ALL RELIGIONS AND NATIONS HAVE TO RAISE PRAYERS FOR PEACE TOGETHER

My dear friends, Christians, dear Ambassadors: I am here to give utterance to my contentment and admiration, which derives from seeing you, all Christians, or, to be more precise, representatives of all Christian folds, assembled here, under the same roof of this temple, in the capital of Georgia famed as the Virgin's lot.

I am happy to be a witness to this occurrence. I am happy because you are together, because we are together. But all of us have our own faith.

I am an Orthodox believer, but we are all Christians. It is what we should always bear in mind and keep intact this wholeness and unity.

Georgia is one of those countries on the planet whose roots go back the farthest in history. Tolerance has become particularly entrenched in its history and nature since the days we embraced Christianity.

Christ granted that we be together. And more than this: Georgia is a multinational country, where Muslims and followers of other confessions have dwelt along with Christians in the course of centuries.

We live presently in a world of stark contradictions. It remains anybody's guess when

a bomb may blast. You probably understand what I mean. Therefore, we should pray for peace, and these prayers should be raised by all of us: Christians, Muslims, representatives of every religion, confession and nation.

But prayers alone will not keep us together. We have also to struggle, in order that, through our benevolence, faith, love and respect to one another, we may put up resistance to the eradicating processes of which I already made a mention.

As was customary with my great ancestors, I go to an Orthodox church. But nor do I keep distance from synagogues, mosques or churches of different Christian confessions.

I feel respect for all who have confident belief in kindness and its victory.

I am happy to see, along with Georgian citizens, the attendance of the distinguished ambassadors and diplomats accredited in Georgia, who have come this evening to share our happiness.

I cannot but express a deep sense of regret, even resentment at the gross infringement of our unity, mutual respect and freedom of faith by some of the aggressors.

As the President of Georgia and a believer, I shall not restrict myself only to a mere expression of resentment. I do promise that the President and the Authorities of Georgia will do their utmost to grant every person freedom of expression of faith.

The state will exert its pressure on whoever comes in defiance of this principle. You may stand assured that the aggressors will be brought to justice.

I would like to greet you once more and wish you happiness and advancement of goals. So as with Georgia, a multinational country of various religious confessions, my wishes are for joy, happiness and prosperity.

#### MEDICARE OUTPATIENT CO-PAYMENT REDUCTION ACT OF 2003

**HON. FORTNEY PETE STARK**

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Thursday, April 3, 2003*

Mr. STARK. Mr. Speaker, I rise today with my colleagues, Representatives MCDERMOTT, KLECZKA, DELAURO, FRANK, FROST, JACKSON-LEE, McNULTY and ABERCROMBIE to introduce legislation to expedite the timeframe for reducing to 20 percent the coinsurance amounts that Medicare beneficiaries are required to pay for hospital outpatient services. I'm honored that this bill has the support of the National Committee to Preserve Social Security and Medicare and Families USA.

For most Medicare services, beneficiaries are required to pay 20 percent of the allowed payment amount, and Medicare pays 80 percent. However, for hospital outpatient services, Medicare beneficiaries are required to pay much higher co-payments—up to 55 percent for some services.

This is an anomaly due to an error in legislative drafting many years ago. Based on earlier legislation I helped enact into law, Congress has already taken some partial steps to correct this wrong. Under current law, hospital outpatient co-payments will reduce to 40 percent by 2006, but they will not reduce to the typical 20 percent level until 2029. We didn't solve the full problem because Congress didn't want to spend the money.

The Medicare Outpatient Co-payment Reduction Act of 2003 will speed up this reduction process by decreasing beneficiary coin-

surance rates in increments of 5 percent each year beginning in 2007 until the coinsurance rate for all hospital outpatient services is 20 percent by 2010. This expedited reduction is consistent with a recent recommendation made by the Medicare Payment Advisory Commission or MedPAC—the expert body that advises Congress on Medicare.

While high coinsurance rates affect all Medicare beneficiaries, they are particularly devastating for the approximate 3.6 million beneficiaries who have no supplemental insurance. Most of these individuals are the “near poor”—with incomes too high to qualify for Medicaid or the Qualified Medicare Beneficiary or QMB program, but with incomes too low to be able to afford supplemental insurance. This group is made up of a disproportionate number of minorities and women.

Furthermore, coinsurance amounts are much higher for certain services than others. Those with the highest coinsurance are the “high-tech” services, such as radiology services and cancer chemotherapy services. Thus, high coinsurance greatly limits affordable access to these life saving services for many Medicare beneficiaries.

Mr. Speaker, the Medicare Outpatient Co-payment Reduction Act of 2003 is a simple bill. We've charged seniors outrageous amounts for too long already for hospital outpatient services. Seniors shouldn't have to wait another 26 years before they are fairly charged for outpatient services. This is an incremental approach that lowers the co-payment level to 20 percent by 2010. It's a small, but important step to improve health care access for seniors. I look forward to working with my colleagues to enact it as soon as possible.

#### PERSONAL EXPLANATION

**HON. J. GRESHAM BARRETT**

OF SOUTH CAROLINA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Thursday, April 3, 2003*

Mr. BARRETT of South Carolina. Mr. Speaker, on rollcall No. 100, I was unavoidably detained. Had I been present, I would have voted “no.”

#### HONORING BEN BERLINGER

**HON. SCOTT McINNIS**

OF COLORADO

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Thursday, April 3, 2003*

Mr. McINNIS. Mr. Speaker, I would like to take this opportunity to recognize Ben Berlinger of La Junta, Colorado. Ben has worked with the Natural Resource Conservation Service for over 25 years, and I would like to recognize his accomplishments before this body of Congress and this nation.

Ben started his job with Natural Resource Conservation Service in 1975, becoming an area rangeland management specialist in 1981 when he moved to Eastern Colorado. He has served in La Junta for 14 years, working with his agency and local ranchers and agricultural producers to ensure good rangeland management and to develop and implement sound technology on grazing land resources. This year NRCS named Ben its rangeland