

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