and Prosecutor General appear unwilling to effec-
tively enforce the rule of law, refusing to ar-
rest mob leaders like Mkalavishvili and Paata
Bluashvili and not attempting serious prosecu-
tions. For example, the trial of Mkalavishvili
has dragged on for more than a year, without a
single piece of evidence considered yet. I
would expect of an adequate judicial and visi-
bile 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 re-
peated there. I also urge the Government of
Georgia to arrest and detain Mkalavishvili,
Bluashvili and other indicted persons who con-
tinue 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 con-
tinue, we can only expect these laws (that
were not stringent to begin with) to have no
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 govern-
ment.

In closing, I urge President Shevardnadze to
fulfill his most recent commitment to punish
the aggressors, thereby restoring Georgia’s in-
ternational reputation and upholding its inter-
national commitments as a participating State
in the Organization for Security and Coopera-
tion in Europe.

I and other Members of Congress are acutely interested in seeing whether the Gov-
erment of Georgia will actually arrest the per-
petrators of violence and vigorously prosecute them.

REPRESENTATIVES OF ALL RELIGIONS AND NA-
tions have to raise prayers for peace together.

My dear friends, Christians, dear Ambas-
sadors: I am here to give utterance to my con-
tentment 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 occur-
rance. 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.

Christians, I hope that we will be together. And
more than this: Georgia is a multinational
country, where Muslims and followers of
other confessions have dwelt along with
Christians for centuries.

We live presently in a world of stark con-
tradictions. 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, representa-
tives of every religion, confession and na-
tion.

But prayers alone will not keep us to-
gether. We have also to struggle, in order that
these confessions—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 ances-
tors, 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 be-
lief in kindness and its victory.

I am happy to see, along with Georgian
citizens, the attendance of the distinguished
embassadors 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 ex-
pression of resentment. I do promise that the
President and the Authorities of Georgia will
do their utmost to ensure that every person
freedom of expression of faith.

The state will exert its pressure on who-
ever 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.

MEDI Care 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,
FRAK, FROST, JACKSON-LEE, MCNULTY and ABERCROMBIE to introduce
legislation to expedite the timeframe for reduc-
ing to 20 percent the coinsurance amounts
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 per-
cent. However, for outpatient services, Medi-
care 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 legis-
lative drafting many years ago. Based on ear-
lier legislation I helped enact into law, Con-
gress has already taken some partial steps to
correct this wrong. Under current law, hospital
outpatient co-payments will reduce to 40 per-
cent 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 take on the costs

The Medicare Outpatient Co-payment Re-
duction Act of 2003 will speed up this reduc-
tion 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 per-
cent 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 issues.

While high coinsurance rates affect all Medi-
care beneficiaries, they are particularly dev-
asting for the approximate 3.6 million bene-
ficiaries 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 serv-
cices and cancer chemotherapy services. Thus,
high coinsurance greatly limits affordable ac-
cess 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 out-
patient 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-pay-
ment level to 20 percent by 2010. It’s a small,
but important step to improve health care ac-
cess 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,
in roll call No. 100, I was unavoid-
dably detained. Had I been present, I would
have voted “no.”

HONORING BEN BERLINGER

HON. SCOTT McNINIS
OF COLORADO

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
Thursday, April 3, 2003

Mr. McNINIS. Mr. Speaker, I would like to
take this opportunity to recognize Ben
Berlinger of La Junta, Colorado. Ben has
worked with the Natural Resource Conserva-
tion Service for over 25 years, and I would like
to recognize his accomplishments before this
body—work that has been his life’s work.

Ben started his job with the 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 agri-
cultural producers to ensure good rangeland
management and to develop and implement
sound technology on grazing land resources.

This year NRCS named Ben its rangeland

April 3, 2003