

DEATH OF GEORGIAN PRIME MINISTER

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, I take a moment to share with the Senate the very sad news from Georgia this morning that Prime Minister Zurab Zhvania has died in what Georgian officials are calling an accident.

According to government statements, he apparently suffocated during a meeting with his friend and Georgian deputy governor, Zurab Usupov, from a gas leak in a space heater. Mr. Usupov also died.

We send our condolences to his wife, three children and the people of Georgia. Prime Minister Zhvania led a crusade for freedom and democracy in Georgia that brought about the Rose Revolution.

As Prime Minister, he led the fight to root out corruption and set Georgia on a new path where democratic institutions could flourish. At the time of his death, he was advocating a peaceful resolution to the problems in South Ossetia.

We mourn his death. People throughout the world, who believe in freedom, democracy, human rights, and the viability of peaceful political opposition in a political struggle, mourn him as well. He will be missed.

TRIBUTE TO VERNON COOPER, JR.

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, I rise today to pay tribute to a world traveler who always comes home to his beloved Hazard, KY, Vernon Cooper, Jr.

Mr. Cooper has fought in Asia in World War II, skinned seals with Eskimos in the Arctic, and climbed mountains in the Andes. But after all those vast experiences, his Perry County home in eastern Kentucky holds a prime place in his heart, and he expresses this through great generosity.

Mr. Cooper, 81 and the former president of Hazard's People's Bank and Trust Co., is happy to give back to his community. A year ago, he learned that the sheriff of Perry County planned to lay off all of his deputies at Christmastime because of a strained budget. Mr. Cooper donated \$20,000 to the county to keep the deputies in uniform over the holidays.

A 1941 graduate of Hazard High School, Mr. Cooper donated \$120,000 to install lights on the school's baseball fields. Parents are thrilled they can now watch their children's night games. And if they ever want to thank their patron, they don't have far to look—Mr. Cooper still attends games, wearing his Hazard High School jersey with the name "Bruiser"—his World War II nickname across the back.

Mr. Cooper has also filled in as a guest host at WLJC, a Beattyville, KY, Christian radio station. When he learned of their hopes to reach a larger audience, he donated \$50,000 for a new transmitter. Now three times as many homes as before receive WLJC's signal.

Perhaps Mr. Cooper's largest gift of all was the gift of life. He donated over \$200,000 to the Appalachian Regional Healthcare Regional Medical Center in Hazard to build an open-heart surgery unit.

Before Mr. Cooper's gift, Hazard-area residents had to travel over 60 miles for an open-heart procedure. The new unit admitted its first patient this month, and its director hopes to perform around 100 open-heart surgeries this year.

Kentucky's greatest resource has always been its compassionate, friendly people. To any who doubt this, I direct them to look at Vernon Cooper, Jr., as a model for all of us to follow. I ask the Senate to join me in recognizing a man who generously wants to give as much back to Kentucky as it has given to him.

Mr. President, recently the Courier-Journal published a story about Mr. Cooper, "Hazard Man, 81, shares his millions with others." I ask unanimous consent that the full article be included in the CONGRESSIONAL RECORD.

There being no objection, the article was ordered to be printed in the RECORD, as follows:

[From the Courier-Journal, Jan. 22, 2005]

HAZARD MAN, 81, SHARES HIS MILLIONS WITH OTHERS; DEPUTIES, SCHOOLS, HOSPITAL GET GIFTS

(By Alan Maimon)

HAZARD, KY—When Vernon Cooper Jr. takes interest in a cause, he lets his checkbook do the talking.

Because of Cooper's largess, eight Perry County sheriff's deputies kept their jobs during Christmas 2003, a Beattyville television station tripled its potential viewership, and school baseball and softball teams in Hazard now play under the lights.

His latest gift—of more than \$200,000—helped build an open-heart surgery unit at a Hazard hospital.

Cooper, who is 81 and former president of People's Bank and Trust Co. in Hazard, said he is a multimillionaire who has made a hobby out of giving back to his community.

"I've been around the world, but this is the most special place in the world to me," Cooper said at his mountaintop home.

"Hazard is my home, and where's there a need I like to help."

Just over a year ago, Perry County Sheriff Pat Wooton was facing a blue Christmas as he prepared to lay off all his deputies because of a tight budget.

Cooper heard about the situation and pledged \$20,000 to Perry Fiscal Court to keep the officers on the job until officials could allocate more money to the department.

"He's a very civic-minded individual and has been for a long time," Wooton said. "He has made significant contributions to so many areas in Perry County."

Cooper said he has given hundreds of such gifts over the years.

BRUISER'S GIFT

A deep-rooted sense of school spirit led him to make the largest contribution in the 92-year history of the Hazard Independent School District.

Cooper, a 1941 graduate of Hazard High School and a former school board member, wrote a \$120,000 check in 2003 for the installa-

tion of lights at the high school's baseball and softball fields.

District Superintendent James Francis said the lights have helped Hazard attract regional tournaments and allowed working parents to see more of their children's games.

"No one has been more instrumental in the progress the school district has made," Francis said.

Cooper still prowls the sidelines of Hazard football games wearing a jersey with "Bruiser"—his World War II nickname—across the back.

UK DONATION

In 1999, Cooper's generosity had unintended consequences when he mailed a \$500 check to the University of Kentucky to help pay for a summer football camp.

An internal investigation of the football program showed the check was endorsed by former UK football recruiting coordinator Claude Bassett and sent to a high school football coach in Memphis, Tenn.

University officials said any gifts to UK should pass through its Office of Development and be deposited in university accounts. Cooper was not accused of any wrongdoing.

Bassett was fired, but Cooper did not let the incident dampen his generous spirit.

"I learned a lesson that not everybody can be trusted, but most people can," he said.

The incident also reaffirmed for Cooper the importance of getting receipts for his donations.

"That's all I ask for in return," he said. "I need a receipt, so I won't have problems with the government."

Cooper, a 1949 UK graduate, said he now opts to build strong relationships with organizations before parting with his money.

Cooper recently gave \$50,000 to WLJC, a television and radio station in Beattyville whose call letters stand for Wonderful Lord Jesus Christ.

Jonathan Drake, manager of WLJC, said the money helped buy a transmitter that nearly tripled the number of homes the station reaches.

"He is a man with a very large heart," Drake said. "He got to know us, was a guest host for us and then really helped out."

HOSPITAL GIFT

One of Cooper's largest gifts to date arrived in several installments to the Appalachian Regional Healthcare Regional Medical Center in Hazard.

Charles Housley, the hospital chain's executive director of development, said the gift went toward building an open-heart surgery unit in an area that has lacked such a facility. Cooper said the amount was \$200,000, but Housley said it was more, declining to be specific.

Ashland, Pikeville, and London—each more than 60 miles from Hazard—had been the only Eastern Kentucky towns to offer the open-heart procedure.

"We hope to give him some recognition for that," Housley said.

The Hazard hospital admitted its first open-heart patient earlier this month and expects to perform around 100 surgeries this year, Housley said.

WHAT'S NEXT?

Cooper said his fondness for philanthropy stems from a love of the mountains of Eastern Kentucky, something he first recognized during a four-day train trip to a California naval base in 1943.

When the then 22-year-old sailor returned from World War II service in Asia, he