

Remarks by Paul M. Joyal  
at the Memorial Service for Prime Minister Zurab Zhvania  
9 March, 2005

Your Excellencies, Distinguished Senators friends and colleagues

The untimely and tragic accidental death of our friend Zurab Zhvania has left all of us with a loss that remains incomprehensible and numbing

Zurab was a man of many talents, diverse interests and the master of his political world.

We gathered here today to honor him for all that he accomplished and for all that he was to the many who knew, admired and loved him. There is no more appropriate location in Washington DC for we to gather for this solemn remembrance than the United States Senate.

In January of 1995 I received a call from Georgia's Ambassador, The Honorable Tedo Japaridze asking me to accept a new visitor from Georgia, Zurab Zhvania. Tedo explained that Zurab was the new head of the Citizens Union Party and the likely successor to President Shevardnadze. The Ambassador asked if I could spend some time with Zurab and orientate him to Washington but especially Capital Hill. Shevy asked if I could arrange some meetings with staff for Zurab to provide a briefing on Abkhazia and for the new member of the Georgian Parliament to see the US Congress at work.

This was Zurab's first meetings with members of the US government in Washington and one that would grow into a series of long and fruitful relationships.

Even though Zurab's command of English was far from the fluent level he would soon master, he managed to connect with many who were present. These relationships would eventually develop into a decade of cooperation and mutually beneficial collaboration between Georgia and the United States.

At that first meeting were some who remained close with him and the country Georgia throughout the following decade. Steve Beigen, Robin Cleveland, Randy Schunammen, Charles Flickner and others during the next five years, especially Christina Rocca

Zurab was a man who connected with people on a deep level. He was a leader and a very human man who used these talents to better the Georgia he loved.

Over the next decade Zurab connected with Senators and Congressmen alike. He loved visiting the Hill and went out of his way to see those he met that January 1995 afternoon.

One of the traditions he initiated was the dinner with Staffers at La Coline when he was Speaker of the parliament. He was a man who didn't lose touch with those acquaintances turned friends.

His humor was infectious and his humanity was palatable. He was a man who struggled to improve his country and his absence is a blow to all those who knew him and admired him. But both our countries have lost a champion of liberty and a freedom.

I believe that this evening gathering in the United States Senate is the most appropriate of venues for us today. It was the Senate that initiated many of the programs that are now a reality in Georgia and have mightily contributed to independence of the Georgian state.

The creation of the Georgian Border Guard, the strengthening of the Georgian military, and many other programs that have fed Georgians during its darkest days.

I thank you all for coming, I thank all of you for contributing to this new vibrant state and I offer this solemn pray. May Zurab Zhvania be among the angels of the light, May his soul and all the souls of the faithfully departed rest in peace. And may his family's grief be assuaged by our prayers and God's grace and mercy.

Thank you Mr. Ambassador for providing me this opportunity to participate tonight and honor my good Friend Zura!