

Washington, DC -- Congressman Vern Buchanan (FL-13) has announced open enrollment for Medicare prescription drug plans. During open enrollment, Medicare eligible seniors can either enroll in or switch their drug plans.

"I encourage all Medicare eligible seniors without prescription drug coverage to enroll in a prescription drug plan," said Buchanan. "You may be able to save money by changing plans for 2009."

The annual open enrollment for Medicare Part D began on November 15, 2008, and ends December 31, 2008, for coverage effective January 1, 2009. According to the Center for Medicare and Medicaid Services, there are 135,000 people in the 13th District already benefiting from a Medicare prescription drug plan.

"Each year plans change what they cover and at what cost," said Buchanan. "There may be a plan that covers the same drugs as your current plan but for less money. Maybe your current plan has changed the list of drugs it covers or your prescriptions have changed and you need a different plan that covers your new medications. This is an opportunity to compare plans and make sure you're getting the most help with their drug costs."

Buchanan voted in 2007 to help lower prescription drug costs for seniors by requiring the federal government to negotiate Medicare prescription drug prices.

Information regarding the prescription drug program is available online at www.medicare.gov or by calling Medicare at 1.800.MEDICARE. In Florida, 54 Medicare prescription drug plans are available for 2009, including 30 with no deductibles and 10 with premiums under \$25.00.

For help choosing a plan, seniors may contact Serving Health Insurance Needs of Elders (SHINE) at 1.800.963.5337. When calling for assistance, make sure to have your Medicare card, the name and location of your pharmacy, and a list of your medications handy. Low-income seniors should contact the Social Security Administration to apply for additional help, 800.772.1213.

Buchanan's office can also provide seniors with information on the Medicare prescription drug program or assist seniors experiencing problems with Medicare or any federal agency. Seniors, their families and care-givers may call the Sarasota office at 941.951.6643 or the Bradenton office at 941.747.9081.