

Washington, DC -- Congressman Vern Buchanan (FL-13) toured the Sarasota County Emergency Operations Center today and discussed key approval of \$1.6 million in federal funding for a new public safety center in Sarasota County and improvements to the county's 911 system.

The House Fiscal Year 2009 "Homeland Security Appropriations Act" passed by the House Appropriations Committee includes the funding sought by Buchanan to move the County Emergency Operations Center, 911 Consolidated Communications Center, and the Enterprise Information Technology Data Center from the county administration building to a new facility.

"Sarasota County has been fortunate in recent years, but it only a matter of time before we get hit with a major event," said Buchanan. "This funding will improve the county's ability to serve the needs of the community and enhance the public safety services that are available should a disaster occur."

An engineering survey determined that the county administration building was not designed to withstand a major hurricane. Sarasota County is currently planning and designing a new 50,000 square foot public safety center that is structurally sound and geographically located to ensure it can provide critical services and government continuity after the advent of a major storm event.

"The County Emergency Operations Center is the focal point for our ability to direct responses to emergencies," said Ed McCrane, Emergency Services Chief. "It's critical to construct a secure building where we can manage operations during and after storms. This federal funding is extremely important to the new emergency operations facility."

Buchanan also secured \$600,000 for new equipment for Sarasota County's Emergency Operation Center. The funding sought by Buchanan was included in the House fiscal year 2009 "Commerce, Justice, and Science Appropriations Act" approved by the House Appropriations Committee.

"This would allow them to replace the county's current -- 30-year old 911 network with state of the art technology," said Buchanan. "The new equipment will enhance public safety by enhancing their ability to respond to emergencies."

The funding awaits final approval in the full House and Senate.