

SARASOTA, Fla. – Congressman Vern Buchanan today toured the North County Health Clinic in Sarasota to see first-hand how Florida's "KidCare" health program is helping to treat patients regardless of their ability to pay. Following the tour, Buchanan denounced the partisanship in Washington, D.C. over children's health care and urged the President and fellow Congressmen to reach agreement on legislation to extend the Children's Health Care Program. Senate President Harry Ried said yesterday he would not compromise with President Bush on the children's health care program.

"One of the complaints I hear most frequently is that partisan politics is preventing Congress from addressing important issues. As a new member of Congress I can tell you that there is too much angry partisanship and too little cooperation in Washington. Americans don't care whether a proposal is Republican or Democrat – they want common-sense solutions that work. The children's health insurance program has been a success. Republicans and Democrats need to work together to renew it."

Buchanan voted in favor of a bipartisan bill to expand and renew the State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP), known in Florida as "KidCare". Buchanan was joined by health care providers and beneficiaries, including Jill Jones and her 10-year old daughter Alexis who relies on "KidCare" for health insurance.

"Jill Jones is a single working mother trying to pay the bills and take care of her daughter, Alexis, as well as her aging parents," said Buchanan. "I grew up in a blue collar home with five brothers and sisters – so I can sympathize with families like the Jones'. The skyrocketing cost of health care is unaffordable for many working families. The children's health care program gives kids from low-income families access to the care and medicine they need to live healthy lives. It saves money in the long run and it is the right thing to do."

"Several months ago, Alexis broke her arm," said Jones. "If it weren't for Florida "Kidcare" I would not have been able to afford the care she required at that time. My father always told me that either you pay for it now, or you pay for it later. If you take away doctors visits for coughs and colds, then you pay for a hospital stay when they get pneumonia. But in every instance it's the child who pays the ultimate price. It's my daughter who will suffer when her insurance is cut."

In Florida's 13th Congressional District 9,298 children are enrolled in "KidCare". Statewide, the program provides coverage for approximately 226,000 children who are at or below the federal poverty level -- less than half the children who are eligible for the program. The President vetoed legislation this week to expand from 6.6 million to ten million the number of low-income children eligible for the program.

"This is one of the most important pieces of legislation that will come from the legislative branch this year," said Manatee Rural Health Care President Walter Presha. "This bill will improve and enhance the health of our nation's children. It is my hope that the house and senate will generate the two-thirds vote needed to override the president's veto."

"Because of my strong support for this important program, I will vote to override the President's veto," said Buchanan. "But should Congress chose to uphold the veto, it is my hope that both Congress and the administration will sit down and work together to ensure the continuation of a strong and viable children's health program."