

Washington, DC -- Congressman Vern Buchanan (FL-13) announced today that he supports a bipartisan bill to provide health care coverage to low-income children across America. In Florida, more than 226,000 children are currently covered under the program.

The House is expected to vote today on the "Children's Health Insurance Reauthorization Act" (H.R. 976). The bill would renew and expand a successful program created by Congress in 1997 to provide health coverage to more than 6 million children. According to the House Energy and Commerce Committee, Florida would receive \$51.1 million more under the bill to cover low-income children in 2008.

"I grew up in a blue-collar home with five brothers and sisters so I understand the challenges working families face," Buchanan said, adding, "nothing is more important than the health of our children."

Currently 6.6 million kids nationally are enrolled in the State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP). The compromise bill in Congress would provide funding to cover an additional four million low-income children. "Millions of kids across the country have been given a healthy start in life thanks to this important program," Buchanan said, "We can't turn our backs on them now. Our kids are worth it."

Buchanan noted that the compromise bill brought to the House floor Tuesday contains several key improvements over an earlier bill that he opposed in August. That bill, which was later re-written by leaders of the House and Senate, would have cost nearly \$50 billion, would have penalized senior citizens with punishing cuts to Medicare and would have opened the door to illegal immigrants receiving benefits. The new version does not cut Medicare for seniors, prohibits SCHIP funding for illegal immigrants and reduces the cost from \$50 billion to \$35 billion.

"The bipartisan bill increases health insurance coverage for low-income children, and improves the quality of health care children receive," added the Congressman. "It is designed to target the lowest-income uninsured children and returns the program to its original focus – providing health care to low-income children instead of adults and illegal immigrants."

President Bush has vowed to veto the new version, according to a White House aide who said Tuesday the president's concern was not over the cost but over the policy direction.

"The health of our children is not a Republican or Democrat issue," Buchanan said. "I hope the President will reconsider his veto threat and sign this important legislation when it comes to his desk."