25 House Members Co-Sponsor Legislation

National Anti-Drug Coalition Urges Swift Passage

WASHINGTON, DC -- U.S. Rep. Vern Buchanan’s bill to combat prescription drug abuse and crack down on Florida’s sprawling pill mill industry will be introduced in the House today with broad bipartisan support from senior members in both parties.

Buchanan’s bill, “The Pill Mill Crackdown Act of 2011,” includes provisions to: support state-based prescription drug monitoring programs; use the money from seized illicit operations for drug treatment; strengthen prescription standards for certain addictive pain drugs; and toughen prison terms and fines for pill mill operators.

Among the House leaders co-sponsoring Buchanan’s legislation are Appropriations Chairman Hal Rogers (KY-05); Foreign Affairs Chairwoman Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (FL-18); Transportation and Infrastructure Chairman John Mica (FL-07); and Veterans’ Affairs Chairman Jeff Miller (FL-01).

In addition, the Co-chairs of the Congressional Caucus on Prescription Drug Abuse, Mary Bono-Mack (R-Calif), and Stephen Lynch, (D-Mass), co-sponsored the measure as did senior House Democrat Ed Markey (D-Mass). Florida Democrats Debbie Wasserman-Schultz (FL-20), Corinne Brown (FL-03), Ted Deutch (FL-19), and Frederica Wilson (FL-17) also are co-sponsors.

The National Coalition Against Prescription Drug Abuse (NCAPDA) immediately endorsed Buchanan’s legislation and urged its swift passage: “Prescription drug abuse has become a national epidemic that has no boundaries,” said April Rovero, founder and President of the NCAPDA. “The pill mills that are fueling this epidemic simply must be shut down. The NCAPDA applauds Congressman Buchanan for taking this action to save lives and urges Congress to pass this bill as quickly as possible.”

“Today, we take a crucial step toward putting these pill mills out of business,” said Buchanan. “Many of these so-called pain clinics are nothing more than illegal drug distribution networks that bring untold misery to our children, our families, and our communities. I appreciate the bipartisan support I’ve received from members across the country who recognize the severity of this epidemic.”

Chairman Rogers said, “Congressman Buchanan’s bill gets it absolutely right. More and more of my colleagues are joining the fight to put these unregulated pill mills out of business and the pushers behind bars. I applaud Congressman Buchanan’s efforts in leading his state and I believe this bill is another important and thoughtful step in our fight to end the scourge of prescription drug abuse.”

Congressman Markey, dean of the Massachusetts congressional delegation, said “this legislation will help curb the growing epidemic of prescription drug abuse by cracking down on the healthcare providers who prescribe medically unnecessary painkillers and will support law enforcement in their efforts to identify and stop illegal activities."

Specifically, Buchanan’s Bill would:

• Toughen federal penalties for pill mill operators by doubling the prison sentence from 10 to 20 years and tripling the fine from $1 million to $3 million.

• Stipulate that assets seized from violators be used to: fund drug monitoring databases in the states; fund DEA enforcement actions against Pill Mills; and, support drug treatment programs within the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. The DEA last month seized an estimated $2.5 million in illicit assets owned by pill mill owners in South Florida.

• Reclassify hydrocodone combination drugs (one of the most addictive and dangerous drug mixtures) to make them a Schedule II drug that is more difficult to prescribe and obtain.

Co-sponsors to Buchanan’s bill include: Rep. Hal Rogers (KY-05), Rep. Ed Markey (MA-07), Rep. Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (FL-18), Rep. Mary Bono-Mack (CA-45), Rep. Stephen Lynch

(MA-09), Rep. John Mica (FL-07), Rep. Mario Diaz-Balart (FL-21), Rep. Jeff Miller (FL-01), Rep. Debbie Wasserman-Schultz (FL-20) Rep. Ander Crenshaw (FL-4), Rep. Tom Rooney (FL-16), Rep. David Rivera (FL-25), Rep. Richard Nugent (FL-05), Rep. Ted Deutch (FL-19), Rep. Corrine Brown (FL-03), Rep. Frederica Wilson (FL-17), Rep. Jerry Lewis (CA-41), Rep. Jerry McNerney (CA-11), Rep. Laura Richardson (CA-37), Rep. Marlin Stutzman (IN-03), Rep. Brett Guthrie (KY-02), Rep. Joe Wilson (SC-02), Rep. Jim Cooper (TN-O5), Rep. Scott Tipton (CO-03), Rep. Donna Edwards (MD-04), Rep. Kathy Castor (FL-11).