

LA PLATA, MD - Congressman Steny H. Hoyer (D-MD) today hosted a town hall meeting to discuss some of the challenges facing seniors as they enroll in Medicare Part D.

The new Medicare prescription drug benefit officially went into effect in January and the initial deadline for enrollment is May 15. Hoyer has been an outspoken critic of the Republican law as being unnecessarily complicated and failing to adequately take care of seniors' biggest problem, the high price of medicines. The law actually prohibits the federal government from negotiating the best price on behalf of seniors.

"Democrats wanted a different law," Hoyer said. "We wanted to simply add a prescription drug benefit to the existing Medicare program that seniors knew and were comfortable with. Unfortunately, the Republicans did not listen to us and adopted this bewildering program."

To make a flawed program even worse, the Bush Administration has botched the implementation, and now seniors and people with disabilities across Maryland are plagued with a complex system that leaves too many seniors without their prescriptions and unsure whether their drugs will remain covered.

"Due to these rampant problems, over 20 states have declared public health emergencies and been forced to pick up the tab for tens of thousands of vulnerable seniors and people with disabilities who have been left without the medicines they desperately need," Hoyer said. "America's seniors deserve a prescription drug program that helps them get the medicine they need, but they've been given an overly complex and poorly implemented law that does not serve them well."

Under the new law, Maryland seniors are facing an overwhelming array of choices: 19 different companies offering 47 different plans with monthly premiums that vary from \$6.44 to \$68.91, as well as a Medicare managed care option called MedicareAdvantage.

At the invitation of Congressman Hoyer, Theresa Mason, coordinator of the Charles County Senior Health Insurance Assistance Program (SHIP) answered specific questions from concerned seniors.

Hoyer urged seniors to contact their county SHIP office for individualized assistance:

-Charles 301-934-0118

-Calvert 301-855-1170

-St. Mary's 301-475-4200 ext. 1064

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