

FORT WASHINGTON, 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 benefit officially went into effect in January and the initial deadline for enrollment is May 15. In response to the bewilderment of many seniors, Hoyer recently requested that the Bush Administration extend the penalty-free enrollment until December 31, 2006.

“The cost of prescription drugs in this country has skyrocketed beyond what most American families can afford, and it is imperative that we extend the time allotted for seniors to enroll in the Medicare prescription drug plan,” Hoyer said. “It is patently unfair that seniors who are unable to navigate the plan’s enrollment labyrinth are penalized.”

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 Medicare Advantage.

“The Republicans’ Medicare prescription drug plan has truly been a double whammy for the American public,” Hoyer said. “First, American taxpayers were socked with a bill that was over twice as much – \$932 billion – as the Bush Administration’s advertised price. Then, seniors were forced to grapple with a system so confusing and complicated that many still cannot navigate their way through the program.”

At the invitation of Congressman Hoyer, Julie Neal, coordinator of the Prince George’s County Senior Health Insurance Assistance Program (SHIP) answered specific questions from concerned seniors.

Hoyer urged seniors to contact their county SHIP office (301-265-8450 in Prince George’s), call 1-800-MEDICARE, or log onto www.medicare.gov for detailed information about the new benefit.

“Although I opposed the bill, it is now the law of the land, and I advise every senior to study this carefully and make a decision whether or not to enroll,” Hoyer concluded.

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