Reps. Steny H. Hoyer and Benjamin L. Cardin met this week with seniors at Victoria Park Apartments in Waldorf to discuss the Medicare prescription drug program and the looming Monday deadline to sign up for the benefit.

The two Maryland Democrats -- Hoyer, the House minority whip, and Cardin, a candidate for the Senate -- have asked the Bush administration to extend the penalty-free enrollment period for the new drug plan to Jan. 1.

"With the deadline only a week away," Hoyer said in a statement Monday after the Waldorf meeting, "it remains patently unfair that seniors who are unable to navigate the plan's enrollment labyrinth are penalized."

Seniors who don't enroll by the deadline will be charged a higher premium for the coverage. Hoyer said more than 200,000 seniors and people with disabilities in Maryland have yet to sign up for the program.

In Maryland, seniors have a wide array of choices: Nineteen companies are offering 47 plans with monthly premiums that vary from $6.44 to $68.91, as well as a Medicare managed-care option called Medicare Advantage.