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By John Toole

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WINDHAM — Business leaders who met yesterday with Congressman Charles Bass, R-N.H., are looking for Washington to help with energy prices and health-care costs.

Bass spent about an hour at the Community Development Department with more than a dozen business leaders as part of an afternoon swing through the community that also took him to Windham High School and Windham Terrace.

Scott Baetz, owner of AdminInternet, asked Bass to help with rising health-care costs. Providing coverage for employees at his small business is a challenge, he told Bass.

"It's killing me," Baetz said.

The answer, Bass told him, is in an open market and universal deductibility for the expense. Bass said he wants to see the day when consumers and businesses are getting junk mail from companies vying to provide coverage.

Bob Winmill of Winmill Equipment told Bass energy costs are hurting business. If diesel prices could be cut in half, Winmill said, "You'd see the economy would take off."

Bass told Winmill the Democrats were wrong to want to tap the nation's strategic petroleum reserves.

Bass, who as a small business owner and investor ran a wood pellet firm, said he's an advocate of developing alternate energy sources and tapping offshore oil resources.

Bass drew praise from Bob Young of R.A. Young Associates when he said he was looking for bipartisan solutions to what ails the country.

"Look, I understand there will be other points of view," Bass said. "But I'm not in this for the battle, I'm in this for the solution."

Bass saw some ways Washington can help local businesses. One is by less spending.

"Spending cuts have to happen," Bass said.

Another is through policies that support business.

"We need to create an environment for real job growth," Bass said.

He defended a proposal from Congressman Paul Ryan to reform Medicare. The average American is paying \$100,000 into the system, taking out \$300,000, Bass said.

"That is an unsustainable system," he said.

Ryan's proposal has the potential to extend the life of Medicare another 40 years, Bass said. "This is a trust fund," he said. "You can cut benefits, raise the Medicare tax, some combination of the two or do nothing. We can't do nothing."

Bass was accompanied on his rounds by Selectman Bruce Breton and Rep. Robert Elliott, R-Salem.

Bass, returning to Congress after an absence of four years, said he was making a point of visiting all the voting precincts in the 2nd District.

"I want to make a difference not only for our country, but anybody in any community that needs help," Bass said. "For me, saving the country for my 17-year-old son and my 19-year-old daughter is why I'm here (in Congress) now."