

Untitled document

By Doug Robinson

*The Pelham-Windham News, May 27, 2011*

The sun had barely risen over the horizon when Pelham and Windham's representatives to the U.S. Congress left his Peterborough home to drive to Pelham. His visits to the area involved serving lunch at the Pelham Senior Center, taking a tour of Windham High School, visiting the Windham Rail Trail, a question-and-answer session at Windham Terrace, a Business Roundtable with Windham business owners, and a visit to Bella Vino in the Howie Glenn Plaza.

Pelham Seniors instantly recognized Congressman Bass as they extended their welcoming hands. "I try to come here three to four times a year. I can remember coming here with my dad when he was a Congressman," commented Bass.

Going immediately to the kitchen, he picked up the tray of salads and began serving them to the seniors. Calling many by name, he could be heard saying, "Good to see you again – okay if I serve on this side of you?" While eating lunch, he shared longtime memories with Pelham Senior Ed Richard. They spoke of Ed's trip to Florida, as well as his health. Seeking out the eldest senior, Congressman Bass reached out to the 97-year-old Herbert Currier, Sr. Fellow Senior Charlie Hobbs spoke with Bass that where he was standing used to be the bathroom before the house was renovated. Evidently, he was the homeowner before the house was sold to Pelham. He pointed out to Bass where he used to have to sleep outside as a kid because "back in those days, when you were sick, my parents made me sleep on the porch so that I wouldn't infect anyone in the family."

The Rail Trail brought back childhood memories to Bass of the times he used to play with and build trains, and work with his dad. "See that wall over there," Bass stated, flashlight in hand, walking through the darkness of the newly renovated Train Depot. "See that white shape of the wall, just above the horizontal timer," as he continued speaking to Windham Rail Trail Alliance President, Mark Samsel. Others in the room could not see the image, so Bass walked right up to the wall and outlined the image with his flashlight. "I never saw that before," came a comment from the crowd following Bass. "That used to be the area where the Depot clock used to hang. That is where thousands of people from days long ago would set their clocks and pocket watches. That is the timepiece which would tell people when the trains were coming and going," Bass continued. "I love to work on clocks. I have 11 clocks and they all chime. I have worked on clocks since I was a kid."

The tour of Windham High School involved a lesson in Smart Board Technology, as well as a visit to the Latin class. Superintendent Frank Bass led the tour, explaining the town's education vision as being a state-of-the-art facility. "We spent \$55 million dollars to build this award-winning school," commented Bass. Biology teacher and finalist to becoming NH Biology Teacher of the Year, Bethany Bernasconi, offered Congressman Bass a lesson not in biology, but how she and fellow teachers can teach more effectively as a results of Windham's commitment to education.

"Every student gets a laptop?" asked Bass. "Yes," answered Bernasconi. "We assign them a laptop for which they keep for their four years here at Windham High. It is their lifeline to everything we do at the school. We can access them immediately and they can access me whenever they need. Parents have a direct link to the teachers as well. With this white board technology, students can do the lesson over and over, as many times as needed from their home if they choose. They can see my notes for the lessons and they can ask me questions directly related to any concern by page, assignment, podcast or picture."

Students in WHS Latin learned quickly that U.S. Congressman Charlie Bass was like them, as he speaks Latin. "I have a real appreciation of Latin. About 60 percent of all English comes from Latin," said Bass. He continued his storytelling by making the frustration faced by all kids understood and stated, "While on vacation, I remember sitting squished in the backseat of our family car, driving the ruins of Rome, and I can remember my mother who was sitting up front, reading to us the history of that era over and over and over and over." Bass and the students laughed.

Windham Terrace residents were sitting at the long table waiting for Bass' arrival when he walked into the dining room. Having left the seat at the head of the table open for Bass, he stated his appreciation, but stated, "Is it okay if I sit here in the middle? This way I feel as though I will work with you better." And sitting straight in their chairs, many had their hands folded, like school children would do, as they awaited further instruction. What Bass did not know was that under the folded hands of the residents were prepared questions in preparation of his visit. Questions asked of Bass involved Medicare, his Congressional District, what he has been doing since he "took four years off," as Bass stated, to questions on the economy. Questions about oil, coal, and biofuel, as well as his opinion as to opening more territory for more exploration, were subjects the Windham Terrace residents wished to discuss. They asked about the proposed reduction in meals tax, too. "What's your viewpoint?" was asked over and over again.

"I am passionate to diversify," with regards to energy, and we need to be "less dependent on importing oil. We need to look into wind, solar, and biomass as an energy alternative," commented Bass.

At the Business Roundtable, local businesses had a very direct and personal conversation with Bass regarding the issues of our national debt, telecommunications, health care, banking regulations, and related issues they face on a daily basis. Small business startups as well as long-term Windham businesses were present to share their concerns with the Congressman.

"What the heck is going on and what are you going to do?" was asked of Congressman Bass, who commented that this is the exact reason he was traveling to all 191 voting districts across the state of New Hampshire while he represents his 675,000 constituents. "I want everyone to understand that I am going back not to be in Congress, but to see what I can do. I've been out of politics for four years and I am back in public service....I need to make decisions...I am a small biz person...the wood pellet business and I consult on three different enterprises...I really want to use the experiences I have in business, in politics, in the legislature, and in Congress. I have a unique prospect. The next 18 months will be a tough time. We need bipartisan solutions

– not just be out there scoring points on what we say. And bipartisan does not mean that we have to agree...want to see people with different points of view be flexible and come to conclusions."

And as the sun began to set, Bass joined many business professionals and continued the discussions at Bella Vino Specialty Wines and Gourmet Shop in Windham. He continued to share his ideas, questioned all for more information, and made time to speak with all in attendance.