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By Tom Fahey

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CONCORD – The Public Utilities Commission observed the 100th anniversary of its founding Monday, long after the days when it was established to regulate railroads that had a stranglehold on the state's economic and political systems.

Among those addressing a crowd of about 100 people was Congressman Charles Bass, R-N.H., whose grandfather, Robert Perkins Bass, pushed for the PUC's establishment when he served as governor.

Bass noted that the power of railroad owners in the state had begun to decline by the time a long legislative battle led to creation of the PUC. Established as the Public Service Commission, it was to regulate rates on railroads, electricity, telegraph, telephone, even the Mount Washington Cog Railway and tour boats that piled Lake Winnepesaukee and Lake Sunapee.

Since then the complexity of issues has multiplied: Seabrook nuclear power plant, the Public Service of New Hampshire bankruptcy, FairPoint's takeover or Verizon landline telephone service and now the Northern Pass project.

"This is an example of an agency that has remained fresh, crisp and effective over time," Bass said.

He said in his first term in the New Hampshire House, he voted to remove the Cog Railway from PUC oversight, "eliminating part of the justification for the creation of the PUC to begin with."

PUC chairman Thomas Getz said these days "few easy questions are presented to us, and there are fewer easy answers."

He said one constant concern at the commission is to balance the interests of consumers and businesses, "and not let fairness be the victim of efficiency."

Bass said yesterday that he does not have direct power of the fate of the Northern Pass project but has pushed for changes in the plan. Northern Pass is a \$1.1 billion project to carry hydro-power generated in Quebec along a 180-mile route through New Hampshire into Massachusetts. The state's entire Congressional delegation has expressed concerns about the project.

Bass said PSNH's and its parent company Northeast Utilities have not briefed him on a revised plan to acquire property for the project.

"My position has been that the North Country has to be partner in this process, not a victim. Right now, as it stands today, the people of the North Country feel they are making a huge sacrifice and there is no or little apparent benefit to them. That is not an acceptable resolution to

this problem. I certainly urge the developers to come forward with new ideas that will change that paradigm."

"I'm not supporting the project until I see something very different come forward."

He noted that the House Energy and Commerce Committee on which he sits has oversight of the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission, ISO New England, the Department of Energy and other agencies involved in electric power issues.