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By Sara Young-Knox

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JEFFERSON—U.S. Rep. Charlie Bass told constituents last night that he was surprised, given his campaign rhetoric, that President Obama's international actions are as aggressive in size, if not more so, than his predecessor's.

Speaking of the U.S. military's action in Libya, Bass said that Americans have never had any significant presence in that country, and that Libyan oil goes to Europe.

"Europeans have an obligation to be the primary players in this." He said the tomahawk missiles the U.S. has fired into the country are an act of war.

"You might as well have invaded the country with troops," he said. "My own observation is that it takes 15 minutes to decide to get involved, and ten years to get out."

Bass held the town meeting in the Jefferson Town Hall, fielding questions for more than an hour. Uneasy about the economy and the federal debt, worried about cuts in social services and angry about aid going overseas, the roughly 60 North Country residents at the meeting held nothing back as they brought their questions to the congressman.

"It's not a sprint, it's a marathon," said Bass in regard to working on the budget. He said the federal prison in Berlin was constructed and completed at a very importune time, as it needs new spending in the federal budget to open, and nothing has happened to move the budget forward for a year.

Bass, who was defeated in 2006 after serving 12 years, said "I never honestly thought I'd see my name on a ballot again." He said he was moved to run because of the growing federal deficit.

He said he had already cast some difficult votes. He said tackling the three big entitlement programs, Medicare, Medicaid and Social Security, will be difficult and Congress will need the support of the American people.

"We have to make some tough decisions," he said. "We don't know what we're going to do, but we're working on it."

In response to a question about rolling back the Bush tax cuts, he commented, "I just don't think this is the appropriate moment for class war. We could tax the rich 100 percent and we still won't close the budget."

Several in the audience spoke out against foreign aid. Referring to aid to Afghanistan, Bass said, "The taxpayers should not, under any circumstances, be spending money to people who are stealing."

He didn't give people much hope for a break at the fuel pump. "Congress can't wave a magic wand and lower prices." He said oil prices are high because of instability in the areas where it's produced.

District 1 Executive Councilor Ray Burton said he hoped Bass would come to his senses and come out against the Northern Pass power line project. At the start of the meeting, Bass put the matter to rest: "I said from the beginning I don't think this project should be constructed as planned." However, he said he wants to bring the issue to the table instead of coming out completely against it.