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By Merry Armentrout

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NEWPORT – Congressman Charlie Bass has 20 days to gather feedback from residents of New Hampshire before heading back to Capitol Hill as the country faces economic uncertainty.

Bass is circulating through the district in hopes of gaining insight into what sort of regulations stand in the way of small businesses having the ability to expand.

"I'm talking to business owners and employees who can provide perspective on where we need to go in order to achieve our number one mission over the next six months. Besides bringing the budget mess under control, we need to provide an environment which is conducive to job creation so we can turn the economy around and help the budget deficit at the same time," Congressman Bass said, during a stop in Newport last Thursday.

The Congressman dedicated the week to gathering input on manufacturing and high tech jobs. Bass arrived in Newport after spending time with the President of Moore Nanotech Systems Len Chaloux in Swanzey. Chaloux told the lawmaker his frustration with the current corporate tax structure, "I pay 42.5 percent of my net income in taxes. Why do other companies that are 10 times bigger than I am pay no taxes at all?"

Bass said he agreed with Chaloux's concern and will be reviewing the tax code in the fall to see if lawmakers can find a way to broaden the base to make more businesses pay lower taxes.

Last week the Labor Department reported some good news in a depressed economy. The number of first-time filers for unemployment benefits fell last week, dipping below 400,000 for the first time in four months.

"We're pretty lucky in New Hampshire because unemployment is almost half of what it is elsewhere in the country. The reason for that are exports, diversity of industry and we have a good tax climate. Our business tax structure is high but our overall tax structure is competitive with the rest of the country," Bass said.

Bass, along with his colleagues in the House, will have their work cut out when Congress resumes session next month to address the nation's debt. A special congressional committee composed of six Democratic and Republican members from the House and Senate has the enormous task of devising a plan to shave \$1.2 trillion off the federal deficit over the next decade. The committee has until Thanksgiving to come up with a proposal, and if they fail to do so, automatic cuts will kick in.

"I support this process and I think it will be interesting to see what they do. I'm going to make every effort to support their recommendation because I don't think we have a lot of choice right now. The number I keep throwing out is at the beginning of 2008 our nation's debt as a percent of our gross domestic product was around 40 percent and today it's between 80 and 85 percent.

I don't care what your philosophy is, what party you're in or what vision you have, you have to agree we can't sustain this country for very long at that rate of spending," said Bass.

He also said the state's economic future is dependent on looking towards the past. "Relief in New Hampshire is going to come the old fashioned way that is when we find customers, when we need employees. We do have the ingenuity and flexibility to make our taxes work better, to make sure we're competitive and to reduce unnecessary government regulations. If people get paychecks than they can bring them to the craft fair in Sunapee. I'm just glad my wife didn't know about that craft fair," said Bass.