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## **But Says Cuts to Offset Expenses Are Needed, Too**

By Patrick O'Grady

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UNITY – U.S. Rep. Charlie Bass, R-N.H., said yesterday he is as eager as any lawmaker to send federal disaster relief money to the Vermont and New Hampshire communities hard hit by flooding from Tropical Storm Irene, but he doesn't think it's unreasonable to expect Washington to offset the emergency appropriations with spending cuts.

While flood victims await federal assistance through FEMA, Democrats and Republicans were embroiled in a stalemate over a stopgap budget bill until the Federal Emergency Management Agency said it had enough money to carry it through to the end of the government's fiscal year on Friday.

Bass, in the Upper Valley yesterday to tour the new community corrections center at the Sullivan County Complex, emphasized that he has no desire to see communities wait any longer for FEMA assistance.

"I want to be sure our neighbors in Vermont and places in New Hampshire such as the Upper Valley are getting what they need," Bass said in a telephone interview after stops in Unity and his new district office in Newport.

The House bill passed last Friday included \$3 billion in FEMA funding along with \$1.6 billion in budget cuts. The Senate rejected the measure and last night voted on its own legislation that contained no offsets.

The House bill would have cut funding from a Department of Energy loan guarantee program for alternative energy companies and a program to increase development of energy efficient automobile technology.

"That program (for more energy efficient automobiles) has a huge surplus," Bass said. "Why not use the surplus as an offset?"

The other program, which gave a \$535 million loan guarantee to Solyndra of California, a bankrupt solar panel company now under investigation by the FBI, is seriously flawed, Bass said.

"By DOE's own admission, it is not that successful."

Senate Democrats say the cuts will kill programs that create jobs.

Asked whether he would support the Senate bill when it gets to the House, Bass said, "I will vote to make sure the (FEMA) money is available but I prefer to have the offsets."

Keeping the government operating and ensuring fiscal responsibility are priorities for him, the congressman from Peterborough said.

"The problem is that Democrats don't want to cut spending at all," Bass said. "They don't believe there is a problem. He (Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid, D-Nev.) can't find anything worth cutting."

Bass said cuts to offset emergency appropriations was how Washington operated for years. But since the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks, when the magnitude of the relief made offsets impractical, it has not been adhered to.

"Trying to argue that offsets have never been done before is not accurate," Bass said.

Bass was also asked about the crowded field for the GOP nomination for president, but he declined to name a favorite.

"I think I'll keep my powder dry for the time being," he said. "I've spoken to all the candidates and I want to welcome them to New Hampshire. I won't have an endorsement in the immediate future. I want to wait until the issues develop a little more."

In Unity, Bass was given a tour of the community corrections center by Corrections Superintendent Ross Cunningham. The \$5 million facility, designed for counseling and treatment for substance abuse problems of nonviolent offenders, opened in August 2010.

At Monday's visit, Cunningham said the program has served 111 inmates, 84 men and 27 women. Of that total, 81 have been released to the community, 4 convicted of new crimes and 14 were sent back for violations, such as failing a urine test. However, since January 1, of the 46 inmates who completed residential treatment, none have returned to custody or been rearrested.

County Administrator Greg Chanis credits that success rate to the more than \$1 million the county has received in federal funds for the development and operation of the treatment programs. The money came through a Department of Justice initiative called Second Chance.

Chanis said the center could never have achieved that success in such a short time without the federal money.

Bass said he was impressed with the program.

"I was really impressed with the recidivism rate," he said. "It appears to be exceptionally low."

Bass acknowledged that such programs, while successful, have to be looked at carefully when many Republicans are calling for deeper spending cuts.

"I've always said all programs should be on the table. They wanted me to see this so when it does come up, it won't be just another line on a piece of paper but something that works."

