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BERLIN — Congressman Charlie Bass returned to the construction site of Burgess BioPower last week, his first visit to the wood-to-energy project since he regained his seat representing New Hampshire's Second District.

During his four years out of office Bass worked with Laidlaw Energy Group, the original developers of the venture, now being developed by Cate Street Capital, and had witnessed the demolition of three of the industrial stacks in 2007 on the former pulp mill site. The last stack standing will serve the 75-megawatt facility, which is expected to come online in late 2013.

On May 24, a bright day above the notches but a cloudy, rainy day below, Bass stood with site manager Carl Belanger uphill from the core of the facilities. Bass said he remembered when Belanger was the only person on the site, a contrast from the bustling work site it is now.

"It's very heart-warming," Bass said as he looked down upon the work site, much of the ground dug up and rearranged to fit the new infrastructure. Three men in white hard hats and bright safety vests conferred at the edge of the excavation for the foundation on which a generator will sit.

Bass pointed out the 1890s pulp mill foundation that was visible in the northern section of the construction site. "It's fascinating how archeologically you can see the old mill," he remarked.

The site has several offices, as the general contractor, Babcock & Wilcox Construction Company, oversees the \$275 million project. The company's mobile safety training center sits not far from the employee parking lot, which on this day was crowded with pickups.

Belanger said of the 150 workers at the site, about 100 of them are from the North Country region, including several former Isaacson Structural Steel employees. Belanger said they'd hired four or five Isaacson welders and a steel inspector. It's a union shop.

A huge pile of sand sat near the old scale house. A covered pile sat beside it destined for the landfill. The uncovered sand is reusable. The same fate will meet the wood ash that the plant will produce. The cleaner wood ash can be used as fertilizer.

The biomass facility will sit on the southern part of the property, with developable space still available on the former pulp mill acreage.

"Eventually you'll see a lot of industry here, which may or may not be symbiotic," Bass said. When Laidlaw first proposed the project the company provided drawings of what the site could look like, with greenhouses sharing space.

Bass said while the greenhouses might not be practical in the northern climate, the plant will

produce hot water.

"I think it will be a very compelling opportunity for other business to come in and use that water," he said. "I think we'll see a real rebirth for a lot of jobs for the city."

Bass also visited Presby Steel, LLC on East Milan Road. The warehouse operation was part of the Isaacson company, operating as Isaacson Steel, and was subject to the recent bankruptcy proceedings. The company supplies a variety of steel products, from fasteners and pipes to steel sheets and Ibeams, delivering products throughout northern New England.

David Presby, the owner and founder of Presby Environmental, said he bought the company in February to, among other things, preserve jobs.

"I used a lot of steel in my business," Presby said, adding he'd worked with the employees of the business over the years and heard it was going to auction. He's been able to keep 15 of the 19 employees, and has restocked what were barren shelves. "It's in the black," he said of the business, "It will be here for years to come."

"We're constantly filling orders," Presby told Bass. "If we don't have it, we'll get it for you."

Bass was accompanied by his daughter, Lucy, Beno Lamontagne, North Country representative for the Department of Resources and Economic Development, and staff. Prior to his stop at the biomass project, he visited with students at the Berlin Junior High School.