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BERLIN - Congressman Charles F. Bass (NH-2) has sent a letter to Attorney General Eric Holder protesting the proposal by Holder of diverting Bureau of Prison (BOP) funds to purchase a prison facility in Illinois, a plan that could affect the activation of the new federal prison in Berlin.

The Berlin prison is in the process of staffing up and is scheduled to start accepting some minimum security prisoners at the end of this month.

According to a press release from Bass, Holder's proposal would divert \$14 million from the Bureau of Prisons to acquire the Thomson Correction Center in Thomson, Illinois. This "earmark" was not included in any legislation approved by Congress and was in fact rescinded by Congress last year.

This could not only potentially affect the activation of the Berlin prison, but three other new federal prisons as well.

"After an unnecessary and costly delay, Congress was finally able to come together last year and approve and prioritize funding for the activation of the new prison in Berlin, which had been sitting empty for far too long. Not only will this prison help to alleviate overcrowding in the federal prison system, it will be a tremendous economic boon to the North Country, Bass said "So I am extremely concerned that the Administration would consider moving forward on any proposal that could put the four new federal prisons currently being activated, including Berlin, in jeopardy. To circumvent the will of Congress and the American people is unacceptable and I will continue to work with my colleagues to prevent this proposal from becoming a reality."

According to Bass' letter to Holder, Holder had proposed on July 26 to fund a \$165 million earmark to acquire the Thomson Correctional Center in Thomson, Illinois. Of that amount \$151 million would come from the Assets Forfeiture Fund Super Surplus and \$14 million would be reprogrammed from the Bureau of Prisons appropriation balances.

"Your proposal would divert much-needed resources away from existing Bureau of Prisons priorities toward an earmark project Congress never even requested. The Bureau is currently in the process of activating four new Federal prisons that will alleviate overcrowding in the system, and any surplus in the Salaries and Expenses account should go toward this existing demand," the letter states.

The letter goes on to say that Congress has "denied and rescinded funding for this specific acquisition" and last year "rejected a similar reprogramming request."

The State of Illinois is the owner of this prison. It paid for and built it over a three year period, 1999-2001. It had originally been proposed on an old Army depot, but was moved because of

environmental concerns. Because of this additional cost, there were no funds in the state's 2002 budget to activate it.

Holder's proposal would have the federal government buying it from that state through the Department of Justice and its Bureau of Prisons.