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By Melissa Grima

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BERLIN — "The light just flipped green on the Berlin Prison." That was the word late yesterday afternoon from Congressman Charlie Bass.

Bass reported that the House of Representatives had passed the appropriations bill that provides funding of \$6.6 billion for the Bureau of Prisons and language that prioritizes spending for completion and activation of prisons that are constructed or under construction but not yet activated. The measure passed the house 298 to 121.

"It's likely to pass the Senate tonight," Bass said on Thursday, and should receive the President's signature by the end of the day Friday. If that all happens with no hiccups, the funding would be accessible for the remainder of Fiscal Year 2012, meaning as soon as the BOP could arrange it the prison could open.

Senator Jeanne Shaheen, who has also advocated for the prison funding approval, announced on Wednesday that she also expected the measure to pass the Senate and be approved by the President before the week was out.

"I want to thank Congressman Bass for really working with me and the rest of the North Country since he came back to Congress. He's been up here about once a month, I speak to him on a regular basis, and he knows how desperately important the Berlin Prison project is to the city. He has played an integral role in marshaling this project through the House and I thank him for that," said Berlin Mayor Paul Grenier.

Once opened, the Berlin Prison is expected to house over 1,000 medium and minimum security adult male offenders and its day-to-day operation is estimated to create over 300 jobs. The project is estimated to have a \$40 million annual impact on the area.

"This is tremendous news for Berlin and New Hampshire's North Country. This prison has been sitting empty for too long at a huge cost to taxpayers," Bass said.

Bass has advocated for opening the federal prison in Berlin. Earlier this summer, he worked with the House Appropriations Committee to help author the language prioritizing funding for federal prisons that have been constructed but not yet activated, such as the Berlin Prison, which was included in the bill. The Senate Appropriations Committee later included similar language in their version of the bill.