

Baker tours manufacturer, calls for fiscal responsibility

By Joe O'Connell

Published On Friday, February 19, 2010

Photo By Joe O'Connell

Republican gubernatorial candidate Charles Baker, center, stands with Mayor Mark Hawke, right, as Mack Prototype Inc. President Ric Perry talks about a piece of the manufacturer's equipment during a tour of the company's Main Street facility Thursday.

GARDNER — It is time to start holding state government accountable to the same level of sacrifice and belt-tightening that has been happening in cities and towns around the Bay State during difficult economic times, said Charles Baker, the former CEO of Harvard Pilgrim Health Care and a Republican gubernatorial candidate, during a visit to the Chair City on Thursday.

“People think there are two sets of rules, rules for Beacon Hill and another set of rules for everybody else,” said Mr. Baker after touring the Mack Prototype Inc. facility on Main Street. “And I see cities and towns tightening their belts everywhere I go. They are doing it, they are living within their means and dealing with the new normal. And it just feels like state government doesn't have to play by the same set of rules.”

Mr. Baker, who is seeking his party's nomination ahead of November's election, was joined by a small group of Gardner residents and public officials during his tour of the low-volume manufacturer led by Ric Perry, the company's president. The group was brought to every department of the company, getting a chance to see the products it develops and the operation as a whole.

“Our name ‘Prototype’ doesn't really encompass what we do here,” Mr. Perry told Mr. Baker. “We are a low-volume manufacturer.”

Mack Prototype has been in Gardner since 1999 and specializes in rapid prototyping, CNC machining and injection molding. Some of the products that were showcased during the tour included rubber cleats for athletic shoes and the PS Tibial insert that is used during the knee replacement process.

“I have been visiting a lot of small manufacturers,” said Mr. Baker. “They don't have the visibility I think they should have and are a bigger piece of the economy than most people realize.”

After the trip through the facility, Mr. Baker took time to talk with the tour group and employees of Mack Prototype about the problems that Gardner is facing.

Mayor Mark Hawke, who also took the tour, mentioned that in order to alleviate the financial stress on the city, furloughs were taken by elected officials and a reduction in city employee's work time were implemented.

“I hear this from all the people I know in local government and I don't see the state putting in anywhere near the same effort,” said Mr. Baker.

Mayor Hawke also talked about the effects the increase in the sales tax has had on Gardner, the need for capital assistance to help New England Peptide expand and the road blocks that the city has been unable to overcome in regards to the trash to energy facility, something Mr. Baker said he would look into more.

Mr. Baker and businessman Christy Mihos are both seeking the Republican nomination in hopes of unseating incumbent Gov. Deval Patrick, a Democrat, who is looking for his second term as governor. State Treasurer Timothy Cahill is also running for governor as an Independent.

“I know Massachusetts pretty well,” said Mr. Baker. “The most interesting thing to me is how many different ways people can come up with to make a living here. It is fascinating.”

joconnell@thegardnernews.com