

# County saving by cutting

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Sullivan County Commissioners voted Monday to give non-union county employees a 1.5 percent salary increase in the upcoming fiscal year, rather than the 3 percent increase the county administrator had proposed.

The proposed change, which affects about 75 county employees, would save the county an estimated \$70,000, County Administrator Greg Chanis said. Unionized employees will get a 3 percent raise, as previously negotiated.

The salary change, as well as a \$5,000 reduction in contracted accounting services for next year, are part of a plan to offset an anticipated decrease in revenue, mainly because of lower state and federal Medicaid reimbursement rates, Chanis said.

"From essentially one year ago to

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now, we're looking at about \$525,000 less in revenue through Medicaid reimbursement," he said.

As the commissioners' \$28.2 million budget stands now, it represents about a 5.2 percent increase over the current year in the amount to be raised through taxation, which is about \$13.6 million. The county tax burden is spread across the municipalities in the county based on each community's total property value. For that reason, Sunapee usually pays about one-quarter of the county tax bill.

The proposed Sullivan County budget does not include money to offset a significant deficit the county incurred in previous years. After years of budgeting \$1 million for deficit reduction, Chanis said, he anticipates the

county will end the fiscal year June 30 with a fund balance of about \$1.6 million, or about 6 percent of the total budget. The New Hampshire Department of Revenue Administration recommends counties maintain fund balances between 5 and 10 percent of their overall budget.

"What this means is that the fiscal health of the county has been restored," Chanis said.

In other county news, the Sullivan County Delegation voted unanimously last week not to increase salaries for any elected officials in the upcoming fiscal year. In previous years, the delegation's Executive Finance Committee has met to formulate a recommendation regarding raises for elected officials and then presented it to the full delegation. State Rep. John Cloutier,

D-Claremont, made a motion at the delegation meeting last week to return to that practice, but his motion was not seconded.

Instead, the full delegation debated the issue for about half an hour, including some talk about a possible 1 percent salary increase, before agreeing to keep salaries level. The decision impacts the registrar of deeds, who attended the meeting, as well as the county commissioners, the county attorney and the county sheriff, who were not in attendance.

Sullivan County Commissioners are scheduled to meet at the county complex in Newport at 8:30 a.m. Friday to finish their review of the proposed fiscal year 2011 county budget. The delegation is scheduled to begin reviewing the budget next month.