

SULLIVAN COUNTY DELEGATION

Aug. 11, 2005

**Place: Sunapee Middle High School,
Sunapee, New Hampshire**

REPORT OF REPO. JOHN CLOUTIER

Delegation Members Present: Reps. John Cloutier, Harry Gale, and Peter Franklin

County Elected Officials Present: County Commissioner Donald Clarke

Special Guest Present: Reps. Betsey Patten of Moultonboro, Eric Stohl of Columbia, and Coos County Commissioner Bing Judd of Pittsburg

Media Present: Eagle-Times' Rebecca Miller, WNTK reporter

Rep. Cloutier, Delegation Chair, called the meeting to order at 7:05 p.m., and had all delegation members present introduce themselves as well as Commissioner Clarke

By previous agreement, Sunapee Town Manager Donna Nashaway led off the meeting with a presentation of Sunapee's current property tax situation, and the town's share of county property taxes.

Said the town will ^{this year} pay 24% of Sullivan County's total property tax burden versus 20% of the county's total burden last year.

Also claimed that Sunapee now raises more money in its total taxes to help run the county than it does money to actually run the town.

Rep. Patten, Chair of the House Municipal & County Government Committee, then spoke about the role of county government and how it is funded. She then answered questions from those present.

Rep. Stohl, House Municipal & County Government Vice Chair, then talked among other items, about House Bill 681, which was sponsored by Rep. Patten during the 2003-04 legislative term and was interim studied. Bill tried to deal with some of the concerns now being raised by communities like Sunapee.

He then produced a chart constructed in 2001 which showed that of all the counties, Sullivan County had the highest per capita county government costs with such government costing each county resident \$213, whereas in Hillsboro County the cost was only \$98 per resident. He promised copies of the above-mentioned chart to all delegation members.

Rep. Stohl then asked the question, "Why isn't population used in calculating county taxes?"

Commissioner Clarke, in response to several of Rep. Stohl's questions and statements, said it is sometimes difficult to determine responsibility for the cost of certain county services. He cited the example of a Sullivan County resident who lived in one community, committed a robbery in another of the county's communities, but was actually captured in a third county community. He added that some county services are actually used by summer residents, who don't live in this county year round, either because they live in other New Hampshire counties or even out-of-state.

Mr. Judd then spoke and answered questions about county government.

He said he has a real problem with the apportionment of county taxes. He thinks the way the system is now established is unfair, and used his own county as an example.

Then he added that the only way to actually cut county taxes would be for the state to take over running the county prisons and nursing homes. Though he doubts such facilities will be better run by the state, money ~~will~~^{would} be saved.

Commissioner Clarke then said county taxes are now based on a community's percentage share of the county's total grand list. For example, Sunapee has 10% of the grand list, therefore it pays 10% of the total county taxes. He then complained that the state has used counties for years as a "conduit" to collect property taxes to pay for state services. Cited several examples, including House Bill 409, which was passed in 1998 in reference to long-term as well as nursing home care. Said the bill has "screwed" the counties by forcing them to raise taxes.

An unidentified Sunapee resident ~~was~~ complained about the defeat of House Bill 218 earlier this year, and the lack of publicity about tonight's meeting. But Rep. Gale strongly disagreed with the resident's latter complaint.

Sunapee Selectman Bill Roach then complained about studies of county government done in 1983-84 as well as 2000-01. Studies which have suggested improvements in such government, but which he claimed have been ignored by the county delegation.

But Commissioner Clarke said recommendations in the latter study have actually been used to improve the county nursing home.

Meeting was then adjourned at 8:31 p.m.

John R. Cloutier
Rep. John R. Cloutier
Acting Clerk