



\$6.9m bond for Sullivan jail OK'd

◆ **Heated debate:** Dissenters say the project is laudable but taxpayers can't afford it right now.

By **KRISTEN SENZ**

Union Leader Correspondent

NEWPORT — The Sullivan County Delegation yesterday approved a \$6.9 million bond proposal to build a 68-bed community corrections center at the county complex in Unity.

Heralded as a creative solution to the county's jail over-

crowding and substantial inmate substance abuse issues, the community corrections center will contain a substance abuse treatment program for well-behaved inmates and jail cells for female inmates.

At the end of a tense meeting in Newport yesterday, the delegation of state representatives voted 12-1 to approve the bond

measure, with State Rep. Beverly Rodeschin, R-Newport, as the lone nay vote.

"Until we get our fiscal house in order, I can't support this motion," Rodeschin said, referring to the county's \$2.5 million budget deficit.

Other legislators and county corrections and law enforcement officials insisted that the new facility would save county tax money in the long run.

"I think this represents a tremendous opportunity for Sulli-

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STATE REP. BEVERLY RODESCHIN, R-NEWPORT

casting the lone nay vote

van County to better address the underlying root causes of a significant portion of the criminal conduct we see in law enforcement," County Attorney Marc Hathaway said.

She noted that more than 90 percent of inmates at the 99-bed

Sullivan County House of Correction are dependent on alcohol, drugs, or both. We believe that this is a wise allocation of society's resources," she said.

Despite the eventual con-

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sensus, yesterday's delegation meeting did not run smoothly.

With about two-dozen county officials and members of the public watching, Delegation Chairman and State Rep. Peter Franklin, D-Newport, at one point slammed a gavel on the table and asked a law enforcement officer to remove Claremont City Councilor Jeffrey Goff from the meeting room at Sullivan County Superior Court.

There was no attempt to physically remove Goff, who stood defiantly and asked to offer comments about the corrections proposal, which he opposed.

Rodeschin challenged Franklin's ruling that Goff could not speak, arguing that two corrections officials from outside the county had been allowed to speak in favor of the proposal. Franklin said a public hearing on the issue, which Goff did not attend, was held July 31. Delegates rejected Rodeschin's motion to challenge Franklin, but State Rep. Jay Phinizy, D-Acworth, followed it with a motion to allow public comment before the delegates voted.

That motion passed, but Goff stormed out of the meeting before making his comments. He said in the hallway that he had another meeting to attend in Claremont "and they all knew that."

"This is not a democracy," Goff told reporters outside the meeting room. "This is a dictatorship. Someone's got to stand up and say, either stop the train or run me over, and I guess that's where I am."

Goff said the community corrections center is sorely needed, but the county can't afford it. "This is a slap in the face to

the members of the public who really want to have a say in this issue," said Goff, who criticized Franklin and the delegation's budget process.

Back in the meeting room, the debate remained tense. At one point, Phinizy, who was trying to withdraw a motion, asked Franklin to "quit being so anal."

The motion was related to the allocation of \$209,000 in the county's fiscal year 2009 budget to pay for some improvements at the county jail. Those funds also were included in the original \$7.1 million bond proposal, and Franklin advocated for using the extra funds to reduce the deficit.

State Rep. Brenda Ferland, I-Charlestown, and other delegates argued that the bond amount should be reduced to lessen the burden on taxpayers, who will start feeling the financial impact of the bond vote in fiscal year 2010.

After the approval of the \$6.9 million bond for the new corrections facility, jail superintendent Ross Cunningham received a round of congratulations.

"It's cutting edge," he said of the new approach to corrections in Sullivan County.

In addition to substance abuse treatment for inmates, the community corrections center will offer counseling and other services to inmates' family members. Hathaway said the new approach is unique in New Hampshire.

"I don't think there's another facility in the state that is placing this kind of emphasis on the community corrections component for such a significant portion of the house of correction population," he said.