

# Sullivan County reps OK 25% budget hike

◆ **AC axed: \$160k for cooling system at county nursing home in Unity cut.**

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**NEWPORT** — After a series of meetings over the past month, the Sullivan County Delegation of state representatives has passed a budget for the current fiscal year that represents a 25 percent increase in spending over last year.

The \$26.1 million budget is down from the \$27.3 million budget the Sullivan County Commissioners proposed in May, which would have increased spending by 32 percent. The county has a cumulative budget deficit of about \$2.5 million.

The budget deliberation process saw the delegation's annual convention extended five

times for a total of six meetings. The delegation finally voted, 9-2, Wednesday night to pass the budget for fiscal year 2009, which started July 1.

State Rep. Beverly Rodeschin, R-Newport, and State Rep. Jay Phinizy, D-Acworth, voted against the final budget because an air conditioning system at the county nursing home in Unity, at a cost of \$160,000, had been cut.

"They're entitled to have some comfort up there, because for some of them, it's their last home," Rodeschin said.

Rodeschin, the only Republican in the delegation, walked out of the first meeting July 30 after Democratic delegates held an impromptu caucus in the hallway. Rodeschin said the budget review process was "strictly partisan" and "highly contentious." "I look at the county as a nonpartisan position," she said. "We're supposed to be working together there for all the citi-

zens of Sullivan county, but it has been strictly partisan, and I can't be quiet after a while." Rodeschin accused delegation chairman Peter Franklin, D-Newport, of refusing to accept a motion to reconsider the air conditioning issue and of trying to micromanage the county.

Franklin sees things differently. He said meeting rules prohibited a reconsideration of the funding for the air conditioning system, because delegates had already voted on it twice. And, he said, it's important that the delegation finance committee monitor every fund transfer in the county to keep county employees aware that resources are limited.

"The delegation, I think, has worked to make the administration much more alert to the need to control how spending is done in the county," he said. "I would say that we have statutory obligations and responsibilities, and that includes making

sure that we don't run a deficit, and you can't just say, 'Here's a pot of money, we'll see you in a year, and have a good time.'" Sullivan County Manager Greg Chanis said the difference between the county commissioners' proposed budget and the final budget was largely due to information that came to light after the commissioners created their budget.

For example, the estimated cost for human services had been overstated by \$200,000 because it was based on outdated state contributions, he said, and finalized union negotiations resulted in less than anticipated expenses.

The Sullivan County delegation is expected to vote next Thursday, Aug. 14, on whether to support spending \$7.1 million to renovate the county jail and build a community corrections center with an in-house substance abuse treatment program.