

We need to look at county finances like a CEO would

Over the last several months I have become increasingly concerned with the financial condition of our Sullivan County government. Slowly my concern has turned to outrage. Now that the county delegation and county commissioners are in the deliberation process for the upcoming budget, it is time to sound the alarm bells, round up the troops and mount the cavalry. The situation is that bad and our voices need to be heard loud and clear in Newport.

In recent weeks it has been made public that the county is projecting a deficit for this coming fiscal year of more than \$300,000. This is added to a deficit posted last year of more than \$2.5 million. Listening to select members of the delegation and the county

commission, it seems apparent that they feel the public taxpayer, you and me, should step up to the plate and bail the county out of a horrendous financial mess. If you weren't aware, they are proposing an unprecedented and shameful 33 percent increase in the county share of the property tax burden.

Adding insult to injury, and despite the significant deficit of \$3 million, the delegation feels it necessary to vote the commissioners a pay raise. What is the logic in rewarding absolute deplorable financial management with a merit increase?

But wait, it gets worse. Recently the county commissioners voted unanimously to recommend the expenditure of \$7.1 million for a new

drug treatment facility and upgrades to the existing jail. I will state very clearly that I will not deny in any respect the need for a facility or upgrades to the current jail. What I will clearly articulate is the fact that NOW IS NOT THE TIME for additional expenditures of this magnitude.

I come from a banking and corporate background. I would liken this to a CEO of a company announcing that their company is posting continual and substantial losses but would still like a raise and still move forward with substantial borrowings and expenditures. Cash flow is not an issue; we will just push a 33 percent increase to our customers. And why not? They usually don't pay attention. Well guess what? We are paying attention and we need to hold our delegation and county commissioners accountable.

Jeffrey Goff

Claremont City Councilor

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The county has some tremendous deficiencies in the financial management area. Before considering any substantial borrowing or expenditure, I would highly recommend some fundamental changes.

The county needs:

A permanent, experienced county manager.

A permanent dedicated financial officer.

A county treasurer that will competitively bid all deposits and borrowings; to doing this has cost the county thousands of dollars in missed savings.

It is time for the citizens of Claremont to tell our county delegation and our county commissioners that enough is enough. With gasoline at \$4.15 a gallon and rising food prices reaching an all time high and projected winter fuel costs forcing many residents to make some very

tough choices, a 33 percent tax increase from Sullivan County is not acceptable. The commissioners and county delegation need to hear us and need to know that as a unified body, we will not sit by and watch this happen.

Please make your voices heard to all the members of our county delegation and our county commission. Write letters, make calls and attend the public hearings to make your concerns known. Additionally, I would like to encourage every municipal governing body within the county to stand together and say "this is not acceptable." Together, maybe we can get their attention. After all, elections are in November.

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