

Franklin won't respond to mileage flap

◆\$21,000 over two years: Sullivan County Delegation member calls mileage reimbursement record "an obscene abuse of the system."

By KRISTEN SENZ
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NEWPORT — Confronted with questions about the \$21,000 he received in mileage reimbursements from the state over the past two years, state Rep. Peter

Franklin, D-Newport, had no response.

"I will not give you a response," Franklin said after Claremont City Councilor Jeff Goff finished publicly lambasting him for making 422 trips to Concord — more than the Speaker of the House and the House majority leader — over

the past two years. "This is the first I've heard of this. I will prepare a response and get back to you."

Goff, an outspoken critic of the Sullivan County Delegation that Franklin chairs, called Franklin's mileage reimbursement record "an obscene abuse of the system" and demanded during a full delegation meeting yesterday that he pay back \$8,482 to the state, the

Se Flap, Page B2

Page 1 of 2

amount by which his total exceeds that of the second highest reimbursement in the county (state Rep. Jay Phinizy, D-Acworth, at \$12,581).

Goff, a Republican, said it's ironic that Franklin, a member of the House Finance Committee and the joint fiscal committee, would spend so much taxpayer money for his own travel to Concord, given that he's known for scrutinizing the county budget, which increased by 25 percent this year over last year.

"My feeling is he's doing it for his own financial gain," Goff said outside the delegation meeting room. "He presents himself as someone who watches every penny, but yet he hears 'cha-ching' every time he goes to Concord."

Goff said he'd heard rumors around Concord that Franklin makes frequent trips there, but when he looked at the numbers from the State Office of Legislative Accounting, he found Franklin made about twice as many trips as any other representative from the county.

The \$21,063 Franklin billed the state for mileage during fiscal years 2007 and 2008 represents the third-highest total in the Legislature, Goff said.

Two state representatives from northern Coos County charged the state more in that time period.

State Rep. Beverly Rodeschin,

R-Newport, said she was aware Franklin made frequent trips to the state capitol, but never thought to check the financial figures attached to his travel back and forth.

"I'm disappointed that he didn't give Mr. Goff a response, but I'm not surprised," said Rodeschin, the lone Republican in the 13-member county delegation.

Marked by political infighting and even calls for Franklin to resign his seat as chairman, the delegation's most recent budget-review process took an unprecedented six meetings to complete. The county is currently operating with a \$2.5 million deficit.

About two months ago, Goff tried to voice his opposition to a county corrections project after the public hearing on the issue had already taken place. Franklin ruled that he was out of order, slammed his gavel on the table and tried to get a law enforcement officer to physically remove Goff from the meeting room.

After yesterday's meeting, state Rep. Carla Skinder, D-Cornish, said she doesn't think Franklin will retain his position as chairman of the delegation next term.

"I don't appreciate the way he conducts these meetings," she said yesterday. "I feel that he's very abrasive to people."