

# HHS chief tours Sullivan County

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During his tour of the state, New Hampshire Commissioner of Health and Human Services Nick Toumpas said he's given local groups "a dose of current reality" about the department's budget. But during his visit to the Sullivan County Home on Friday morning, he emphasized that nothing will be accomplished unless the state

and local municipalities work together.

**Unity** "What I've been trying to do since I became commissioner is to go out and talk to people in the communities," Toumpas said. "I want to give people a big picture standpoint of who the department is, and the challenges we face as an enterprise, and the response we'll have to those challenges."

The main purpose of the tour is to gather the feedback from the state's health care communities.

"You know where the opportunities are, you know where the redundancies are, you know where the waste is," Toumpas said. "We cannot do our work without talking to groups and individuals such as you."

"I sit in Concord," he added. "I don't sit in the communities. I need to hear from people in the communities."

The department's three subagencies are health and medicine, long-term health care, and human services. Of those, Toumpas said that assisted living is a special concern, due to the steadily increasing numbers of elderly citizens.

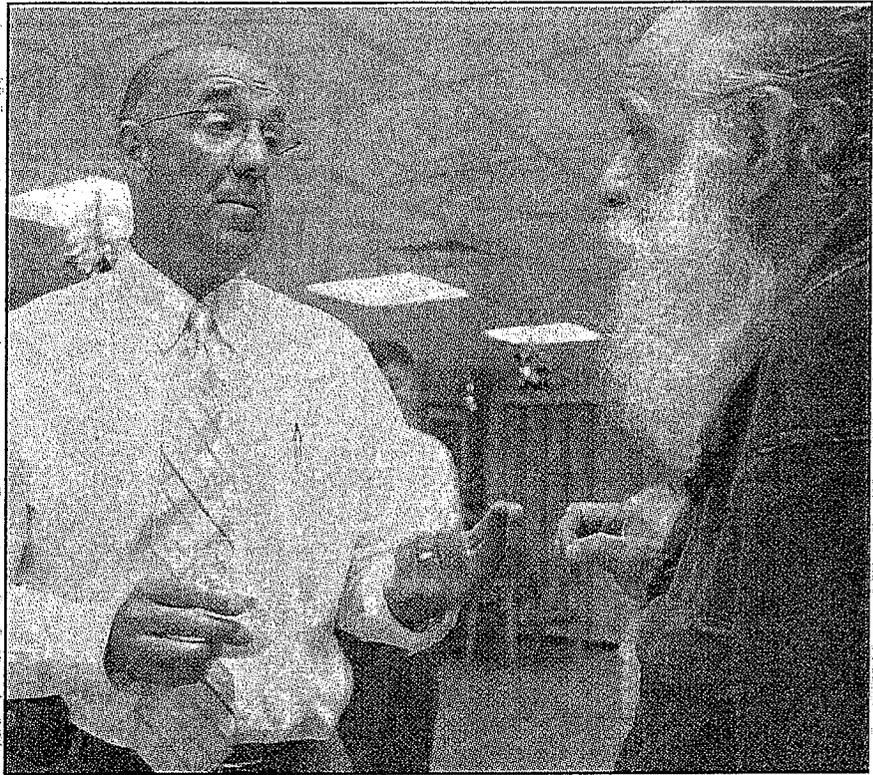
"Once someone goes into the long-term care system, they'll be in there for the balance of their life," he said.

As the largest agency in the state, the department had a budget of \$1.8 billion for fiscal year 2009. At the same time, the state budget could face as much as a \$30 million shortfall. It's

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Jesse Baker photo

State Health and Human Services Commissioner Nick Toumpas speaks with State Rep. Peter Franklin, D-Newport, chairman of Sullivan County Delegation, about health care and funding concerns at the Sullivan County Nursing Home in Claremont on Friday morning.



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a result, Toumpas said, of the federal government shifting the problems associated with public entitlement programs down to the states.

Meanwhile, the Sullivan County Home faces the problem of too few patients for its overnumbered staff. Home Administrator Ted Purdy suggested that having data available from other municipalities might help the facility better examine its expenditures "to provide the services appropriate for each resident."

Toumpas was receptive to the idea. "I've got nothing to hide," he said. The commissioner also made stops at Good Beginnings in Claremont, as well as the department's district office in Claremont during his trek through Sullivan County.

Jessica Rosman, coordinator of the Greater Sullivan County Public Health Network, said that she appreciated the commissioner's approach to preventative care issues.

"I wanted to glean whether

the state is prioritizing public health and making sure that being proactive with your health care is never an afterthought," she said.

State Rep. Beverly Rodeschin, R-Newport, added that results may not be visible overnight.

"Please be patient with the commissioner," she said. "He's going to do all he can."

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