

Franklin's mileage questioned

By **BEN BULKELEY**
Staff Writer

Several Sullivan County legislators weighed in on the revelation last week the Peter Franklin, D-Newport, had logged more than 400 trips to the state house over two years and was reim-

Newport \$21,000, third highest in the state legislature, for mileage.

Claremont City Councilor Jeff Goff addressed the Sullivan County Delegation last week, asking Franklin for an explanation, which Franklin did

not provide but said he would in due time.

One of the biggest questions raised by Goff and several of the representatives was: What was Franklin doing in Concord for 422 days?

"I don't understand what he was doing down there all those days," said Rep. Beverly Rodeschin, R-Newport. "We serve on the same committee (finance committee), albeit in different divisions. And even when there was nothing going on with the committee, he would still go down there."

Rodeschin said that even when the

state house was undergoing renovations, and there were no meetings, Franklin would still make an appearance in Concord.

"On Fridays, when it's very quiet down there (in Concord), and there are very few committees, he's there," said Rodeschin. "We (the delegation) don't know if he's working on something, or if he has any assignments."

Rodeschin, who received \$3,899 in mileage reimbursement over two years, said that she tries to avoid traveling to Concord if she can.

See **FRANKLIN** - Page A2

Page 1 of 2

"If I can, I try to handle everything by phone, unless I absolutely have to go to Concord," said Rodeschin. "I can't see a reason for all the trips he (Franklin) made.

"It's a shame, it's taxpayer money," said Rodeschin.

Representative Jay Phinizy, D-Acworth, had the second highest total of all the Sullivan County Representatives, but only made about half as many trips as Franklin.

Phinizy, who is challenging State Senator Bob Odell, R-Lempster, in the November 4 election, said that he frequently has to make trips to Concord for his work on several committees, and only went to Concord when he was needed.

"As the chair of the House Environment and Agriculture committee, I would have to make additional trips to Concord," said Phinizy. "If there was a bill, or legislation, I would have to drive to Concord to support it.

"I've been appointed to study committees, and other additional committees that require me to make extra trips," said Phinizy.

There are two rates a representative can choose from: The state rate, and the federal rate. The state pays 38 cents for each of the first 45 miles traveled, and 19 cents for each additional mile traveled. The federal rate is 58 and a half cents per mile.

The distance from the Newport Town Office to the State House in Concord is approximately 45 miles.

"It's typically a three day week, depending on the session, or if there is a hearing on one of the bills I am required to stay longer," said Phinizy. "For the three days, I usually get between \$50 and \$60, and I use a tank of gas. And you need to factor in the wear and tear on your car, and the cost of tires.

"We will typically put in eight hours of work at a minimum for a day, and if you look at the

amount of reimbursement, we're being paid less than minimum wage," said Phinizy. "For the amount of work we do, taxpayers are getting quite a bang for their buck.

"We haven't been taking advantage of the system," said Phinizy. "In the two and a half years I've been going to Concord, I've put 35,000 to 36,000 miles on my car, and I had to spend \$800 for new tires this year."

Representative Carla Skinder, D-Cornish, said that she was disappointed with Franklin's actions, and last year she tried to have him removed as the chair because of his behavior towards other members of the delegation.

The mileage reimbursement issue has also disappointed Skinder.

"Peter should give all of us a reason for his attendance record," said Skinder. "Transparency is very important to the community and me, and we need an answer as to why he has been going to Concord so often.

"In today's age — e-mails, Internet, telephone, newspapers, etc.— one can conduct a lot of business from home," said Skinder.

Like Rodeschin, Skinder wondered why Franklin would need to drive to Concord in the summer months, when there is very little activity.

"The summer months are quiet in Concord, there are no sessions or committee meetings," said Skinder. "There are study commissions, but he would not be on all of them.

"I know that Peter is very dedicated to his work as a State Representative," said Skinder. "Perhaps he needs to work more at home, and save Concord time for when it is really necessary."

Rep. John Cloutier, D-Claremont, was fourth in the county for trips to Concord with 185, but cited his work on several committees as the reason

for most of his trips over the last two years.

"My total might seem excessive, but with all the work I have to do in Concord — I'm the clerk of the House Public Works and Highway Committee — I frequently need to be in Concord," said Cloutier, who also serves as the vice Chair of the Executive Finance Committee.

"His (reimbursement) does seem excessive, but I think he needs to answer for himself, I can only account for myself," said Cloutier.

Rep. Brenda Ferland, I-Charlestown, who had the fewest number of trips (66), couldn't understand why a representative would go to Concord over 400 times.

"I have no idea what he does when he's down there," said Ferland. "I've heard that all he does is wander the halls."

Ferland also pointed out that Speaker of the House, Terie Norelli, should have had some oversight when it came to mileage issue.

"Personally I feel that maybe the Speaker of the House wasn't doing her job, because she is the one who signs the slips, and she should have seen that something was up," said Ferland.

"I can't imagine that she wasn't aware," said Ferland. "It looks like she was handling the situation by not handling it."

Franklin was third in the state when it came to reimbursement, behind Rep. Robert Theberge and William Hatch, both of Coos County. For number of trips, Franklin was first in the state with 422.

Terie Norelli, speaker of the House, made 285 trips to Concord over the same time period.

Franklin could not be reached for comment.

Ben Bulkeley can be reached at (603) 543-3100 ext. 105, or by e-mail at bulkeley@eagletimes.com