

EAGLE TIMES
SUNDAY
MAY 4, 2008

Established in 1914

EAGLE TIMES

Focused on Local News

HARVEY HILL, Publisher

ARCHIE MOUNTAIN, Managing Editor

PATRICK O' GRADY, Local News Editor

Not good enough

The news always seems to go from bad to worse when it comes to Sullivan County government.

The latest pronouncement from the county commissioners is that taxes in the proposed budget for the fiscal year beginning July 1 are projected to increase 32 percent, which amounts to another \$3.3 million. A chunk of that will help reduce the county's projected \$2.5 million deficit by \$835,000. Nearly half of the new taxes are to cover an estimated \$1.5 million revenue decline at the Sullivan County Health Care. About \$600,000 has been added to the expense side for human services and \$350,000 for department of corrections.

Sunapee is getting hit hardest with the estimated tax increase — \$800,000 — because it has the greatest property value. But Claremont, Newport and Charlestown will also feel the increase.

On what one may call the bright side, the commissioners are cutting almost \$900,000 from the budget for nursing and \$270,000 for nursing home administration. But will these reductions be enough to satisfy the county delegation of state reps., who have to approve the budget and are the only ones with a voice to keep taxes reasonable for county residents.

The county has struggled the last few years with rising costs and decreasing revenues, particularly at the nursing home, which has led to deficits. Yet the commissioners have not instilled much confidence in taxpayers and officials from local municipalities that they can manage the county in a fiscally responsible way, and that doesn't mean just covering the additional costs with taxes.

Like it or not, many people vote their pocketbooks at town and school meetings and the county budget should be no different. The bottom line here for Sunapee, Claremont, Newport and all the other county towns is simply too much to bear in a struggling economy. The commissioners and county management need to sharpen their pencils and we hope the county delegation will force them to do so. Taxpayers deserve better.