

WEDNESDAY
MAY 23, 2007

Established in 1914

EAGLE TIMES

Focused on Local News

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Numbers game

State Rep. Peter Franklin, D-Newport, believes something is seriously wrong with the finances of the county government and he spent three hours Monday trying to prove it.

Franklin and other reps. quizzed county accountant Jeff Graham, attempting to prove that the county is headed for a deficit when the fiscal year ends June 30. But projecting a deficit or how the budget will look after the final quarter was something that neither Graham nor anyone else could predict with 100 percent accuracy. There appeared to be little in the way of specifics offered by Franklin to prove his point. Instead, we heard a lot of vague accusations, such as "I think we need some honesty in budgeting."

As a member of the county delegation that will have to approve the county budget, Franklin is well within his role to question county expenditures in as much detail as he sees fit. In fact, any taxpayer should applaud his meticulous approach. But there is a difference between examining the numbers and alleging in a roundabout way, without proving it, that the county manager is hiding something or not fully disclosing the county's current financial condition. It may very well be that there is a deficit at the end of the fiscal year. With the wide fluctuation in revenues depending on the number of Medicare and Medicaid patients, it is impossible to predict the final figures. On June 4, Franklin will continue the meeting. It is not clear what he hopes to uncover, but whatever it is, it should be factual and not include attacks that question the competence of the county manager.