

Raises voted for county officials

By **AARON ALDRIDGE**
Staff Writer

The Sullivan County delegation voted Monday to give raises to all elected county officials, despite a recommendation by the executive finance committee to maintain level funding for salaried positions.

"As tight as our budget is, I feel we need to consider a raise," Rep. Carla Skinder, D-Cornish, said, citing higher fuel and food prices.

Each official will receive a 1.5 percent salary increase for each of the next two calendar years. Those officials are the registrar of deeds, county attorney, sheriff, treasurer and the three commissioners.

Finance committee chair Rep. Brenda Ferland, I-Charlestown, said the committee voted 4-1 against any increases due to budget constraints. Ferland said she supported a 3 percent increase and was the dissenting vote.

"Because the budget was tight this year, the committee chose to hold the line and not give increases this year," Ferland said.

The county is currently faced with a \$2.5 million deficit from the last fiscal year and is potentially looking at another deficit this year.

A motion was made to accept the committee's recommendation of no increases, but was narrowly defeated by the delegation 6-7.

"The county is in a very serious financial condition," delegation chair Rep. Peter Franklin, D-Newport, said. "To hold the line on salaries for elected officials is both the prudent and proper thing for this delegation to do."

Skinder then moved to give increases to the registrar of deeds, sheriff and county attorney.

"I'm not happy with it, but it's a compromise," Skinder said.

According to a handout from the delegation, the current salaries for elected officials are: county attorney - \$72,157; sheriff - \$60,949; registrar of deeds - \$50,952; commissioners - \$9,500 each; treasurer - \$4,771.

After much discussion among the delegates, the motion passed 11-2 with Franklin and Rep. Larry Converse, D-Claremont, voting no.

According to acting county administrator Greg Chanis, the cost for the 1.5 percent increase for the three positions for the first year will be \$2,760.

Rep. John Cloutier, D-Claremont, then moved to give

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the same raise to the treasurer and the three commissioners. Several delegates opposed the motion, including Ferland.

"Part of the problem in the county has been the commissioners' fault," Ferland said.

Discussion surrounding the responsibility of the current financial situation of the county

was cut short by Franklin.

"I don't want to start playing the blame game right now," Franklin said.

The motion to give the other elected officials raises passed 9-4 with Ferland, Franklin, Rep. Beverly Rodeschin, R-Newport, and Rep. Jay Phinizy, D-Acworth, voting no.

Franklin recessed the meeting until 10:30 a.m. May 28, when the delegates are scheduled to discuss the current status of the county budget.

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