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County home debate sparks

Two delegation members storm out of meeting

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NEWPORT — After a heated discussion with the Sullivan County delegation Monday, County Manager Ed Gil de Rubio stormed out of the meeting saying the delegation chairman had publicly humiliated him.

Just before Gil de Rubio walked out, delegation chairman Peter Franklin, a Democratic state representative from Newport, told him, "I have an issue with you."

During a tense two-hour discussion, Franklin grilled Gil de Rubio and county nursing home administrator Scott Wojtkiewicz on line items in a county cash

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flow analysis that showed the county nursing home stands to finish the fiscal year \$220,000 in the red, and the county as a whole is on track for a \$111,000 deficit.

Questions by Franklin and other delegates ranged from the timing of the distribution of the financial information (several delegates said they requested the information weeks ago), to the inner workings of Medicare and Medicaid health plans, to details about Wojtkiewicz's salary and benefits package.

Gil de Rubio repeatedly referred Franklin's more specific financial questions to the county's accountant, Jeff Graham, who had been unable to attend the meeting due to an illness in his family.

"Sir, I am not a CPA," Gil de Rubio said.

In response to persistent questioning, Gil de Rubio explained to Franklin that he works for the three-person county commission, not the county delegation, a group made up of all the state representatives who live in the county. Ethel Jarvis, chairman of the county commission, was at the meeting but said nothing during the exchange.

State Rep. Beverly Rodeschin, R-Newport, was

first to storm out of Monday's meeting, accusing other delegates of micro-managing the nursing home.

"I have better things to do," she said, "and I'm not going on a witch hunt."

"You're excused," Franklin told her.

Wojtkiewicz said the nursing home is suffering from an industry-wide slump caused by the recent emphasis on caring for seniors in their homes as long as possible.

He also said local newspaper coverage of strife between a workers union and management has painted the facility in a negative light.

"Our facility is in no more turmoil than any other long-term care facility out there," he said. "We're busting our butts trying to fill these beds and the front page of the local paper doesn't help."

Gil de Rubio said there's a chance the county will break even for this fiscal year by increasing revenue in the final two months, but if not, the county's approximately 46,000 residents will need to make up the difference with tax dollars next year.

Despite the projected nursing home budget shortfall, which is due in large part to empty beds and nurses calling

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out sick, Wojtkiewicz said the quality of care at the nursing home and its financial situation are better than they have been in years.

In 2005, Sullivan County contracted with Genesis

HealthCare, a company that runs several private nursing homes in the state, to take over the management of the county nursing home in Unity. The delegation was informed of the arrangement after the paper-

work was signed, which angered some delegates.

Gil de Rubio said he and the commissioners at that time apologized for taking action without getting input from the delegation.

At the end of yesterday's discussion, the delegation recessed its meeting and tentatively scheduled another session for next Monday, at which time delegates hope to question Graham about county finances.