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EAGLE TIMES

# County starts fiscal year without budget

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Partisan politics dominated the Sullivan County Convention Monday where failing to pass a budget before the June 30 deadline was a foregone conclusion because the chair said there was no reason to follow the fiscal timetable.



## Claremont

"We've run into a terrible mess. We need to change the county rules and the way the county is run."

**Steve White**  
Sunapee resident

During his opening remarks, chair Peter Franklin, D-Newport, said he would speak with delegation members over the next few weeks to come up with a budget.

"The bills have come due and now we must pay them," Franklin said.

Executive finance committee chair

Brenda Ferland, I-Charlestown, attempted to propose a \$26.8 million budget, but Franklin would not accept the motion.

"It's a question of whether the chair runs the meeting or if the chair of the finance committee runs the meeting," Franklin said.

Beverly Rodeschin, R-Newport, challenged Franklin's ruling to not accept Ferland's motion, but was overruled by the delegation.

Ferland attempted to give a report on the EFC budget proposal, but was again challenged by Franklin.

"You've been recognized to make a report on the EFC proposal, not your per-

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sonal report," Franklin said.

Ferland responded by saying, "The only thing I have to report is they do not have a budget."

Jay Phinizy, D-Acworth, made a motion to accept the commissioner's \$27.3 million budget, but it was eventually defeated. The budget would have reflected a 32 percent increase in the amount to be raised by taxes.

"I'm perfectly willing to sit here all day and adjust the budget," Phinizy said. "If we come to an agreement today, I think we've done our job properly."

Franklin disagreed and said there was no reason to pass a budget.

"The deadline is not today," Franklin said. "The deadline is Aug. 31."

The county runs on a fiscal year beginning July 1 and ending June 30. If the delegation does not pass a budget by the end of August, the commissioner's budget automatically goes into effect Sept. 1.

Rodeschin said she wanted to see a budget passed during the convention.

"I think this budget is very important to me and I would like to see it done today," Rodeschin said.

Claremont city council member Jeff Goff said he wanted to see action on the part of the delegation.

"If you don't have a budget today, I think that's a shame," Goff said. "Most of you were here when we got to where we are today. I think that it's preposterous you don't have a budget, and today is the last day of the fiscal year."

At the end of fiscal 2007, the

county had a \$2.5 million deficit. The current fiscal year is expected to post a deficit of not more than \$500,000.

"I really don't want to see lip service," Goff said. "I want to see action."

Richard Leone of Sunapee said he was very concerned with the county as a whole.

"Things just aren't working here," Leone said. "It's costing too much and things are just going to get worse."

Leone suggested closing the nursing home and privatizing it.

"Think about giving up the nursing home," Leone said. "I'm not so sure the system we're using today works."

Sunapee selectman Steve White suggested a complete change to the county form of government.

"We've run into a terrible mess," White said. "We need to change the county rules and the way the county is run. We have an opportunity now to attack the broader spectrum of how counties are run. All you're doing now is putting patchwork on the problems we have now."

Carla Skinder, D-Cornish, suggested the problems the county is having is due to negative press.

"I think a lot of the problems at the nursing home are because of negative press in the local newspaper," Skinder said. "We need to have more positive articles."

At 10:50 a.m., almost two hours into the meeting, a recess was called and the 11 Democrats on the delegation held a 20-minute private meeting in the hallway, which upset one member of the public.

"You need to have deliberations in public," Goff said.

"That is an illegal meeting and I protest. That is not the way we do things. This is exactly what is wrong with this process."

Franklin told Goff that his remarks were out of place and that his party was holding a caucus which, according to Franklin, was perfectly legal.

Immediately following the caucus, the delegation voted 10-3 against passing the commissioner's budget. The vote was almost completely along party lines with Rodeschin, Ferland and Phinizy voting to accept the budget.

Franklin then proposed a continuing resolution so the county could operate without a budget. He gave each member a typed and copied resolution that he had brought with him to the meeting.

An amendment was passed to make the entire delegation a committee of the whole to prepare a new budget. The motion passed 11-2 with Ferland and Rodeschin voting no.

A final vote to accept the resolution and not pass a budget was passed 10-3 with Ellen Nielsen, D-Claremont, joining Ferland and Rodeschin in the three no votes.

Rodeschin attempted to make a motion to adjourn the meeting, but Franklin would not accept her motion. Rodeschin and Ferland then left the meeting.

"We feel it is not a committee of the whole," Ferland said. "It's a committee of Democrats. That's why we left."

Commission chair Jeff Barrette was not pleased with the decision to not pass a budget.

"I would like to go on record my disappointment that you,

the delegation, cannot pass a budget," Barrette said. "It makes it a lot more difficult to manage a county without a budget."

Franklin disagreed with Barrette and said, "I fail to see where there will be an increased difficulty."

Commissioner Ben Nelson responded and said he could think of one specific difficulty.

"Not being able to hire a finance director," Nelson said. "Until it's in the budget, we can't start the process."

The 11 remaining members of the delegation unanimously passed four other motions following the departure of Rodeschin and Ferland.

Those members include Franklin, Nielsen, Phinizy, Skinder, Ray Gagnon, D-Claremont, Arthur Jillette, D-Goshen, Matthew Houde, D-Plainfield, Tom Donovan, D-Claremont, John Cloutier, D-Claremont, Sue Gottling, D-Sunapee and Larry Converse, D-Claremont.

The motions passed were to borrow \$3.125 million to pay off the current year's debt, accept a \$3 million tax anticipation note from Laconia Savings Bank, hold a public hearing on the \$7.1 million proposal for renovations to the jail and the construction of a new treatment facility and to allow the commission to accept and expend funds during the time of the continuing resolution.

The delegation is scheduled to meet again at 5 p.m. July 8, at the commissioner's office in Newport to discuss passing a budget.

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