

County leaders grapple with projected deficit

Taxpayer group objects to idea of relying on gambling money

By JASON PULLIAM

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Polk County faces a \$1.6 million deficit in the 2009-10 budget, even if elected leaders reject \$10.2 million in new spending pitched by department heads. County administrator Ron Olson said he will recommend against most of the spending requests to trim an estimated \$270 million budget. "I'm not saying that will be particularly easy, because each

of the departments have reasonable justifications for what they're requesting," he said. "I just don't think we can afford to approve all of that."

Olson said the gap could be closed with spending cuts. A proposal to erase the deficit with gambling revenue from Prairie Meadows Racetrack and Casino in Altoona was greeted skeptically by a government watchdog group. "Any expert in government

■ Talk about it

WHAT: County budget requests

WHO: Auditor, public works director and medical examiner

WHEN: 9:30 a.m. today

WHERE: County administration building, 111 Court Ave.

NEXT: Budget presentations for general services and health departments are at 9:30 a.m. Thursday.

finance will tell you that using one-time revenues for operating expenses is not good policy," said Jeff Riese, president of the Polk-Des Moines Taxpayers As-

sociation. "It took them about four years to wear the budget from gambling revenues the last time, and now they're going right back to it."

The budget requests include a \$3.3 million increase for operating costs at the new \$60 million county jail, which opened last fall north of Des Moines. The jail increase includes 62 additional full-time employees and expanded hours for part-time jail workers.

Some supervisors shook their heads in apparent disbelief when county officials described the proposed spending increase for the jail. Olson said he will

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Military medal awarded to envoy may be a first



CARLSON

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through hundreds of pages of mission and combat reports and confirmation of — it's not a stretch to use the term — acts of valor by Quinn alongside American forces.

"Ken flew a lot," said Boswell, a Democrat from Des Moines who served two yearlong tours in Vietnam. "He had command and control responsibilities and faced the same dangers as the rest of us. It was unusual for a civilian to be in that position. He earned the medal, all right. There's no disputing that fact."

So Tuesday afternoon, nearly 40 years after the fact, the Dubuque native stood tall during a ceremony at the U.S. State Department in Washington, D.C., and received the Air Medal. It was presented by Deputy Secretary of State John Negroponte. Quinn, 66, is believed to be the first civilian to receive the award.

"I'm really overwhelmed by this," said Quinn before leaving Iowa for the Washington ceremony. "I didn't imagine it would be possible, working in the Foreign Service all those years. I'm certainly proud."

The official citation said that Quinn distinguished "himself by meritorious achievement during sustained aerial operational activities against hostile forces in the Republic of Vietnam" and that he



HEATHER WINES/GANNETT NEWS SERVICE

Rep. David Loeb sack, D-Ia., congratulates Kenneth Quinn, who was awarded the Air Medal for his service in Vietnam. Rep. Leonard Boswell, D-Ia., initiated the recognition effort.

"participated as a non-crew member of an Army aircraft in more than 25 combat, operational and aerial reconnaissance missions over hostile enemy territory."

Quinn initially worked as a "rural development officer" in the Foreign Service and later as the U.S. government's "senior district advisor" in two areas of Vietnam. That meant he filled a command position normally reserved for military officers and often flew missions where soldiers engaged enemy units. He speaks Vietnamese fluently and routinely communicated with Vietnamese civilians and military leaders.

Quinn left Vietnam in 1973 and worked around the world with the Foreign Service. A graduate of Dubuque Wahlert High School and Loras College, he later worked on the

National Security Council staff at the White House, with the U.S. mission to the United Nations in Vienna and as ambassador to Cambodia. He also was instrumental in bringing Indochinese refugees to Iowa 30 years ago.

He retired from the State Department in 1999 and a year later became president of the World Food Prize Foundation.

Boswell contacted Army Secretary Pete Geren more than a year ago, urging him to authorize a presentation of the Air Medal to Quinn.

"Secretary Geren said he didn't think that was possible," Boswell said. "I didn't think that was right, so we did some research."

Boswell staffers searched Army records at the National Archives and documented numerous instances of Quinn's participation in dangerous

missions and determined he clearly qualified for the honor. They compiled the information and Boswell went back to Geren.

The man deserves the medal, Boswell said again. It's authorized under the law, even to civilians. If the Army wouldn't come through, Boswell reportedly told Geren, he'd give Quinn one of his own Air Medals.

"If I deserved an Air Medal, Ken Quinn certainly deserves one," Boswell said. "Now, it's happened, and it's about time."

Another presentation ceremony will take place at 4 p.m. Friday at the Des Moines Club.

"I wanted people Ken works with and who know him best to be able to honor him," Boswell said. "I kind of insisted on the Des Moines ceremony. Guys like him don't come around very often."