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Inside

A Lane County jury is deliberating the fate of University Professor Dennis Gilbert, on trial for criminal mischief and trespassing charges stemming from a labor protest in July.

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More than 200 students and community members protested the Persian Gulf Saturday at a noon rally that moved from the EMU Courtyard to the Federal Building in downtown Eugene.

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Gulf War

CBS is increasing its efforts to locate reporter Bob Simon and his crew, who were captured by an Iraqi patrol near the Saudi-Kuwaiti border four weeks ago.

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American pilots are worried about the blaze of anti-aircraft fire they will have to fly into during an all-out attack on Iraqi-occupied Kuwait; only one seabird in 10 is expected to survive the mammoth oil spill oozing its way down the Persian Gulf, and biologists fear entire colonies of birds will be wiped out.

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Sports

The Oregon men's basketball team extended its winning streak to four games Saturday with a win over Pac-10 cellar dweller Washington at McArthur Court, 67-64.

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The Duck women's team was not as fortunate against its foes to the north, as it suffered a loss to Washington State on Friday and another to 10th-ranked Washington on Sunday.

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Editor's Note

Because of space limitations, *Calvin and Hobbes*, *Hudson Van Curen* and the daily crossword puzzle will not run today. The *Emerald* apologizes for any inconvenience this may cause its readers.

Agencies respond to fee proposal

Owners use fee to check history

By Rene DeCair
Emerald Reporter

First and last month's rent, deposits and application fees can add up to a heavy financial burden for a prospective renter, particularly a University student on a tight budget.

But if a bill recently introduced in the state House passes, Oregon renters would get a break from paying non-refundable application fees.

If it passes, those seeking local apartments would get relief from mounting fees, and University-area rental agencies would lose what has become a lucrative source of income.

Rep. Bill Dwyer, D-Springfield, said he drafted the bill banning application fees for rentals to prevent landlords from making a profit off the fees.

"This is another cash cow that they can milk," said Scott Bartlett, Dwyer's legislative assistant.

Dwyer said he believes students and low-income people are hurt by the application costs, which are difficult for them to pay, and that such charges may sometimes result in people not finding a place to



Photo by Sean Poston

Rental agencies charge a fee to process an potential tenant's application, which some claim is unfair and prices people out of housing. Agency owners say the fees are necessary to cover the costs of checking applicants' credit histories.

live.

Not everyone agrees with Dwyer, however. Local property management companies have criticized the proposal, denying they make money from the application fees — ranging from \$10 to \$30. Instead, they say the money is

needed to run credit checks on prospective tenants.

"We want to make sure ... that we're getting the best residents that we can," said Barry Blanton, executive property manager at Jennings and Co., an agency with many rentals in the University area.

The expense of checking a person's credit "gets pretty high" Blanton said.

But Dwyer, saying he is not convinced that credit checks are even necessary, believes rental agencies should absorb

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Lawmakers hoping to banish rental fees

Rental companies accused of placing undue hardship on students, needy

By Joe Kidd
Emerald Politics Editor

For many years, those looking to rent an apartment or house have had to pay a non-refundable fee simply to be considered as a tenant. But that will change if several state legislators have their way.



While rental agencies say the practice of charging non-refundable application fees is necessary, a handful of lawmakers believe the screening method has become a money-making scam and have introduced legislation that would outlaw such a charge.

House Bill 2638, introduced in the House two weeks ago by Rep. Bill Dwyer, D-Springfield, would prohibit rental agencies from charging non-refundable application fees. And the legislation goes so far as to establish penalties as high as 10 times the amount of rent or the possible revocation of the business' license if such a charge is required.

"These fees are almost criminal, when the vacancy factor gets low and there are so many people competing for rentals," Dwyer said. "It gets to be a scam. Rather than just to cover incurred costs, people want to make a profit off the fact that these (applicants) don't have an apartment."

With non-refundable fees ranging from \$10 to \$30 dollars, Dwyer calls the application charges "an abusive practice" that makes it difficult for people of lower-income levels to find housing.

"Those hit worse by it are people, including students, who really don't have a stable source of housing and may have to apply in numerous cases," Dwyer said.

But managers in the rental industry say the screening process costs money — an expense that individual applicants should pay, rather than having to raise tenants' rents to pay for the credit and reference checks that are made when screening applications.

'Those hit worse by it are people, including students, who really don't have a stable source of housing and may have to apply in numerous cases.'

**—Rep. Bill Dwyer,
D-Springfield**

"Why should someone who is not moving have to increase their costs for someone else to apply?" asked David Meissner, a manager at Gateway Village Apartments in Springfield. "That cost has to be borne by someone ... Why shouldn't (applicants) have to pay? The person who moves a lot should pay the fee. An apartment house can't run in the red, can it?"

But legislators who oppose the practice say the application fees are an expense that make the difficult process of finding affordable housing unnecessarily costly.

"You could spend up to \$200 in application fees alone in a month of searching," said Sen. Grattan Kerans, a Democrat from Eugene who is a sponsor of the bill. "People could spend up to the amount of the first month's rent on application fees for needed housing — just to get turned down."

"Why should everything make money, every aspect of every kind of detail make money?" Dwyer asked.

Sponsors of the legislation not only oppose what they see as an unnecessary hurdle for those looking for housing, but also claim some property management agencies charge the fees to make a profit.

Without citing specific cases, Dwyer said he believes some agencies go so far as to hold apartments open for extended periods to gather more application fees.

But Gateway's Meissner denied that charge, saying rental agencies try to keep them to a minimum to remain competitive within the industry.

"I don't know why they would jack up the fees unnecessarily," Meissner said. "The person who can keep his expenses the lowest with the best quality is going to be the most competitive. Everyone is working to keep costs low."

And as for holding apartments open to collect more fees, Meissner said he has never heard of an agency doing that.

"I can't comprehend that, when you have an apartment vacant," he said. "It definitely wouldn't apply to a large apartment complex."

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