

NEWS BRIEF

ASUO will rally in Salem for education funding

ASUO will hold a lobby day in Salem on Monday to garner support among lawmakers for Gov. Ted Kulongoski's budget, which ASUO officials said does not cut higher education funding.

Students are invited to attend the lobby day, which will run from 10 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. at the Capitol; ASUO will provide transportation to all interested students.

"This is our last chance to push for higher education funding," ASUO Legislative Associate Gabe Kjos said in a press release. "This budget will affect all students — rich or poor — and will be a huge indicator of future increases in tuition."

ASUO has said it does not support the alternative state budget, drafted by the co-chairs of the Joint Ways and Means Committee, because it includes \$74 million in cuts to higher education.

For information on transportation or the event itself, contact Kjos at asuoleg@gladstone.uoregon.edu.

— Jan Tobias Montry

Fire

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rooms and most of the hallway, charring doors and walls and burning holes through the ceiling and roof. The fire also burned through the floor to a room on the second story, raining flaming material on the room below.

Deputy Fire Marshall Mark Thompson, the fire's lead investigator, said the department estimated \$250,000 in structural damage and \$10,000 in property damage.

While the results of the fire are clear, the cause remains a point of contention for the house's residents.

Glenn Potter, a public information officer with the fire department, said "smoker carelessness" caused the fire. He said a cigarette can on the sun deck caught fire and the flames ignited the adjacent wall.

Thompson confirmed the cause, saying residents "found a plastic bucket used for cigarette butts burning," and that the fire eventu-

ally spread to the interior of the building.

But resident Ian Harvey, who took a break from packing his car with his belongings Tuesday, said he didn't "buy that." He said he was one of the residents who originally discovered the fire.

"We think the fire was electrical," he said. "The people that live here — none of them smoke."

And if a cigarette bucket caused the fire, he said, the flames wouldn't have gone through to the second floor.

"Fire doesn't normally go downward," he said.

Andrew Barr, another resident at the house, agreed. He said the cause of the fire was electrical and added that the whole building has "bad electrics." While the house has never had electrical fires, Barr said they have had lights fail to work without apparent explanation, and circuit breakers often blow.

Thompson agreed that there were some "pretty unusual circum-

stances" involved with the fire. Normally, fires do spread up and out, he said. But, in this case, the plastic bucket containing cigarettes melted and the flaming plastic flowed into a crack where the deck meets the roof. That ignited the tar on the roof and allowed the fire to flow down to the second floor room.

Thompson added that he also has evidence that burning material fell and expanded the fire to the second floor room.

Thompson said the only possible source of an electrical fire would be an extension cord used for an exterior light. That was unlikely, he said, adding that "By all witness accounts it was unplugged."

The building does not have a sprinkler system, Thompson added.

In May 2002, the University required greek houses to install approved fire sprinkler systems by fall 2004 or lose their school affiliation. By the end of spring term, six of the eight sorority houses had complied, as well as six of the 12 fraternity houses, according to the

Greek Life Office.

Closing the house until repairs can be made won't hurt the chapter, Funes said. The number of individuals living in the chapter house predictably drops in the summer, so the chapter pays the mortgage during the summer with "school-year incomes," Funes said. He added that because of the loss of personal possessions they may have to "dip into a few extra pockets," but there "shouldn't be trouble financially."

Ultimately, Funes said the fire has demonstrated just how tight-knit and supportive the chapter is, which he added could help their future membership.

"I'm hoping it won't (negatively affect membership). In fact, I think it could improve our membership," Funes said. "I think it really opened (members') eyes to how close we were to losing everything. It could be a blessing in disguise."

Jared Paben is a freelance reporter for the Emerald.

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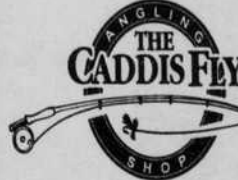
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