

Proposed \$70 dorm rate hike tentatively approved

By Becky de la Motte

A proposed \$70 increase in residence hall rates for the 1978-79 academic year might cause on-campus dwellers to start thinking about putting in a few extra hours at that summer job.

Formal approval of the increase has not yet been given by the NU Board of Regents, but the plan tentatively has been approved, according to Gary Partridge, assistant director of housing in business affairs.

"We in housing need more time to introduce the idea to the students," Partridge said. "It will be taken up again at the February 18 Board of Regents meeting and most likely approved at that time."

The rates will jump from this year's \$1,265 to \$1,335 next year. According to Doug Zatechka, director of housing, there are two main reasons for the increase.

"First of all, the increase in minimum wage is having a big effect," Zatechka said. "The residence halls employ a lot of people, and now the government is telling us we have to start paying our employees more. That's a big expense that has to be absorbed."

The minimum wage figure rose from \$2.30 to \$2.65 January 1. By next January 1, the figure will rise to \$2.90—a net increase of 60 cents over a 12-month period.

The second cause is an increase in utility costs, he said. "Telephone, gas, electricity and water are all going up," he said. "I guess you could simply say that the new rate is the result of several uncontrollable cost increases."

Zatechka said that the residence hall rate increase is "below the cost-of-living increase—that is, our rates are increasing more slowly than the costs of living elsewhere. Everything is going up everywhere, but we are asking for the absolute minimum rates necessary to pay our expenses."

When compared with other Big 8 schools' rates, Zatechka said, UNL currently is the third most expensive Big 8 school, with Colorado and Kansas ranking first and second, respectively. Zatechka said he anticipates that UNL will drop still lower on the list.

Union offices relocated

Several Nebraska Union offices have been relocated within the Union in an effort to condense some of the offices.

According to John Dobitz, Union program advisor, the major change has been in the incorporation of the Student Program Office and Student Activities.

Dobitz said the two departments were very similar and did not require separate offices. The new office, located in room 200 now is the Office of Campus Activities and Programs.

The Nebraska Union Public Interest Research Group (NUPIRG), and Student Y have been moved to room 117 and the student lounge has been relocated in room 115. The Banking Services of Student Activities Office has been moved to room 222.

"It's hard to say how much the drop will be, but we should drop to fourth or maybe even lower, depending upon what is approved in other schools," he said. "Most of the other Big 8 schools are asking for even larger increases than we are. One, I understand, is asking for as much as ten percent."

Where does the extra income go? The proposed budget for residence hall operation in the coming year is for more than \$7 million, he said. The payroll accounts for about \$2.3 million, and operating expenses (telephone, utilities, etc.) for about \$1.8 million. Food is listed at \$2 million, and payments to the bonding company (which made the building loan for the residence halls) at \$1.2 million.

"If everything goes as predicted, assuming that the price of meat or something doesn't go sky-high, 400 and some odd dollars will be left at the end of the year,"

Zatechka said. "And for a budget this large, that's operating on a shoestring."

To meet this budget, the allowance for housing office expenses has been trimmed, he said. These funds then can be channeled into the residence halls' budget.

The Office of University Housing plans to meet with ASUN, the Residence Hall Association and students who live in the halls, Zatechka said. In this way, students planning to return to the residence halls next year will receive notice of the rate hike early enough to do some financial planning during the summer.

Zatechka said he does not believe that the increase is substantial enough to cause students to turn toward off-campus housing.

"It (the residence hall rate) is still very reasonable, and I hope it has no big impact on students' decisions to live in residence halls," he said. "We still hope to remain very attractive as a living alternative."

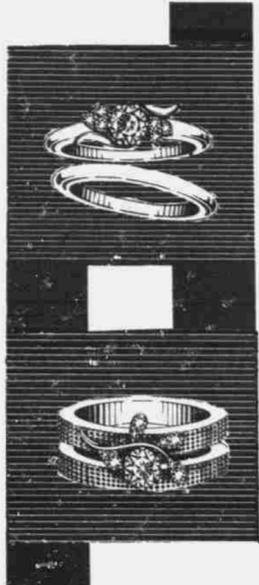
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