

The Olympian, March 23, 2005

Under the Dome UPDATE

Advocates chanting for cost-of-living increases for the poor had a small rally at the Capitol's sundial Wednesday, the first of several efforts to keep a presence near the Legislature while budget cuts are mullied.

"Everyone needs a COLA," read a sign that Seattle resident Sophie McKenzie carried, proclaiming her support for retaining a cash-assistance program for the disabled and others who are unemployable.

Dubbed GAU, or general-assistance unemployable, the program has been targeted for \$18 million in cuts by Gov. Christine Gregoire, who wants to set higher eligibility standards to remove 3,600 people from the roughly \$330 per month allotments.

Gregoire has denied claims by activists that military veterans could be left penniless on the streets.

Kristine Morgan of Chehalis said that as a single mother who works part time, she has seen her Temporary Assistance to Needy Families' grant shrink to \$123 a month, too little to get by on.

And Monica Peabody, an activist with the Welfare Rights Organizing Coalition in Olympia, noted that welfare grants for a single mother such as she haven't gone up from the \$440 she used to receive 12 years ago, when it already was hard to pay rent. "Imagine how hard it would be today," Peabody said, waving a sign urging an increase.

Kim Justice of the Statewide Poverty Action Network said they plan to show up at the sundial each Wednesday through April 13, reminding lawmakers of the challenges that the neediest face.