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## Marchers carry King's message

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Several hundred low-income residents and supporters march to the steps of the Capitol Campus Monday as part of the Poverty Action Summit and March Monday afternoon. The group called on their various state legislators to champion issues such as health care to affordable housing. Steve Bloom/The Olympian

### Web Links:

- [Full text of the U.S. Census Bureau's report on poverty and health insurance coverage in 2004 \(.pdf\)](#)
- [Poverty statistics for Thurston County, from the 2000 Census \(.pdf\)](#)
- [Recent Census Bureau poverty estimates from across the country](#)
- [Washington poverty rates, with a county-by-county map](#)

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Vowing to keep pressure on lawmakers to do more to help the poor, a few hundred anti-poverty activists marched to the Capitol to rally on Martin Luther King Jr. Day.

Speakers invoked the memory of King, saying that by focusing on poverty they were continuing his work.

"If Martin could die for the struggle of the poor, I can live for it," said Jeffrey Carrol of VOICES, a Spokane-based anti-poverty group.

Carrol, who said he marched in Civil Rights rallies in Mississippi and Louisiana in the 1960s, led marchers in chants as they walked the six blocks from St. John's Episcopal Church to the Capitol in frigid temperatures.

"We came to let (lawmakers) know that they're not paying attention," Carrol said. "Poor people are dissatisfied."

Jesse Miller, vice chairwoman of the Statewide Poverty Action Network, said the groups were trying to pressure lawmakers to solve some of the root causes of poverty, such as lack of health care and education.

"Martin Luther King was dealing with these issues back then," Miller said. "They still need to be dealt with now."

The wish list for the groups include securing health care for all, making housing more affordable, putting a check on predatory payday lenders, helping low-income people save money by expanding the state's individual development account program and improving access to higher education.

"We talk to low-income people and they tell us these are the issues affecting them," Miller said.

Olympia resident and business owner Stephenie Jekel spoke at a pre-rally forum at St. John's Episcopal church about the economic difficulties she has encountered as a small business owner. She said after paying wages and contributing to health insurance for employees at her three Java Flow Coffee Houses, "I don't even have enough left over to cover my own kids."

Michelle Edwards of Lacey said, "The issues are things that hit home." Edwards' husband is uninsured and her child is on Medicaid, she said. Edwards has been involved with Washington Community Action Network for four years, working toward health insurance for everyone in the state, including people who are self-employed or who work for small businesses.

House Speaker Frank Chopp, D-Seattle, and Senate Majority Leader Lisa Brown, D-Spokane, were scheduled to speak at the rally but were unable to make it due to scheduling conflicts, their offices said.

Besides the march and rally, the state House passed a resolution honoring King and listened to a gospel choir sing. The Senate passed a resolution Friday.

The Capitol events were among several memorials that took place statewide. There were marches and parades in Seattle and around 1,500 people attended a unity march in Spokane.

Gov. Chris Gregoire spoke at the 19th annual Tacoma Human Rights and Human Services department's King celebration. The event featured music, dance and dramatic performances.

Gregoire said King was a dedicated advocate for education.

"That's why I think, in this state, if we want the future that our children need and deserve, we need to stand up for education for every single one of our children," Gregoire said.

The Democratic governor has proposed more than \$1 billion worth of education improvement initiatives, including teacher salary increases, class-size reduction grants and money to boost math and science education.

The Olympian legislative intern Kurt Ackerson contributed to this report. Steve Bloom/The Olympian