



Monday, June 2, 2008 - Page updated at 12:00 AM

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# Sound Alliance kicks off push for social-change agenda

By Susan Kelleher

Seattle Times staff reporter

Natalie Fingerroot discovered a funny thing about helping other people.

"Once you get involved in community work, it's like a snowball: You want to do more," said the 80-year-old great-grandmother from Tacoma.

And so it was that Fingerroot, who serves as a director for Temple Beth El in Tacoma, found herself seated Sunday among an improbable mix of more than 1,200 plumbers, laborers, churchgoers, teachers, electricians and community volunteers at a meeting to define and promote an agenda for the "common good."

The gathering, held at the Greater Tacoma Convention and Trade Center, marked the official launch of Sound Alliance, a not-for-profit group that has been working for three years to recruit and train leaders to negotiate a common agenda for social change.

More than 80 groups or organizations in Pierce, King and Thurston counties sent people to the gathering, which morphed between political rally and revival meeting as civic and political leaders shared the stage with people facing health, education and job challenges.

Organizer Alejandra Tres said the alliance invited the state's top Democrats — including Gov. Christine Gregoire, House Speaker Frank Chopp, D-Seattle, and Senate Majority Leader Lisa Brown, D-Spokane.

Gregoire said she would work on behalf of many of the group's general concerns — including health

care and education.

Chopp pledged to work toward a "living wage" and better health-care coverage. Brown said she would back a union-run pilot program to make homes more energy efficient.

"We invited the people who were in power," Tres said. "To make policy, we need to work with the people who have the most amount of power."

The alliance is affiliated with the Industrial Areas Foundation, a nationwide organization that trains people to exercise political power on behalf of a common agenda. Other chapters have advocated for expanded health-care coverage, citizenship for immigrants, improved public transportation and more affordable housing, among other things.

Francisca Zavala, of Seattle, a Seattle Public Schools worker for 32 years, said the gathering gave her an opportunity to hear the concerns of people she might not otherwise talk to.

"I'm getting an understanding of their toils, and they're getting an understanding of our toils," she said.

Two 12-year-olds from Seattle said the gathering made them hopeful.

"I'm really thinking a lot of people really care," said Celestina Hendrickson. "There's a lot of inspirational people here,"

Said her friend, Leelee Bryant, "It makes you want to change things that aren't good."

Tres said the alliance will now focus on promoting the agreed-upon agenda through candidate forums, legislation and other campaign activities.

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