

COMMUNITY PROBLEM SOLVING

COPA convention pushes for 'shared prosperity'

By SHANNA MCCORD

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WATSONVILLE — Rep. Sam Farr got hit with questions on some of the hottest topics worrying residents from throughout the region during a gathering Sunday of 800 people attending

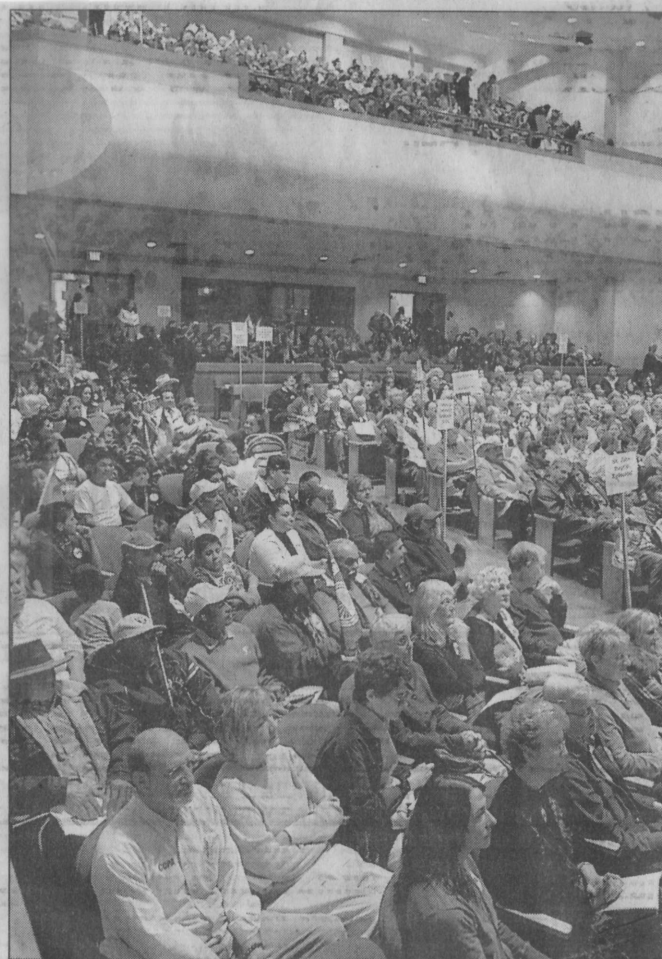
the Communities Organized for Relational Power in Action convention.

The convention, at the Henry J. Mello Center for the Performing Arts, billed as a public conversation of "shared prosperity," focused on foreclosures, gang violence, health care

reform and immigration.

Farr took the stage with several elected leaders from Santa Cruz and Monterey counties to listen to stories from Salinas and Watsonville residents who've lost their homes recently due to

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SHMUEL THALER/SENTINEL

Members of COPA fill the Henry J. Mello Center for the Performing Arts for the organization's Regional Prosperity Convention on Sunday.

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losing jobs and not being able to make the mortgage payment.

Maria Rocha told Farr the bank plans to sell her Watsonville house Dec. 4, despite many attempts to refinance for a lower monthly payment.

Asked by COPA leaders how residents could better handle the wave of foreclosures, Farr said the region needs more HUD-certified counselors to work with homeowners to refinance or modify their loans. More HUD-certified counselors in the region would require additional federal funding, something Farr said he'd try to secure.

Farr also said he'd be willing to contact banks and the Federal Reserve to see if there's a way of helping local residents keep their homes.

Live Oak teenager Manuel Reyes shared with Farr the experience of witnessing a stabbing at his high school and implored the congressman to help make

the community safer for young people.

Farr said projects such as the new youth soccer complex in Salinas are good ways to give young people a way to avoid getting caught up in the "sense of protection" a gang can offer.

"It takes a village to solve some of society's problems," Farr said.

COPA is a group of 22 organizations, mostly churches, synagogues and schools, that works to address community issues such as affordable housing, public safety and health care.

Sunday's convention began with a roll call of the various churches and guests who pledged to support the "shared prosperity agenda."

"I am here today to be a power against violence," said COPA member Sally Torres, who told the audience of the time she was in a Salinas store as it was being robbed by a gunman.

"I'm here today because the violence in Salinas has robbed me of my freedom to live in safety in my hometown," she said.

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