

Colorado

Musgrave holds hearing on dishonest union practices

By Joe Hanel*Times-Call correspondent*

WASHINGTON — Unions are sending moles and saboteurs to drive small businesses into bankruptcy, business owners complained at a House hearing led by Rep. Marilyn Musgrave on Tuesday.

The hearing examined a bill that would make it legal to fire union "salts" — union members who apply for a job at a nonunion business and then try to organize the workers.

"Salting is a practice rooted in dishonesty and deception. Its focus is to make small businesses die the death of a thousand cuts," said Musgrave, R-Fort Morgan, whose district includes Longmont. "The brutal practice is extremely harmful to an employer who, acting in good faith, wants to provide a service, make a living, create jobs and

provide for families in his community."

Union salts file legal complaints aimed at forcing shops to accept a union or go out of business, said Rep. Steve King, R-Iowa.

Not so, said Laurence Cohen, who represented the AFL-CIO and was the only pro-union witness at the hearing.

"Salting is about organizing," Cohen said.

Congress, the Supreme Court and the National Labor Relations Board recognize it as a legitimate tool for unions, he said.

Musgrave, chairwoman of the Subcommittee on Workforce, Empowerment and Government Pro-

**Musgrave**

grams, called the hearing to examine the Truth in Employment Act, sponsored by King and co-sponsored by her.

The bill would change labor law to allow employers not to hire union organizers, even if they were the most qualified applicants. Several similar bills have failed over the past eight years.

Democrats on the committee said the Republicans were focusing on a few bad apples to ban the entire process.

"There is simply no evidence that salting hurts small businesses," said Rep. Dan Lipinski of Illinois.

It can even help small businesses fight unfair competition, he said.

"Many times, this practice uncovers massive violations of workers' rights that employers use to gain unfair advantages," Lipinski said.

Union critics broke out a verbal arsenal to at-

tack salting.

It's an "economic weapon of mass destruction," King said.

Musgrave's pre-hearing press release was titled "'Salting' Merit Labor Shops With Union Terrorism," although no one used the word "terrorism" during the hearing.

Michael Aldi, who owned an electrical contracting company in New York, said salts sabotaged his worksites and stole tools from him.

Union membership is in a long decline across the country, with 12.5 percent of wage and salary workers belonging to a union, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics. That's down from 20.1 percent in 1983, the first year the government started keeping statistics.

In Colorado, 8.4 percent of workers belong to a union.