

# Musgrave sides with district's ag interests in trade pact vote

By **BILL THEOBALD**

Gannett News Service

WASHINGTON — Rep. Marilyn Musgrave sided with her district's major agricultural interests — cattle, corn and wheat — in voting for the controversial Central America Free Trade Agreement.

The trade pact was approved at 10 p.m. MDT Wednesday in a dramatic 217-215 vote.

Even on the day of the vote, Musgrave, a Fort Morgan Republican, had not decided how she would vote on CAFTA, which was opposed by the Colorado Farm Bureau because of fears that sugar imports would undercut the area's sugar beet industry.

"As the representative for one of the country's most agriculturally intense congressional districts, I am pleased to promote Colorado agriculture and join the Colorado Cattlemen's Association, Colorado Wheat Growers, Colorado Corn Growers, Dairy Farmers of America, and Colorado Livestock Association and many others in support of CAFTA," Musgrave said in a written statement.

Cattle interests supported the treaty because it would

eliminate 40-percent tariffs on prime beef exports to the Central American countries and Dominican Republic.

Beef exports to those countries could triple by 2015 from \$12.5 million annually to \$41 million, according to estimates by the National Cattlemen's Beef Association.



**MUSGRAVE**

Cattle accounts for 50 percent of the sales of agricultural goods produced each year in the 4th Congressional District and sugar beets account for about 2 percent, said Guy Short, Musgrave's chief of staff. The value of cattle raised in the district ranked seventh among the country's 435 congressional districts, he said.

Statewide, cattle sales total almost \$3 billion annually, while sugar beets account for about \$30 million, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

"She had to worry about the entire district," Short said.

CAFTA, which passed the Senate 54-45 last month, would immediately eliminate trade

tariffs on about 80 percent of goods made in the United States and sold to Guatemala, Nicaragua, El Salvador, Honduras, Costa Rica and the Dominican Republic.

Tariffs on other merchandise, including autos and auto parts, would be phased out over five to 10 years.

But the agreement would permit the importation of an additional 109,000 metric tons of sugar in the first year and more in subsequent years, which U.S. sugar beet growers fear will put them out of business.

All but 15 of the House's 202 Democrats opposed the agreement, including some who have voted for past trade pacts.

Twenty-seven Republicans voted against it, many of them from districts in the South and Midwest with textile factories or sugar growers.

On Thursday, Colorado and national cattle officials and several other groups contacted a reporter to laud Musgrave's vote.

"It's really a courageous thing she did. It's the right thing for Colorado and it's the right thing for the country," said Mark Smith of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce.