

Musgrave vows to battle for federal commodities program

By Daniel Welch
Medill News Service

WASHINGTON — Rep. Marilyn Musgrave pledged Thursday she'll do everything she can to protect the funding for a federal program that provides food for more than 5,000 Weld County residents each month.

President Bush's \$2.7 trillion budget proposal for 2007 called for the elimination of the Commodity Supplemental Food Program, which nationally feeds more than 450,000 low-income senior citizens, pregnant women, and mothers and children.

In a letter to House Appropriations Committee leaders, Musgrave, R-Colo., said the program provides vital assistance to many low-income people.

"I'm a budget hawk, but with this program, you know the people who need help the most are getting it," Musgrave said in an interview. "This money should go to help feed the elderly and young children in our district."

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year distributed more than 62,000 monthly food packages through the program.

U.S. Department of Agriculture officials say that people who receive the aid should be able to tap into other aid programs, such as food stamps.

But Weld Food Bank Executive Director Leona Martens disputed that, saying many recipients won't qualify for other federal food aid.

"Not everyone who qualifies for the CSFP will qualify for other programs, and these

cuts are going to make a segment of our population very vulnerable," Martens said. "I don't think that needs to happen."

A food package is not designed to feed recipients by itself for an entire month, but instead to supplement their diet with healthy foods that include peanut butter, cereal, fruits and vegetables.

Colorado farmers and producers would also be hurt if the program is slashed, Musgrave said, noting that Colorado producers receive \$15 million in direct purchases each year through the program.

"This program is a great deal for the taxpayer, and it's necessary for some people in our county who need help," Musgrave said.

The funding cut will hamper the efforts of local charities in finding long-term solutions to hunger, Martens said.

"We'll need to focus more on emergency solutions, which is fine in the short term," Martens said. "But it will hurt our long-term goals of getting food to agencies like child care facilities and shelters for battered women."