

# Musgrave defends CAFTA endorsement

By **MATTHEW BENSON**

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Congresswoman Marilyn Musgrave calls herself "baffled" by all of the attention received by passage of the Central American Free Trade Agreement.

The deal — CAFTA, for short — eliminates trade barriers between the United States and six Central American countries. Musgrave's vote helped carry the measure to a narrow 217-215 passage late last

week.

Prior to the vote, Musgrave and other lawmakers considered undecided on the proposal were the subject of heavy lobbying. In the days before the vote, the Fort Morgan Republican was among 10 representatives called to the White House for a special — ahem — discussion about the need for CAFTA.

Musgrave had much to weigh.

Agriculture remains key in

her 4th Congressional District — which includes



**MUSGRAVE**

Larimer and Weld counties and stretches south across the Eastern Plains — but the industry is split on CAFTA.

Cattle, beef and dairy producers support the trade deal, Musgrave said, as do

corn and wheat farmers. The agreement removes tariffs on American exports, helping local products better compete on foreign soil.

"We felt that this trade agreement leveled the playing field in terms of cattle products," said Bill Hammerich, chief executive officer of the Colorado Livestock Association. "We sincerely appreciated the support of the congresswoman on this matter."

See **MUSGRAVE/Page B3**

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## Musgrave

Continued from Page B1

But the measure is staunchly opposed by U.S. sugar beet farmers who worry about an estimated \$113 million increase in sugar imports from Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua.

While the U.S. sugar producers represent a comparatively small percentage of agriculture in the district, they're an organized, insistent and plucky bunch.

"They have a lot of political acumen," Musgrave said Tuesday in a visit to the Fort Collins Coloradoan. "They're really smart."

Much has been made of the trade deal's political ramifications in the days since its passage. For Musgrave's part, she doesn't believe her vote will cost her votes — if and when she seeks re-election.

"I think, ultimately, it will help me," she said. "I did everything I could for sugar."

Musgrave is home for summer recess and plans to visit "every part of the district" during the roughly five weeks before Congress reconvenes after Labor Day weekend.

She boasted Tuesday of her success in landing \$20 million for the district through this year's transportation bill.

That's roughly 40 percent more than the prior year, Musgrave said, and a record for a representative from the district. Projects covered by the funding include:

- \$8 million for Interstate 25 reconstruction from Fort Collins to Dacono.

- \$6 million for U.S. Highway 287 from Limon to the Oklahoma border.

- \$6 million for Interstate 76 from E-470 to the Nebraska border.

When Congress reconvenes in the fall, Musgrave expects that lawmakers will take up the contentious issue of immigration.

"I believe people are demanding it," she said. "There's a real concern out there that terrorists will come across the border."

Musgrave doesn't want to close the border and supports the idea of a limited guest worker program. But she opposes proposed so-called amnesty programs for illegal aliens already on American soil.

Pushing immigration to the forefront is an unusual grouping of environmental, economic and national security interests, she said. The pressure is such that both Congress and President

Bush are voicing plans to act.

Musgrave, meanwhile, remains quiet on plans for her Federal Marriage Amendment.

She made headlines in 2003 with her introduction of the

measure to ban gay marriage, and the amendment rode a wave of interest through that year and the next. But talk has faded in 2005.

Musgrave said she's waiting

for the proposal to gain new "momentum," possibly through a court ruling that refocuses attention on gay marriage as the Massachusetts Supreme Court did with a ruling in late 2003.