

# For a 'low payment,' consultant offered to get Colorado counties off Trump's list of sanctuary jurisdictions

Some commissioners described Jeff Small's offer — before list was rescinded — as 'shakedown' attempt



Emily Philip with the band group "Notes of Dissent" supports the band while marching down 13th Avenue near Broadway during the "Good Trouble Lives On" protest at Lincoln Veterans Memorial Park in Denver, on Thursday, July 17, 2025. Protests were organized across the country Thursday to honor the late Congressman John Lewis and protest President Donald Trump's immigration policies and mass deportations, health care cuts and other concerns. (Photo by Andy Cross/The Denver Post)



By **SETH KLAMANN** | sklamann@denverpost.com | The Denver Post

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Six weeks before a former Trump official [called clerks seeking access to secure voting equipment in Colorado](#), he reached out to several county commissioners in the state with a different proposition.

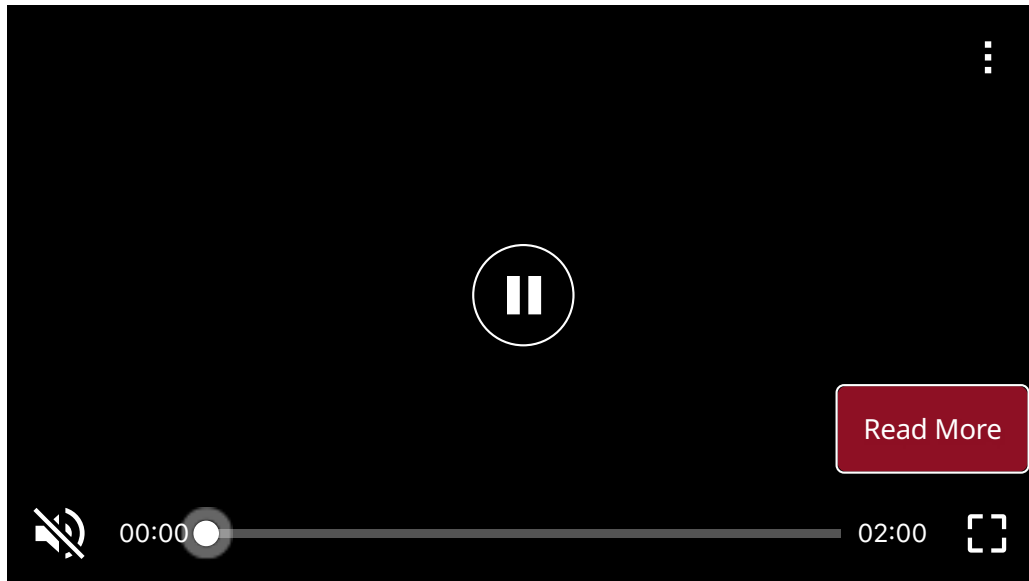
President Donald Trump's administration had just placed [more than 50 Colorado cities and counties](#) on a list of ["sanctuary jurisdictions"](#) that, it claimed, were "deliberately obstructing the enforcement of federal immigration laws and endangering American citizens." Their inclusion on the list shocked some local officials and sent them scrambling — since many hadn't passed pro-immigrant policies or ordinances.

Jeff Small, a consultant for the 76 Group, a prominent Denver-based conservative public affairs firm, offered a way out. In emails to the elected leaders of at least four Colorado counties on the list, Small quoted media reports about targeted counties losing millions of dollars in grant funding.

For a "one-time low payment," he wrote on May 31, he could use his expertise and "extensive relationships" with the White House and federal law enforcement agencies to "swiftly" get the counties off the list.

The pitch went to commissioners in at least Jefferson and Arapahoe counties in suburban Denver and Clear Creek and Chaffee counties in the mountains. The offer shocked and confused the commissioners who received it, five of them told The Denver Post on Thursday.

All said they'd never received an email like it during their time in office. Three of them likened it to a shakedown.



"I've been in elected office for almost 20 years now, between the legislature and this," said Andy Kerr, [a commissioner for Jefferson County](#). "When I received this email, I was floored. Flabbergasted. I saw it as the single most corrupt shakedown attempt that I've ever experienced, personally, in Colorado politics."

Leslie Summey, the chair of [Arapahoe's Board of County Commissioners](#), said she took the email to be Small's attempt "to get some money, and he has figured out this new niche to get it." Jeffco Commissioner Rachel Zenzinger thought it was "a shakedown or fraud or a joke."

None of those who spoke with The Post accepted Small's offer, and it's unclear how much he intended to charge. His pitch to the four counties — where Democrats either occupy all the commissioner seats or have a board majority — soon became a moot point: [The list was rescinded](#) shortly after it was released.

In a statement early Thursday evening, Small said that after the jurisdiction list was published, he "moved quickly to help get two Colorado counties removed and attempted to help others before the list was taken down on June 1st. With hundreds of millions in federal grants potentially at risk for Colorado counties, I wanted to help."

In a follow-up text, he said he'd helped [remove El Paso and Weld counties](#) from the list shortly after it was released.

Jennifer Finch, spokeswoman for Weld County, said in an email Friday that the county commissioners were “not aware of work Jeff may have done on this topic.” One commissioner said he’d received a text from Small about the list, but that was only after U.S. Reps. Lauren Boebert and Gabe Evans had contacted the board and let them know the county had been removed.

As for the shakedown allegations, Small said in another statement that he was “sorry anyone felt that way. That definitely was not my intention. I tried to help three counties pro bono.”

Details of Small's offer to the commissioners surfaced soon after [several election officials told The Post](#) in recent days that he had reached out to Republican county clerks last week. Small sought third-party access to voting equipment on behalf of the White House and as part of a Trump executive order seeking to overhaul elections.

Like their commissioner colleagues several weeks before, the clerks were taken aback by Small's outreach, and none agreed to his request.

Small, who lives in the Washington, D.C., area, joined the 76 Group, a Colorado consulting and lobbying firm, earlier this year. He was previously chief of staff for Boebert of Colorado and had been appointed to the U.S. Department of the Interior during Trump's first administration.

Josh Penry, the 76 Group's founder, referred a comment request to Small.

Small sent the emails on May 31, two days after [the Department of Homeland Security published the list](#) of targeted cities and counties.

His email, some of the commissioners said, seemed to suggest that he had influence over the list's contents before it was publicly unveiled. He wrote that he'd already prevented current "county clients" from ending up on the list and that he'd also "successfully helped remove multiple other counties."

"It seemed like Mr. Small had more time to think about the sanctuary list and the executive order attached to it than I had," said Commissioner George Marlin of [Clear Creek County](#). "It's not the way that government-to-government relations usually works."

[According to federal reports](#), Small began lobbying on behalf of Douglas and Mesa counties nearly three months before the jurisdiction list was published. Neither of those counties was on the list, though both had [also previously passed resolutions opposing so-called sanctuary policies](#).

[Boebert told The Post in late May](#) that she'd successfully removed Douglas County from the list prior to its publication.

Small said he was involved in keeping the two counties off the list, too.

"I didn't control the decision and I never saw a preview of the list -- but I made the case for those counties," he wrote in a text to The Post.

Abe Laydon, the chair of [the Douglas County commission](#), did not return a voicemail seeking comment Thursday. On Friday morning, a spokeswoman for Mesa County government said she was not immediately able to comment. She also directed The Post to file a public records request.

For those counties that stayed on the list during its short life, its makeup befuddled some commissioners, who didn't understand why they were included. Kristin Stephens, a commissioner in Larimer County who didn't receive Small's email, said she and her colleagues had been surprised to see their county on it.

But, she said, she learned through word of mouth how they might get Larimer removed.

"My understanding was that counties on the list were counties that hadn't done a resolution to say they weren't a sanctuary county or city," Stephens said. "But I also understood that if you called the right person and your county was of the right persuasion, you could get off the list."

Zenzinger said she and her colleagues in Jeffco dismissed Small's email after the list was rescinded. But word had spread among other county commissioners. Routt County Commissioner Sonja Macys, who didn't receive Small's email but heard about it, laughed when asked about it this week by The Post.

"Oh, that guy," she said. "The one that's going to get you off the list?"

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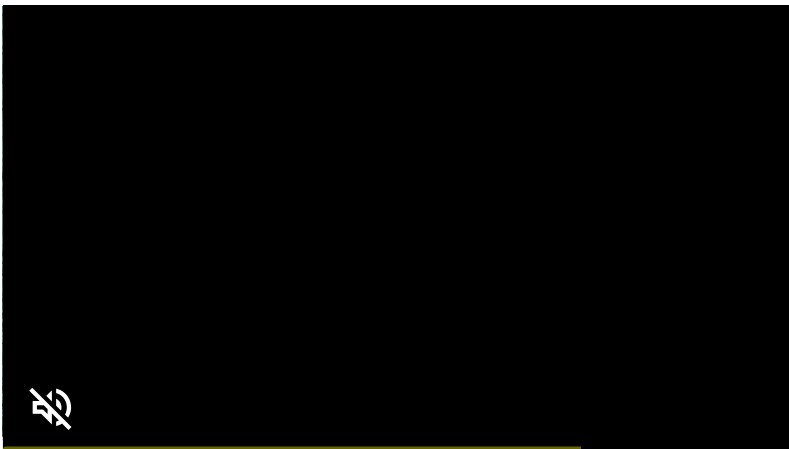
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