

Amid Drastic Federal Spending Cuts, DHS Secretary Kristi Noem Has Already Spent An Eye-Popping \$76.6 Million On A Self-Serving Ad Campaign Mounted By Two Media Companies With Possible Connections To Noem Aide Corey Lewandowski

SUMMARY: An [Accountable.US](#) review has found that Kristi Noem's DHS has so far paid out \$76.6 million for "[thinly-veiled propaganda](#)" ads about the border to two LLCs run by longtime Republican political strategists, one of whom is connected to Noem's "de facto" chief of staff Corey Lewandowski. The overall \$200 million ad campaign [comes amid](#) drastic federal funding cuts to SNAP and Medicaid, and tax cuts primarily [benefitting](#) the wealthy.

One media company, People Who Think, L.L.C., has so far [received](#) \$13.8 million from DHS and is owned by Jay Connaughton, who [advised](#) Trump's 2016 campaign and reportedly worked alongside Lewandowski on the 2023 campaign of Louisiana Governor Jeff Landry.

The other company, Safe America Media LLC, was [incorporated](#) just days before its first contract award and was registered to an address owned by Republican consultant Mike McElwain. McElwain is a longtime partner at Republican media firm DMM Media, a possible recipient of the eye-popping \$62.8 million DHS has so far awarded in contracts to the LLC. DMM Media has supported [numerous](#) Republican campaigns over the past two decades, but its revenue from campaigns has never reached the order of magnitude of the DHS contracts.

As a "Special Government Employee," Lewandowski has reportedly [wielded](#) "outsized" power as Noem's top aide, including advising on DHS contracting spending. Lewandowski has helped nurture Noem's political career since 2019, being [credited](#) as the one who "brought [Noem] into Trump's circle." The two have also long been [rumored](#) to be having an extramarital affair, which they have personally denied.

Homeland Security Secretary Kristi Noem Rolled Out At \$200 Million Border "Propaganda" Ad Campaign—Which She Has Starred In—Amid Drastic Spending Cuts To Medicaid And SNAP.

DHS Secretary Kristi Noem Announced In February 2025 That DHS Would Spend \$200 Million On Ads Threatening Undocumented Immigrants With Deportation.

February 2025: DHS Secretary Kristi Noem Announced A "Multimillion-Dollar Ad Campaign Warning Illegal Aliens To Leave Our Country Now Or Face Deportation With The Inability To Return To The United States." "Today, Secretary Kristi Noem announced a nationwide and international multimillion-dollar ad campaign warning illegal aliens to leave our country now or face deportation with the inability to return to the United States. The international ads warn criminal illegal aliens not to come to America and break its laws or they will be hunted down and deported." [Department of Homeland Security, [2/17/25](#)]

DHS Reportedly Budgeted As Much As \$200 Million For Its Deportation Ad Campaign. "The Department of Homeland Security has budgeted as much as \$200 million for its new ad campaign warning migrants in the country illegally that "we will find you and deport you," according to documents reviewed by Semafor." [Semafor, [2/18/25](#)]

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Noem's Ad Campaign, Which Has Amounted To "An Extremely Expensive Taxpayer-Funded Propaganda Blitz" Boosting Her And Trump's Public Images, Has Come Amid Drastic Federal Cuts To Medicaid And SNAP And Tax Breaks Favoring The Wealthy.

Rolling Stone: Noem's Ad Campaign "Amounts To An Extremely Expensive Taxpayer-Funded Propaganda Blitz To Scare Off Migrants And To Flatter Trump On Television." "The ad campaign amounts to an extremely expensive taxpayer-funded propaganda blitz to scare off migrants and to flatter Trump on television." [Rolling Stone, [2/21/25](#)]

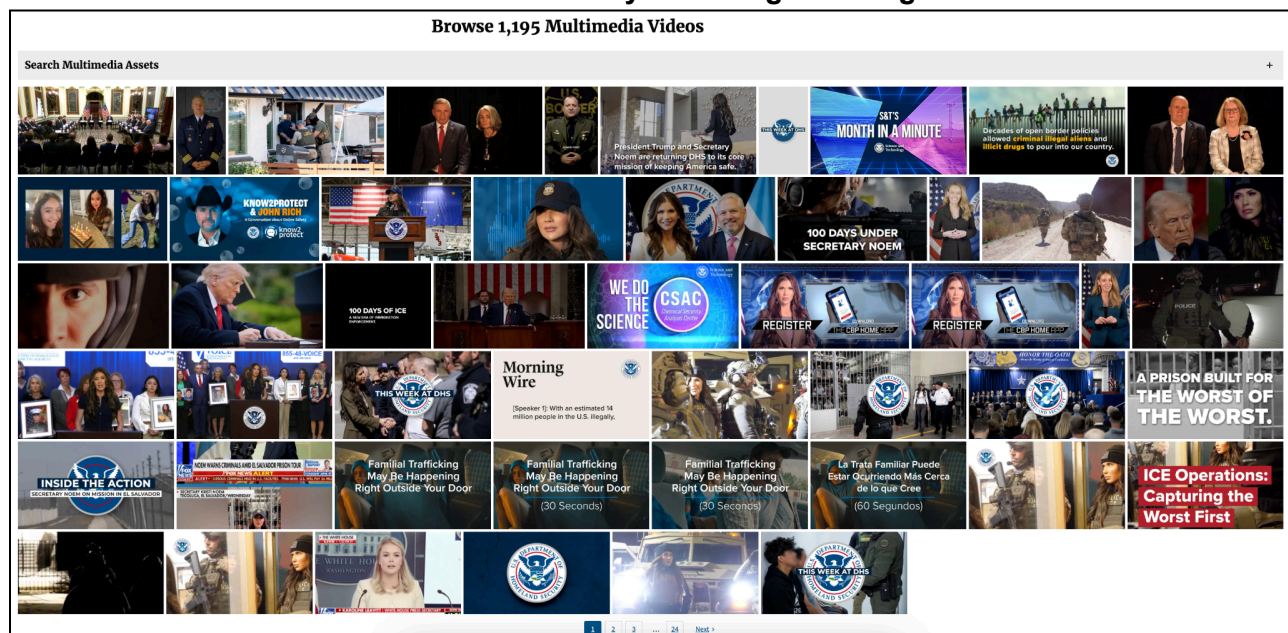
Noem Reportedly Claimed That The Ad Campaign Was Trump's Idea And That Following The 2024 Election, Trump Asked Her To Star In Ads Thanking Him "For Closing The Border." "The Department of Homeland Security has budgeted up to \$200 million to run anti-immigrant ads in the United States and overseas that repeatedly thank President Donald Trump for leading an immigration crackdown. Homeland Security Secretary Kristi Noem said Friday night that these ads were Trump's idea, and during the administration's transition to power, the president asked her to star in ads thanking him 'for closing the border.'" [Rolling Stone, [2/21/25](#)]

- **Noem Claimed That Trump Said, "I Want You In The Ads, And I Want Your Face In The Ads... But I Want The Ad First, I Want You To Thank Me. I Want You To Thank Me For Closing The Border."** "Noem said that Trump instructed that he didn't want to be in the ads himself, telling her: 'I want you in the ads, and I want your face in the ads ... but I want the first ad, I want you to thank me. I want you to thank me for closing the border.'" [Rolling Stone, [2/21/25](#)]

Rep. Rosa DeLauro (D-CT) Called Noem's Ad Campaign "Thinly-Veiled Propaganda" And "Like A Political Ad." [YouTube, at 0:11, [5/6/25](#)]

Many Of Noem's Videos Had The Appearance Of Political Campaign Ads Or Publicity Stunts.

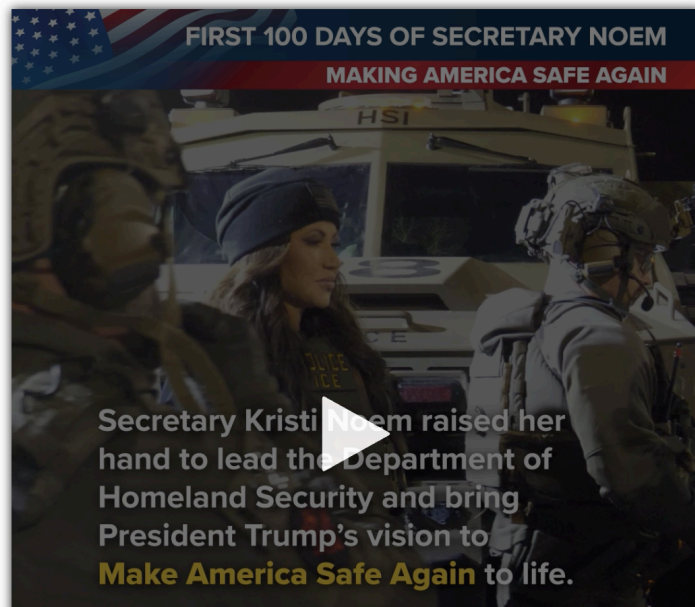
Noem's DHS Has Posted Dozens Of Videos Heavily Featuring Her Image.



[Department of Homeland Security, accessed [5/28/25](#)]

Video: Noem's DHS Posted A Video Titled, "Secretary Noem: Bold, Unapologetic Leadership For America" That Amounts To Little More Than A Political Ad For The Secretary.

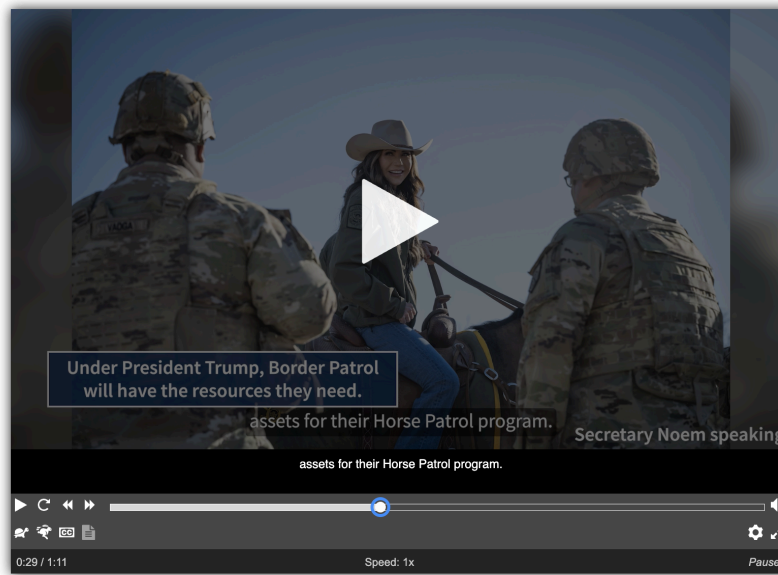
Secretary Noem: Bold, Unapologetic Leadership for America



[Department of Homeland Security, accessed [5/28/25](#)]

Video: Noem's DHS Posted An Ad That Largely Amounts To Publicizing Her Photo Ops With Border Patrol Agents.

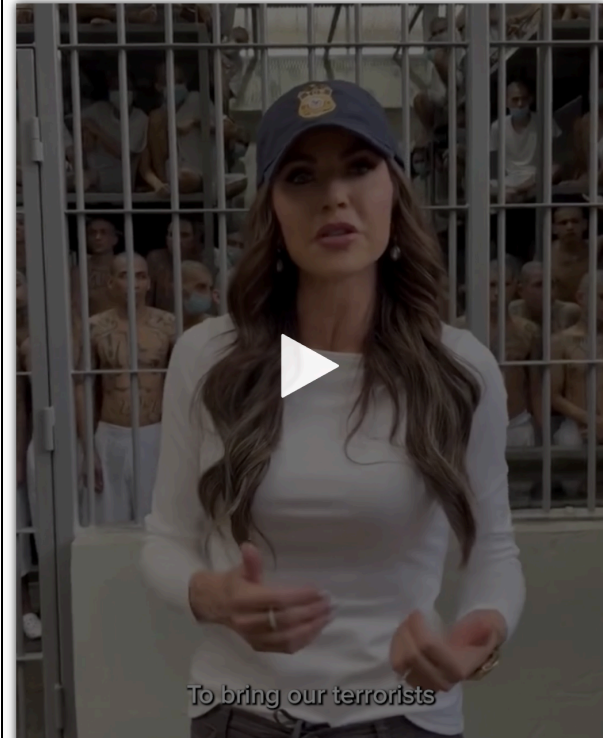
Secretary Kristi Noem Rides with Border Patrol Agents on the Southern Border



[Department of Homeland Security, accessed [5/28/25](#)]

Video: Noem Was Filmed Speaking In Front Of People Incarcerated At An El Salvador Jail For An Ad Publicizing Her Visit To The Country.

Inside the Action: Secretary Noem's visit to El Salvador



[Department of Homeland Security, accessed [5/28/25](#)]

The Spending Blitz Comes Amid Congressional Republicans' Consideration Of The "Big Beautiful Bill" That Will Make Significant Cuts To The Social Safety Net.

May 2025: House Republicans Passed A Budget Megabill That Included Funding Cuts To Medicaid And SNAP And Would Slash Trillions Of Dollars In Taxes. "House Republicans have passed their massive bill to enact the heart of President Trump's domestic agenda, overcoming deep divisions inside the party to advance legislation that would cut trillions of dollars in taxes while scaling back safety net programs such as Medicaid and SNAP." [NPR, [5/21/25](#)]

- **May 2025: House Republicans' Proposed Budget Resolution Included \$290 Billion In Funding Cuts To SNAP.** "A House Republican proposal to dramatically reduce federal funding to the nation's largest anti-hunger program would have a disastrous effect on low-income families, nutrition advocates say. Monday night's proposal from GOP members of the House Agriculture Committee would cut more than \$290 billion from the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, which helps over 42 million people nationwide purchase fresh produce and other groceries, according to the Agriculture Department." [NBC News, [5/13/25](#)]
- **Congressional Republicans' Budget Legislation Would Include Substantial Cuts To Medicaid, Including By Imposing Work Requirements.** "Republican lawmakers may be looking at substantial cuts to Medicaid in upcoming reconciliation legislation. But one method of restricting access to coverage — work requirements — could have disastrous results for Americans, based on efforts in Arkansas and Georgia to implement such policies, according to a new report issued by Sen. Raphael Warnock, D-Ga." [CNBC, [5/14/25](#)]
 - **Brookings Institution: Research On Work Requirements Shows That They Largely Reduce Welfare Program Participation While Failing To Increase Employment Or Earnings—Making Them Mainly About Kicking Off People Deemed Undeserving.** "But decades of economic research tell a different story: Work requirements do little to increase employment and often strip essential benefits from society's most vulnerable, while also adding

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bureaucratic barriers that disproportionately harm those already struggling... Work requirements for Medicaid and SNAP are built on the assumption that recipients avoid work and need bureaucratic pressure—or a ‘stick’—to enter the workforce.... Research on work requirements for SNAP points at consistent patterns: Work requirements do not increase employment, have negligible impacts on earnings, and significantly reduce program participation... The persistence of work requirements is not rooted in evidence, but rather in a deep-seated American ideology that treats poverty as a moral failing rather than a systemic issue.” [The Brookings Institution, [3/3/25](#)]

- **According To An Expert, The Proposed Federal Budget Savings From The Medicaid Cuts “Is Not Savings Through Improved Efficiency,” But “Savings By Kicking People Out Of The Program Who Are Mostly Eligible.”** “What this is really about is producing budget savings,” said Benjamin Sommers, a professor of health policy at Harvard who has studied Medicaid work requirements. “This is not savings through improved efficiency, or more people going to work. It’s savings by kicking people out of the program who are mostly eligible.” [The New York Times, [5/22/25](#)]

- **Republicans Have Called Their Trump-Backed Megabill The “Big Beautiful Bill.”** “Senate Republicans are deeply divided over President Trump’s ‘big, beautiful bill,’ which the House passed by a single vote last week, setting up a battle in the upper chamber between moderates and conservatives that is likely to drag on well into July.” [The Hill, [5/28/25](#)]

According To Experts At The Urban Institute And Brookings Institution, Most Tax Breaks In Republicans’ Bill Favor The Wealthy, With 60 Percent Of Tax Cuts Going To The Top 20 Percent Of Households. “Most tax cuts in the bill go to top-earning households [...] There are several ways the House bill skews toward the wealthiest Americans, experts said. Among them are more valuable tax breaks tied to business income, state and local taxes and the estate tax, experts said. These tax breaks disproportionately flow to high earners, experts said... All told, 60% of the bill’s tax cuts would go to the top 20% of households and more than a third would go to those making \$460,000 or more, according to the Tax Policy Center.” [NBC News, [5/23/25](#)]

- **The Urban-Brookings Tax Policy Center Is Made Up Of Researchers At The Urban Institute And Brookings Institution, Nonpartisan Think Tanks.** “The Urban-Brookings Tax Policy Center aims to improve tax and fiscal policy decision-making by producing independent, timely, and accessible analysis... TPC does not have a policy agenda. As an organization, we are not driving towards specific policy goals, and we don’t have an ideological orientation. Instead, we are a collection of independent voices—individuals with a range of policy preferences but a shared commitment to rigorous analysis and getting at the truth.” [Tax Policy Center, accessed [5/28/25](#)]

As Of May 2025, Noem’s DHS Has Shadily Awarded \$76.6 Million To Two Media Companies, One Of Which Is A Shell Corporation Tied To A Longtime Republican Strategist, With The Other Being Owned By A Consultant With Ties To Noem Aide Corey Lewandowski, Who Has Wielded “Outsized” Power At The DHS.

Skipping A Competitive Bidding Process, Noem’s DHS Has So Far Awarded A Total Of \$76.6 Million To Two LLCs Run By Republican Political Strategists, One Of Whom Has Connections To DHS Aide Corey Lewandowski.

The Department Of Homeland Security Skipped A Competitive Bidding Process To Award Ad Contracts To Two Republican-Linked Firms, Safe America Media LLC And People Who Think, LLC. “The U.S. Department of Homeland Security skipped a fully competitive bidding process to give two Republican-linked firms the first part of a \$200 million television ad campaign that lauds President Donald Trump for his

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crackdown on illegal immigration... One of the winning firms is People Who Think, LLC, which is owned by Jay Connaughton, a Louisiana-based political consultant who served as media adviser for Trump's 2016 campaign... The other firm selected for the contract was Safe America Media, LLC, which was incorporated in Delaware a few days before the solicitation with an address to a property owned by Republican consultant Mike McElwain." [The Associated Press, [3/11/25](#)]

- **DHS Reported That It Had Bypassed A Competitive Bidding Process Due To The “Unusual And Compelling Urgency” Of The Supposed Emergency At The Southern U.S. Border.** “DHS told news outlets last month that it had undergone a ‘competitive procurement process’ for the campaign. But in a document posted Friday on a federal database, the department said Trump’s declaration of a national emergency at the U.S.-Mexico border constitutes ‘an unusual and compelling urgency,’ a circumstance that allows federal agencies to bypass the usual competitive process.” [The Associated Press, [3/11/25](#)]

Trump’s One-Time 2016 Campaign Manager, Corey Lewandowski, Has Been Made A Special Government Employee Advising DHS Secretary Kristi Noem. “The walk-through was orchestrated by a well-placed booster: Corey Lewandowski, President Trump’s early campaign manager who is now Noem’s close adviser... Lewandowski is serving as a special government employee, a status under federal ethics laws that permits private-sector employees to work inside the government without having to relinquish their outside salaries or investments.” [The Wall Street Journal, [4/17/25](#)]

- **Lewandowski Was Fired As Trump’s Campaign Manager In 2016, Made His Way Back Into Trump’s Orbit, And Was Ousted Again For Making Unwanted Sexual Advances On A Republican Donor, Before Re-Appearing Close To Trump In 2024.** “In 2016, Corey Lewandowski was fired by Donald J. Trump’s campaign for encouraging the candidate’s undisciplined habits. Then he made his way back into Mr. Trump’s orbit. In 2021, Mr. Lewandowski was ousted from Trump world again after he was accused of making unwanted sexual advances on a Republican donor. Now he has made his way back yet again, in a move that has puzzled some of Mr. Trump’s allies.” [The New York Times, [9/17/24](#)]
- **Special Government Employees, Who Do Not Require Senate Confirmation, May Work In The Federal Government For 130 Days Out Of A Year And Are Not Required To File Financial Disclosures If They Fall Below A Certain Compensation Threshold.** “A special government employee is anyone who works, or is expected to work, for the government for 130 days or less in a 365-day period... As a special government employee, you may be required to submit a financial disclosure report within 30 days of assuming your position. If you are paid above the rate paid to a GS-15 and expected to serve for more than 60 days, you are required to submit a report that is made available to the public. If you are paid at or below that level, you must file a report on a confidential basis if your decision making could have an economic effect on a non-federal entity.” [Department of Justice, accessed [5/28/25](#)]

As Of May 2025, Noem’s HHS Has Awarded \$62.8 Million In Contracts To “Safe America Media LLC” For “Marketing Consulting Services.”

Date Approved	Purpose	Action Obligation
02/19/2025	Marketing Consulting Services	\$16,000,000
03/28/2025	Marketing Consulting Services	\$10,000,000
05/02/2025	Marketing Consulting Services	\$9,500,530.48
05/13/2025	Marketing Consulting Services	\$27,325,323.84
TOTAL:		\$62,825,854.32

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- In February 2025, Safe America Media LLC Was Granted A Contract With A Total Value Of \$62.8 Million With A Completion Date Of August 19, 2025.

Dates		Amounts	
Date Signed (mm/dd/yyyy) :	02/19/2025	Action Obligation:	\$16,000,000.00
Period of Performance Start Date (mm/dd/yyyy) :	02/19/2025	Base And Exercised Options Value:	\$35,500,530.48
Completion Date (mm/dd/yyyy) :	08/18/2025	Base and All Options Value (Total Contract Value):	\$62,825,854.32
Est. Ultimate Completion Date (mm/dd/yyyy) :	08/19/2025	Fee Paid for Use of IDV:	\$0.00
Solicitation Date (mm/dd/yyyy) :	02/14/2025		

[Federal Procurement Data System, award, [2/9/25](#)]

Safe America Media LLC Appears To Be A Shell Corporation Created By Republican Consultant Mike McElwain. “The other firm selected for the contract was Safe America Media, LLC, which was incorporated in Delaware a few days before the solicitation with an address to a property owned by Republican consultant Mike McElwain.” [The Associated Press, [3/11/25](#)]

- **Safe America Media LLC Was Incorporated Just Days Before The Solicitation At An Address To A Property Owned By McElwain.** “The other firm selected for the contract was Safe America Media, LLC, which was incorporated in Delaware a few days before the solicitation with an address to a property owned by Republican consultant Mike McElwain.” [The Associated Press, [3/11/25](#)]

Mike McElwain Was Previously Political Director Of The NRCC And May Have Worked At Republican Strategy Firm DMM Media As Early As The 2000s. “Former NRCC Political Director Mike McElwain works with the Washington, D.C.-based GOP firm DMM Media, which has been involved in several Republican House campaigns this cycle...” [Roll Call, [10/5/10](#)]

- **As Of May 2025, Mike McElwain Was A Partner At DMM Media.**

Mike McElwain

Partner at DMM Media

New Alexandria, Virginia, United States · [Contact info](#)

[LinkedIn, accessed [5/27/25](#)]

- **Since 2011-2012, DMM Media Has Collected In Hundreds Of Thousands To Millions Of Dollars Each Election Cycle, Primarily From Republican Campaigns.** [OpenSecrets, accessed [5/27/25](#)]

As Of May 2025, Noem’s HHS Has Awarded \$13,857,850 Million In Contracts To “People Who Think, L.L.C.” For “Marketing Services.”

Date Approved	Purpose	Action Obligation
02/14/2025	Marketing Consulting Services	\$250
03/13/2025	Marketing Consulting Services	\$4,804,000
05/02/2025	Marketing Consulting Services	\$6,744,000
05/23/2025	Marketing Consulting Services	\$2,309,600
TOTAL:		\$13,857,850

People Who Think, LLC Is The Media Advisory Firm Of Jay Connaughton, A Republican Political Consultant. “One of the winning firms is People Who Think, LLC, which is owned by Jay Connaughton, a Louisiana-based political consultant who served as media adviser for Trump’s 2016 campaign. Connaughton appeared to have worked as recently as October 2023 with former Trump campaign manager Corey Lewandowski in the campaign of Jeff Landry, for governor of Louisiana. Lewandowski, a longtime Noem

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adviser going back to her tenure as South Dakota governor, mentioned him in a post on X as part of the team that helped elect Landry.” [The Associated Press, [3/11/25](#)]

Jay Connaughton Reportedly Worked With Lewandowski On Trump’s 2016 Campaign, Which He Advised, And Again In 2023, When The Two Worked Together On Louisiana Governor Jeff Landry’s Campaign. “One of the winning firms is People Who Think, LLC, which is owned by Jay Connaughton, a Louisiana-based political consultant who served as media adviser for Trump’s 2016 campaign. Connaughton appeared to have worked as recently as October 2023 with former Trump campaign manager Corey Lewandowski in the campaign of Jeff Landry, for governor of Louisiana. Lewandowski, a longtime Noem adviser going back to her tenure as South Dakota governor, mentioned him in a post on X as part of the team that helped elect Landry.” [The Associated Press, [3/11/25](#)]

Lewandowski Has Played An “Unusual And Outsized Role” At DHS, Which Has Reportedly Included Wielding Power Over Contracting Decisions.

Corey Lewandowski Has Reportedly Wielded An “Unusual And Outsized Role” In Noem’s DHS, Serving As Gatekeeper For Noem, Advising Her Through Meetings With World Leaders, And Weighing In On Personnel And Contracting Decisions. “The episode highlighted Lewandowski’s unusual and outsize role at DHS, where administration officials, agency staff and Trump allies say he has used his close relationship with Noem to wield power—though he has no formal role at the agency. He has emerged as a gatekeeper for Noem, counseling her during her travels to meet with world leaders, weighing in on personnel decisions and advising on DHS contracts.” [The Wall Street Journal, [4/17/25](#)]

- **Sources Close To The Matter Reportedly Claimed That Lewandowski Is Often The Only Aide Accompanying Noem To Meetings.** “He is often the only person who accompanies her to meetings, according to people familiar with the department.” [The Wall Street Journal, [4/17/25](#)]

Lewandowski Reportedly Pushed DHS To Give Additional Work To Peter Thiel’s Tech Company Palantir, After Which DHS Awarded Palantir An Additional \$29.9 Million Through An Existing Contract. “An assistant working on behalf of Lewandowski had sought a ‘significant block of time’ for the tour that included Palantir’s chief technology officer, according to emails reviewed by The Wall Street Journal. In other meetings, Lewandowski told officials at the Department of Homeland Security to give the firm additional work, according to people familiar with the matter. Weeks after the tour, the company co-founded by Peter Thiel would get an additional \$29.9 million from the agency under an existing contract—specifically to deploy its powerful software for immigration ‘targeting and enforcement’ and ‘self-deportation tracking,’ records show.” [The Wall Street Journal, [4/17/25](#)]

Reportedly, Lewandowski Initially Wanted To Serve As Noem’s Chief Of Staff. “Though Lewandowski had initially wanted to serve as Noem’s chief of staff, President Trump and his top advisers were uncomfortable with Lewandowski in that role, owing to tabloid reports of a romantic relationship between Lewandowski and Noem over the years, according to people familiar with the president’s thinking.” [The Wall Street Journal, [4/17/25](#)]

Lewandowski First Began Advising Noem In 2019 And Helped Nurture Her Political Career On The National Level, “[Bringing] Noem Into Trump’s Circle.”

Lewandowski Reportedly Began Advising Noem After They Met At A 2019 Fishing Trip. “He began advising the future secretary in 2019 after they took part in a fishing trip put together. With Lewandowski’s help, Noem created a national profile, and he brought her into Trump’s circle.” [The Independent, [4/18/25](#)]

Lewandowski “Brought [Noem] Into Trump’s Circle” And Helped Nurture Her Political Career On The National Stage. “He began advising the future secretary in 2019 after they took part in a fishing trip put together. With Lewandowski’s help, Noem created a national profile, and he brought her into Trump’s circle.” [The Independent, [4/18/25](#)]

Lewandowski Reportedly Pushed For Trump To Select Noem As His Running Mate, And Later, To Appoint Her As DHS Secretary. “The paper also reported that Lewandowski pushed for Trump to select Noem as his running mate. After failing to convince the president and his advisors, he urged him to select Noem for the role of Homeland Security secretary.” [The Independent, [4/18/25](#)]

There Have Been Tabloid Reports Of A Romantic Relationship Between Noem And Lewandowski Over The Years.

There Have Been “Tabloid Reports Of A Romantic Relationship” Between Noem And Lewandowski “Over The Years.” “Though Lewandowski had initially wanted to serve as Noem’s chief of staff, President Trump and his top advisers were uncomfortable with Lewandowski in that role, owing to tabloid reports of a romantic relationship between Lewandowski and Noem over the years, according to people familiar with the president’s thinking.” [The Wall Street Journal, [4/17/25](#)]

- **The Daily Beast Referred To Noem As Lewandowski’s “Rumored On-Again, Off-Again Side Squeeze.”** “Trumpworld troublemaker Corey Lewandowski may have been prohibited from officially joining his rumored on-again, off-again side squeeze Kristi Noem at the Department of Homeland Security as the new secretary’s chief of staff.” [The Daily Beast, [2/19/25](#)]

In February 2025, Lewandowski Was Reportedly Seen Taking Out Trash In Noem’s Apartment Building. “Lewandowski was spotted in Noem’s Washington apartment building in recent days hopping into an elevator, and carrying boxes down to the trash room, a source tells The Swamp.” [The Daily Beast, [2/19/25](#)]

Noem And Lewandowski Are Both Married To Other People And Have Denied Rumors Of An Affair. “Noem, 53, and Lewandowski, 51, who served as Trump’s 2016 presidential campaign manager and advised the former South Dakota governor and “snow queen” for years as she skyrocketed to MAGA stardom, have denied having a romantic relationship. Both are married—to other people.” [The Daily Beast, [2/19/25](#)]

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