

## Elbert County gadfly not a threat to safety, judge rules

By Carlos Illescas The Denver Post The Denver Post

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KIOWA — Don Pippin may be a pest to Elbert County, with his constant open-records requests. But he is not a threat.

That was the ruling from a judge Friday in rejecting County Commissioner Kurt Schlegel's request for a permanent protection order against Pippin, who was seen photographing security cameras at the county administration building this month.

The judge also threw out a temporary protection order against Pippin and said he was free to go wherever he wanted.

"You don't strike me as a terrorist, someone who is going to hurt those employees," Elbert County Judge Palmer Boyette said. "Common sense tells me you are not a threat."

About 60 residents packed Friday's hearing and applauded after the judge's ruling.

Afterward, Pippin said he was vindicated and still feels the county was lashing out at him for about a dozen open-records request he has submitted since January, among other reasons.

Most recently, Pippin obtained information concerning an unused vacation payment that exceeded county limits former undersheriff Shayne Heap received after he was elected sheriff in November.

Pippin filed an affidavit with the district attorney's office, which forwarded the case to the Colorado Bureau of Investigation. The CBI is in the midst of its probe.

"I feel pretty good," Pippin said, adding that the photographs were taken to accompany an open-records request he submitted for the cost of the security system. "I think it was retaliation."

On behalf of the county, Schlegel won a temporary protection order barring Pippin from the administration building, among other limitations. Schlegel said the hair on the back of his neck stood up when he saw footage of Pippin taking the pictures, so he filed the order to protect county employees.

Schlegel felt Pippin was "cassing" the building for a possible attack.

Friday, he said he still feels a protection order was the right thing to do.

"I have nothing against Mr. Pippin," Schlegel said. "My concern was his action. We've seen these acts in Colorado and across the country."

Carlos Illescas: 303-954-1175 or [cillescas@denverpost.com](mailto:cillescas@denverpost.com)