

# Kristi Noem fires pilot over a blanket – but is forced to reinstate him to fly home: WSJ

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Homeland Security Secretary Kristi Noem capriciously fired a pilot for an exceedingly petty reason but was forced to immediately reinstate him so she could fly home.

[The Wall Street Journal took a deep dive](#) into the chaos and dysfunction inside the Department of Homeland Security, where multiple sources complained on and off the record about Noem and her top adviser and [purported](#) romantic partner Corey Lewandowski.

"Lewandowski and Noem, who are both married, have publicly denied the reports of the affair, but people said they do little to hide their relationship inside the department," the newspaper reported.

"The pair have lately been using a luxury 737 MAX jet, with a private cabin in back, for their travel around the country, according to people familiar with the matter," the report added. "DHS is leasing the plane but is in the process of acquiring it for approximately \$70 million. DHS has previously used other planes through the Coast Guard or other agencies for the secretary's use."

Noem and Lewandowski frequently [berate](#) senior staffers, [demand](#) polygraph tests for employees they don't trust and routinely fire employees for dubious reasons – such as one incident where Lewandowski fired a U.S. Coast Guard pilot after Noem's blanket was left behind on a plane, according to sources familiar with that incident.

"In the blanket incident, Noem had to switch planes after a maintenance issue was discovered, but her blanket wasn't moved to the second plane, according to the people familiar with the incident," the Journal reported. "The Coast Guard pilot was initially fired and told to take a commercial flight home when they reached their destination. They eventually reinstated the pilot because no one else was available to fly them home."

A DHS spokeswoman did not comment directly on that incident but told the newspaper Noem has "made personnel decisions to deliver excellence."

Lewandowski, who was Trump's first campaign manager in the 2016 election, was passed over as Noem's chief of staff due to his alleged relationship with her, which the president continues to bring up, but has been working as a special government employee well beyond the statutory 130-day limit and has an outside presence in the department.

"In an incident last year that rankled some senior staff at the agency, Lewandowski made it known to top ICE officials that he wanted to be issued a law-enforcement badge and a federally issued gun, according to people familiar with his push," the Journal reported. "Officials are typically only issued a badge and a gun after undergoing law-enforcement training."

Lewandowski passed over a former Immigration and Customs Enforcement official for the top job in that agency after he declined to issue him a badge and gun, and an ICE lawyer was demoted and moved to the Federal Emergency Management Agency after he also declined to sign off.

"Lewandowski eventually persuaded other lawyers to sign off," the Journal reported. "The ICE director's autopen was used to sign the paperwork, the people said."