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[LOCAL NEWS](#)  
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[PODCASTS](#)  
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[FOOD & DINING](#)  
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[TECHNOLOGY](#)  
[TRAVEL](#)  
[TV LISTINGS](#)

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[EXTREMES](#)  
[LACROSSE](#)  
[NUGGETS / NBA](#)  
[OLYMPICS](#)  
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[ROCKIES / MLB](#)  
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## Peña adds voice to migrants'

Ex-mayor leads fight against effort to deny state services

 By [Elizabeth Aguilera](#)  
 Denver Post Staff Writer

Former Denver Mayor Federico Peña will lead the effort to defeat a November ballot initiative that would prohibit undocumented immigrants from receiving state services.

"The proposed constitutional amendment is mean-spirited and will hurt innocent children and create a health care crisis by denying things like immunizations for thousands of Colorado residents," Peña said Tuesday. "I was so troubled about it that I decided I wanted to get involved and help fight this."

Peña is now the chairman of Keep Colorado Safe, formed to challenge the proposed amendment.

The initiative is the brainchild of Defend Colorado Now, led by former Gov. Dick Lamm, former Senate President John Andrews and Fred Elbel.

If voters approve it in November, the amendment would keep undocumented immigrants from receiving any state or local services and would allow citizens to sue any agency or local government entity suspected of providing such services.

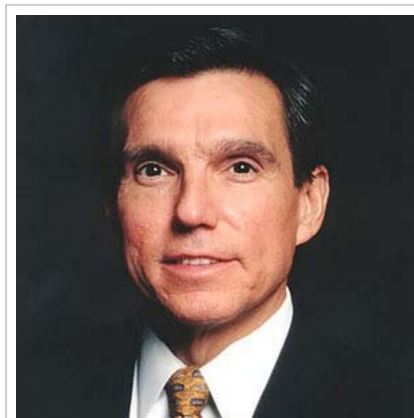
Major state services, such as welfare and food stamps, already are off-limits to undocumented immigrants, and other services, such as emergency medical care and K-12 education, would not be affected, as they are federally mandated.

The presence of Peña, a 59-year-old Democrat, gives the campaign against the proposal added credibility, which, in turn, will deliver a broad base of political support and greater spending power, said Rick Ridder, a Democratic campaign consultant.

"Here's somebody of national stature who is identified with a position regarding immigration, trying to find a sound and middle ground," Ridder said. "There is an element of gravitas to it."

Elbel, of Defend Colorado Now, declined to comment Tuesday on Peña's new role.

Peña was mayor in the 1980s. He served in the Clinton administration as



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transportation secretary from 1993 to 1997 and then one year as energy secretary.

His decision to join Keep Colorado Safe is the boost campaign organizers were looking for, said campaign spokeswoman Polly Baca. "Federico brings credibility, stature and a long public service record," she said.

Organizers plan to capitalize on Peña's talent as a consensus builder, said Mitch Ackerman, head of Service Employees International Union, Local 105, who is on the executive committee.

"His political style is very inclusive, and that is going to be very important to this issue because this cuts across party lines, across ethnic lines," Ackerman said.

Keep Colorado Safe committee members approached Peña after his rousing speech at the May 1 immigrant rally in Civic Center.

"That he's been mayor, been a Cabinet member and is a very successful businessman, shows Federico's ability to reach from the barrios to

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the business community for support," Ridder said.

The strategy and message will focus on the impacts on health care such an amendment will have, Peña said.

"There are other (effects), but I'm going to focus on the ones that people can relate to, and when you talk about hurting children, innocent children, at a time when we are worried about the bird flu and the epidemic of that," he said. "I find it incredulous."

Proponents of the initiative are collecting the needed 67,829 signatures to ensure the proposal gets on the ballot once it is approved by the courts, where it awaits review because of a challenge by Keep Colorado Safe.

Meanwhile, Keep Colorado Safe is building a strategy, deciding on messaging and creating a plan for fundraising, all of which will benefit from Peña's leadership, according to political analysts.

Determining what is considered nonemergency medical service is another concern for the group, as is the ability of nearly anyone to sue an agency

or government worker for helping an alleged undocumented immigrant.

Peña said he is looking back throughout his experiences as a foundation for how to run the campaign.

"This is going to be a very broad-based group of citizens from throughout Colorado," he said. "My work as mayor and my work in Washington taught me that bringing people together is what I do well."

The committee was hoping to find someone like Peña to take the lead, some "big hitter" to help, said former interim chairwoman Lorez Meinhold, executive director of the Colorado Consumer Health Initiative.

"On the other side, you have Dick Lamm, a well-liked Democratic governor," she said. "Now we have Peña, who brings a knowledge of the issue, having been involved in both state and national politics. He understands the levels in which this gets played out on and the impact this could have on Colorado."

*Staff writer Elizabeth Aguilera can be reached at 303-820-1372 or [eaguilera@denverpost.com](mailto:eaguilera@denverpost.com).*

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