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BODY:

One of the reasons Mayor John Hickenlooper has a high approval rating is he's accessible.

Want him to speak at a community center opening? He's there.

A meeting with business owners? What time?

If he can wedge it into his schedule, he'll be there, with that upbeat attitude.

So it was no surprise he attended a breakfast fundraiser Friday for **El Centro Humanitario** Para los Trabajadores, a day-labor center.

But he never thought he'd get surrounded by Minutemen.

Twenty men who oppose illegal immigration arrived uninvited. Their leader, Robert Copley Jr., videotaped the event.

That video is on the websites of the Colorado Minutemen Project and the Colorado Alliance for Immigration Reform. Watching it, you have to wonder why they'd want to document their rude behavior.

One of them calls the mayor "Chickenlooper," though not to his face.

With the video camera rolling, Minutemen encircled the mayor, hammering him with questions about Denver's "sanctuary policies" toward illegal immigrants. The mayor spoke with them, answered their questions, then decided it was time to move on.

"I felt the conversation was over," Hickenlooper recounted. "They weren't saying

anything new."

Hickenlooper said it was the third such encounter he's had with members of this group. They ambushed him at a public meeting this year and again after his State of the City address in July.

When Hickenlooper went back to his table to eat breakfast, several men followed him. One man hovered over the mayor. Finally, someone asked the men to leave the mayor alone.

"They were in his face," said Paul

López, an organizer for the Service Employees International Union. "They weren't respecting his space. It was an attempt to try and intimidate him."

The mayor said he didn't feel like he was being harassed, but he was slightly annoyed by one man who poked him in the chest. "It was light, but most people don't like to be poked," he said.

The Minutemen accomplished little more than spooking some of the 160 people who attended and raised \$19,000 to refurbish the center's building, said executive director Minsun Ji.

People come to the center looking for work, Ji said. While they wait, many take morning English classes.

Copley, a 42-year-old bail enforcer who lives in Lakewood and co-founded the Colorado Minutemen, said he's exercising his right to pressure elected officials to enforce the law.

He feels so strongly about the issue that in April he spent two weeks in Naco, Ariz., with other Minutemen to patrol the border with Mexico.

Copley said he carried his Colt .45 with him, as well as a pocket knife and "other weapons" to protect himself, adding that he relies more on self-defense training.

He said his group in Naco found 50 people sneaking into the U.S. and reported them to the U.S. Border Patrol.

Copley realizes he isn't getting anywhere asking the mayor to get Denver police to arrest undocumented people.

(Hickenlooper says Denver police are underfunded and need to focus on their job, not the job of federal immigration officers.)

Copley and other anti-illegal immigrant folks were unable to persuade Gov. Bill Owens to create holding areas (critics called them internment camps) for illegal immigrants.

But Copley and his group aren't giving up. These days, he's surveilling the day-labor center, though he won't say why.

"I've been checking it out for three months," Copley told me.

Expect more videos on his website, proof of all kinds of dastardly things, like immigrants seeking work and learning English.

Cindy Rodríguez's column appears Tuesdays and Thursdays in Scene. Contact her at 303-820-1211 or crodriguez@denverpost.com.

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