

One Clue That Kyrsten Sinema Is Retiring: Her Weird Spending SECURITY DEPOSIT

Kyrsten Sinema is spending more than \$100,000 a month on personal security, barely raising money, and shelling out for first-class plane tickets—after railing against first class.



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Once upon a time, Sen. [Kyrsten Sinema](#) (I-AZ) crusaded against politicians cashing in on perks of their office.

In 2018, as a U.S. House member and Senate candidate, Sinema co-wrote a bill seeking to crack down on lawmaker use of public funds for “first class air travel,” among other luxuries.

“Arizonans are sick and tired of seeing Washington bureaucrats use their hard-earned tax dollars for personal gain,” Sinema said in a constituent email from July 2018, citing “private luxury travel” specifically.

Now, as Sinema reportedly considers whether to run for another term in 2024, it’s hard to overstate the degree to which she has become a caricature of the type of politician she once bashed.

On Monday, The Daily Beast reported on Sinema’s unusual spending of \$210,000 in taxpayer funds on private chartered air travel since 2020—a practice that she herself had tried to ban just six years earlier.

But if Sinema pushes the envelope on her use of public funds, her latest campaign finance filings reveal her comfort with spending donor money on just about any perk under the sun—stays at five-star European hotels, luxury vehicles, first-class airfare, and splurges at plush West Coast vineyards.

On top of all of that, Sinema’s personal security expenses carry a staggering burn rate of more than \$100,000 a month, most of it to one person—Tulsi Gabbard’s sister.

According to Federal Election Commission filings made public this week, for instance, Sinema’s personal political action committee—the “Getting Stuff Done PAC”—spent over \$5,800 on first-class airfare for the senator in the second half of 2023.

Unusually, the PAC paid nearly \$4,000 in airfare in August not to an airline, but to the big tobacco conglomerate Altria.

It also paid \$1,800 in airfare to FedEx Corporation Travel. Both expenses note they were used for “first-class airfare at fair market value.”

According to Brendan Fischer, executive director of the watchdog group Documented, the specific language of the note very likely means Sinema’s PAC paid Altria and FedEx for travel on private corporate jets at a first class rate.

“When a Senator (or their staffer) flies on a private jet for a leadership PAC trip, the PAC must reimburse the jet’s owner for the cost of a first-class ticket,” Fischer said. “So based on these FEC reports, Sinema or a staffer hitched rides on corporate jets owned by Altria and FedEx.”

A Sinema spokesperson didn’t respond to questions from The Daily Beast about the nature of these expenses.

Beyond the private airfare, the PAC also underwrote the Arizona senator’s stays in July and October 2023 at the five-star [Le Roch Hotel & Spa](#) in Paris, for a total of \$7,600, and paid the tab for her \$2,500 stay in July at the [Edition Hotel](#) in Madrid, billed as a “luxury lifestyle urban five-star resort.”



Sen Kyrsten Sinema (I-AZ) speaks

to reporters during a vote in the Senate Chambers.

Photo by Anna Moneymaker/Getty Images

The PAC also poured out around \$6,000 to half a dozen wineries in California and Oregon, including about \$520 to Three Sticks Wines, the Sonoma County vineyard where Sinema earned \$1,170.40 [as a summer intern in 2020](#).

Sinema's campaign, meanwhile, shelled out nearly \$2,000 in November 2023 to Corporate Paris, a high-end car service based in Paris which operates internationally; it also paid \$434 in October for a ticket on the Eurostar high-speed rail line, best known for shuttling passengers between London and Paris.

Under FEC rules, campaigns can pay for a candidate's travel expenses if the purpose is related to campaigning or fundraising. In the past, Sinema has made liberal use of what is permitted under the letter of the rules. In May 2023, [The Daily Beast reported](#) on how Sinema appeared to add meetings with donors to trips she had planned for marathons and triathlon competitions, allowing her to pay for hotels and flights to her races with campaign funds.

It's unclear to what extent Sinema was fundraising or conducting campaign activity in Paris or Madrid—but that doesn't matter, because the PAC that paid those costs isn't her campaign. Instead, "Getting Stuff Done" is a leadership PAC, a type of committee that is allowed to pay for just about anything under the sun, essentially doubling as a [personal slush fund](#) for the candidate. A spokesperson for Sinema did not respond to questions about the spending on Europe travel, either.

Political insiders in Washington and Arizona are parsing Sinema's every move to figure out if she will file for re-election by the April 8 deadline. The optics of the senator's spending habits, plus the anemic \$594,000 she raised in the fourth quarter, suggest a battle against Rep. Ruben Gallego (D-AZ) and GOP candidate Kari Lake could be even tougher for her than anticipated.

According to Saurav Ghosh, director of campaign finance reform at the nonpartisan Campaign Legal Center, Sinema's "risk tolerance of pushing right up against the rules is quite high for someone as prominent as she is."

More so than her spending on luxury travel, Sinema's outlays for personal security have been truly mind-boggling—an average of more than \$100,000 a month.

In total, Sinema's campaign spent more than \$350,000 on security and related expenses from July to December 2023, while her leadership PAC spent over \$280,000 on those same costs. Combined, that's more than \$630,000 for personal security services over the last six months of the year, or \$105,000 a month.

That total represents more than one out of every six dollars spent by her campaign and PAC—a remarkably high share for a time period where a battleground state senator like Sinema would be expected to ramp up her political activity.

“That amount of money,” Fischer said, “is just mind-boggling.”

Ghosh added that in today’s political climate, where some high-profile lawmakers like Sinema no doubt face many legitimate threats, the FEC has “shied away from second-guessing the decisions that officeholders are making about spending their donors’ money on security.”

Notably, Sinema continues to steer huge sums of cash for security to Vrindivan Bellord, the sister of Sinema’s former colleague Tulsi Gabbard. TOA Group LLC, the organization registered to Bellord, raked in \$232,000 from both Sinema’s campaign and leadership PAC from August to December 2023.

Because the payments to Bellord are aggregated into large lump sums—and not reported out separately and specifically, as is the typical FEC standard—it is extremely difficult to ascertain exactly what Sinema’s campaign funds are being spent on.

Last year, [ethics experts told The Daily Beast](#) that the senator’s apparent arrangement with a close associate—whose LLC has no other clients—raised ethical red flags. Since March 2022, Sinema’s campaign and PAC have paid over \$1.2 million in total to TOA Group.

Ghosh said the continued business relationship between Sinema and Bellord “doesn’t look good from an optics standpoint.”

“It happens all the time, unfortunately—you have a family member or friend with a connection to a candidate, who has no prior experience providing the service, that obviously looks like a sweetheart deal,” he said. “It’s something donors should think about when deciding who to give their money to.”

But the latest FEC filings show Sinema spending heavily on security with other contractors for the first time.

Kinsaker Security Group, which appears to be a professional security provider based in suburban Phoenix, was paid \$225,000 by Sinema’s campaign and PAC in the final quarter of 2023, with the vast majority of that sum coming from Sinema’s campaign.

In November 2023, Sinema’s campaign purchased what was listed as a “security vehicle” for \$77,000 from a Chevrolet dealer in Scottsdale. That would be a ballpark cost for a Chevrolet Suburban, the imposing SUV model frequently used for high-end chauffeuring or by law enforcement to transport government officials. (Sinema’s campaign had already reported spending \$71,000 on a “security detail vehicle” in November 2022.)

But Sinema’s security expenses go even further. Her leadership PAC lists dozens of charges for “security lodging” or “security travel;” there are \$6,870 in hotel stay charges alone.

Between both of Sinema’s committees, there are also over \$3,200 charges to StubHub, TicketMaster, and the famous Red Rocks Amphitheater in Colorado, all of which are listed as security detail “tickets” or “event admission”—presumably for a security guard to accompany Sinema at a concert.

There's even a [\\$342.40](#) campaign payment to Clearwater, Florida-based Mumu Cycling Apparel LLC in August, marked as "security detail equipment."

Sinema's extravagance is all the more remarkable considering how tight her other political spending has been. But those costs may more closely reflect her personal financial life—her annual disclosures don't list any interest-bearing bank accounts, despite the extra \$24,000 she earns annually from her teaching gig at Arizona State University. Those forms only show two retirement accounts, both valued between \$15,000 and \$50,000 in her most recent [filing](#).

At the same time, however, Sinema's political fundraising and spending on actual campaign expenses has begun to slow, and at a curious time—as the 2024 election draws closer.

In the fourth quarter of 2023, Sinema's campaign committee raised \$594,000—less than Sen. Mark Kelly (D), her fellow Arizonan, who is not up for re-election until 2028. Records show the Sinema campaign spent \$141,000 on digital advertising—her largest campaign expense by far besides payroll, but still only half as much as what she spent on security.

In 2023, Sinema's Getting Stuff Done PAC raised \$1.1 million, but spent \$1.7 million. The bulk of the contributions came from corporate PACs and from wealthy donors who are allowed to give up to \$10,000 per election cycle.

The top two individual donors to Sinema's PAC were the co-CEOs of the massive private equity firm KKR; the next biggest donors were executives at the asset management firm The Carlyle Group.

Leadership PACs are generally for spreading cash around to allied politicians, party organizations, or other political causes.

But in all of 2023, Sinema's PAC only spent \$25,000 to support other candidates—\$10,000 each for Sens. Joe Manchin (D-WV) and Jon Tester (D-MT), and \$5,000 to Sen. Martin Heinrich (D-NM).

“That’s why leadership PACs supposedly exist, which is to make contributions to other candidates,” said Fischer, of Documented. “But she is not making contributions—it’s just like a vehicle for Sinema to hold a fundraiser at a five-star resort with corporate lobbyists, and use the proceeds to fund the next fundraiser at a five-star resort.”

“It’s just nuts,” he said.

<https://www.thedailybeast.com/one-clue-that-kyrsten-sinema-is-retiring-her-weird-spending>