

Letter to Senate Ethics Committee Regarding Sinema Private Flights

February 28, 2024

Senator Christopher A. Coons, Chairman
Senator James Lankford, Vice Chairman
U.S. Senate Select Committee on Ethics
220 Hart Building
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Coons and Senator Lankford:

According to recent reporting, Senator Kyrsten Sinema (I-AZ) has billed over \$210,000 in expensive private charter flights to American taxpayers since 2020.¹ This is a disturbing revelation, although not entirely surprising: Senator Sinema has a demonstrated penchant for living the high life on other people's dimes. We urge the Committee to conduct a detailed investigation of Senator Sinema's spending of public funds, and take whatever action in response is justified by the findings.

Since she was elected, Kyrsten Sinema has put her own comfort, convenience, and personal life ahead of the needs of Arizonans. And when she diverts her taxpayer-funded office budget to fund private luxury air travel, Arizonans pay the price.

The congressional database Legistorm shows that Senator Sinema spent \$210,000 on private charter flights over three years, and \$116,000 in 2023 alone — more than the entire annual salaries of most of her staff.

A single private charter flight between Washington, D.C. and Arizona on August 8, 2023 cost the taxpayers an astonishing \$50,000 — more than 33 times the cost of a first-class round-trip ticket to Phoenix on American Airlines.² The trip wasn't an emergency; she flew to Arizona to participate in a bill-signing ceremony that was on President Biden's schedule.

Taxpayer-funded charter air travel by Senators from Washington to home states with ample commercial air service has been so rare that until 2020 it was ordinarily not even permitted by the Senate Rules Committee.³ In fact, in 2017, Senator Sinema herself supported the No Ongoing Perks Enrichment (NOPE) Act, which would have gone so far as to prohibit even first-class commercial air travel by House and Senate members⁴ using public funds.

"Everyone in their personal life, if they had to pay for [a trip like this] themselves, would plan accordingly and try to save money," says David Williams, president of the watchdog group

¹ Daily Beast, [1/29/24](#)

² From aa.com, accessed 1/30/24; one-week advance purchase; next-day return

³ CNN.com, [4/7/20](#)

⁴ FoxNews.com, [2/16/24](#)

Taxpayer Protection Alliance.⁵ But apparently Senator Sinema thinks she's too important to take a commercial flight.

Ordinary Arizonans would never consider chartering a plane to travel from Phoenix to Prescott, which are only about two hours' driving time apart. But Senator Sinema did: in 2022 she spent \$9,400 for a private plane to take her from Phoenix to Prescott and Flagstaff and back. "The normal thing," says Jordan Libowitz, of the watchdog group Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington, about Senator Sinema's charter air travel, is "you get in the car and you drive."⁶ (As *The Daily Beast* notes, Sinema's Arizona colleague Senator Mark Kelly has apparently spent nothing on charter flights since 2020.)

Meanwhile, Senator Sinema spent campaign contributions lavishly on such luxuries as spa stays and winery visits. Her own disclosures suggest that she made more than \$100,000 in potentially illegal campaign expenditures during that period, leading to a formal complaint before the Federal Election Commission.⁷ And the Senator's most recent round of luxury spending is even more disturbing — because taxpayers, not campaign donors, are paying for it.

Senator Sinema seems to think she is entitled to a degree of luxury that's not available to the rest of us, even as she avoids the public who elected her — by dodging reporters' questions⁸ and limiting constituent meetings to three minutes each during a short block on Wednesdays.⁹

And most galling of all, during that entire four-year period, she did not host a single public town hall.¹⁰ Her spokesperson told *The Arizona Republic* that "Senator Sinema maximizes her time in Arizona to connect with as many constituents in every corner of the state as possible"¹¹ But her only in-person visit in Arizona in four years was to a private corporate event — open to employees only — at Honeywell in 2022.¹² We note that Honeywell has donated \$75,000 to Senator Sinema's Get Things Done PAC.

Meanwhile, she has her taxpayer-funded staff book massages and physical therapy to support her sports hobby,¹³ and uses campaign and public funds to travel to marathons,¹⁴ where she competes or watches from the sidelines while staying in luxury hotels.

A year ago, several of our groups addressed a letter to your Committee expressing our concerns about apparent violations of Senate ethics rules and election law in how Senator Sinema manages her office staff; she makes them take on household tasks, advance her money, and even schedule and facilitate meetings with campaign donors during the workday.¹⁵ And, as laid out in detail in

⁵ *Daily Beast*, [1/29/24](#)

⁶ *Daily Beast*, [1/29/24](#)

⁷ *New York Post*, [4/20/23](#); *Arizona Republic*, [5/19/23](#); Federal Election Commission, [In the Matter of Sinema for Arizona \(C00508804\) et al.](#), as filed

⁸ For example: KTVK/KTVO Phoenix, [4/21/23](#)

⁹ *Daily Beast*, [12/22/22](#)

¹⁰ *Business Insider*, [1/27/22](#)

¹¹ *Arizona Republic*, [1/29/24](#)

¹² *FoxNews.com*, [2/16/24](#)

¹³ *Senate Ethics Manual*, accessed [1/30/24](#)

¹⁴ *Daily Beast*, [5/14/23](#)

¹⁵ *Daily Beast*, [12/22/22](#); *Daily Mail*, [2/4/22](#)

the FEC complaint, she's spent hundreds of thousands of dollars in ways that are ethically questionable, like funneling huge sums to a personal friend for contract security services,¹⁶ traveling to Europe and California, and visiting spas and vineyards.

Arizonans like us are subsidizing Kyrsten Sinema's sports, wine and travel hobbies; funding her expensive meals and hotel stays; and even paying her friends. We insist that she be reined in, and held to the same standards as any other Senator. She has an obligation to use the funds that have been allocated to her office in a prudent and legal manner, in keeping with the dignity and responsibilities of her high office, and it is the responsibility of your Committee to ensure that she does.

Please promptly initiate an investigation into these most recent reports of misuse of funds by Senator Sinema — which, again, we note are substantiated by evidence — and take the necessary action.

Sincerely,

Activate 48
AZ Medicare for All Coalition
Change for Arizona 2024
For All
Fuerte Arts Movement
Living United for Change in Arizona (LUCHA)
Mi Familia Vota
National Organization of Women AZ Chapter
Progress Arizona
Progressive Democrats of America - Arizona
Protect Our Communities
Quantum Ethics Project
Stop the Hate Collective
VetsForward

¹⁶ Daily Beast, [2/23/23](#)