



To: Interested Parties

Fr: Adam Jentleson, Executive Director, Battle Born Collective

Re: New Poll Sheds Some Light on the Question: What is Sinema Doing?

Dt: July 21, 2021

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Over the past six months, many supporters of Senator Kyrsten Sinema have found themselves scratching their heads over her actions. After running and winning her Senate seat with the full backing of the Democratic party and grassroots leaders, Sinema has somewhat inexplicably turned her back on priorities she used to support. While her controversial stances have garnered her much media attention, it has come at the cost of President Joe Biden's success. As we speak, Sinema is blocking major pieces of Biden's agenda, including many priorities she has claimed to support in the past. Given that Sinema began her political career as a supporter of Ralph Nader and a member of the Green Party, her recent turn has been especially surprising.

Sinema's recent ideological pivot is made even more inexplicable by the existence of other, successful models set by senators in comparable or more challenging political environments. Her fellow Arizonan, Senator Mark Kelly, has firmly backed President Biden's agenda, and as a result Kelly is in a stronger political position than Sinema. Even senators like Jon Tester in redder states have made clear that they would be open to filibuster reform if Republicans continue to block President Biden's agenda.

This topic is not academic because Sinema's actions have sharply negative consequences for the people and causes progressives care about, and which she claims to champion. Sinema is standing in the way of passing critical provisions like voting rights, the PRO Act, the Equality Act, the DREAM Act, and background checks. The biggest obstacle in the way of passage for these priorities is the filibuster. While Manchin remains an issue, if Sinema were to shift, it would increase the pressure on Manchin and the chances of success for all of these priorities.

Sinema is also making it harder for Democrats to maintain control of Congress. By blocking voting rights legislation such as the John Lewis Voting Rights Act and the For the People Act, Sinema is preventing the electoral playing field from being leveled, and protecting the entrenched, manufactured advantages Republicans have built for themselves. In Arizona, she is hurting Kelly's chances at re-election. A McConnell-aligned group, One Nation, [recently went up with an ad](#) that uses Sinema's positions to attack Kelly, painting him as a "liberal extremist" for not standing with Sinema on the filibuster.

Through these actions, Sinema is squandering the massive investments of time, money and energy made by so many on her behalf.

### **Sinema's actions and their consequences beg the question: What is she doing? And why?**

We got a peek at a [new poll](#) from our friends at Data for Progress that sheds some light on these questions. (If you're not familiar with DFP, they are a highly accurate polling firm dedicated to advancing the progressive agenda. For the past few cycles, they have consistently been rated one of the most accurate pollsters in the nation; they recently nailed the extremely difficult-to-poll New York City mayoral race to within a decimal point.)

This new poll suggests three possible explanations for what Sinema is doing.

#### **Scenario 1: Sinema has miscalculated, and unnecessarily rendered herself vulnerable to a primary challenge.**

The poll shows that among likely Democratic primary voters, 66% said they would vote for another candidate who will champion filibuster reform, versus only 22% who would vote to re-elect Sinema if she continues to keep the filibuster intact. Compared to other Democrats, Sinema's favorability rating falls far short. Joe Biden and Mark Kelly have net +91 and +60 favorability among Democrats, respectively, compared to Sinema's net +3.

This shows that Sinema had angered more than the far left. Discontent with her positioning ranges across the party. She has left a wide open lane to challenge her in a primary, since a candidate can simply run as a Democrat who will actually support Democratic priorities.

Arizona is not West Virginia: Democrats are strong in Arizona, and Sinema relies on the organizations who helped put her in the Senate. If they turn against her, and toward one of her credible challengers, she could very well lose a primary.

#### **Scenario 2: Sinema is planning to leave the Democratic Party and run as an independent.**

Another possibility is that Sinema is courting independents and moderate Republicans to gear up for switching parties and running as an independent. The poll finds that 40% of independents and 36% of Republicans approve of Sinema's job performance. For reference, Biden's approval among Republicans is 14% and Kelly's is 22%.

Notably, switching to the GOP does not seem like a viable option. While her standing among Republicans is good for a Democrat, her favorability lags far behind the levels that would likely

be necessary to win a GOP primary. For comparison, Governor Doug Ducey is at 69% among Republicans, compared to Sinema's 34%.

Running as an independent is more plausible, although even there, her chances of success appear relatively low. In a three-way election, Democratic and Republican voters would be drawn back to their party's candidate, and independents are not showing any special inclination towards Sinema. Despite all of her gestures at independence, Kelly is outperforming her with independents: Kelly's net job approval is 13 points higher among Arizona independents than Sinema's.

**Scenario 3: Sinema has calculated that Democrats will lose in 2022 and is promoting herself at their expense.**

A final scenario is that Sinema is taking a go-it-alone approach on the assumption that Democrats will lose the House and Senate in 2022. In some ways, this is the Occam's razor explanation. Her stances are gaining her extensive media attention, while threatening core Democratic priorities and Democratic control of Congress.

**Conclusion**

None of the three scenarios outlined above are encouraging. They all suggest that either Sinema has miscalculated, or that she feels free to turn against those who supported her and helped secure her seat.

One scenario that seems vanishingly unlikely is that Sinema is taking these positions out of some deeply held commitment to Senate tradition or bipartisanship. Her defense of the filibuster is characterized by inaccuracies and misstatements. There is simply nothing in Sinema's career to suggest a deeply-held commitment to tradition, and a significant body of evidence to the contrary. Sinema has previously decried the filibuster. In a [video recording](#), she admonished the "false pressure to get to 60" votes. The idea that her actions are driven by some late, road-to-Damascus conversion to Senate institutionalism strains credulity.

**While Sinema's actions are perplexing, the upshot is clear: Those who have supported her deserve answers.**

If Sinema intends to remain a Democrat, she should explain why she feels free to betray positions and causes she once championed, even as her fellow Arizonan - and even senators in redder states - forge more productive paths.

If she is planning to switch parties, it would be reasonable for donors, party members, grassroots leaders, and others who supported her to ask her if this is her plan. Given Sinema's history of party-switching, it's an entirely reasonable question.<sup>1</sup>

If she is simply promoting herself at the expense of fellow Democrats, that would be an extremely cynical strategy that has yielded negative policy consequences and questionable political results.

One way or another, the questions are worth asking, and all involved can make any decisions about future support accordingly.

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<sup>1</sup> Prior to 2004, Kyrsten Sinema was a member of the Arizona Green Party. Source: <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/09/24/us/politics/kyrsten-sinema-arizona.html>