

Sen. John McCain ads link rival Kelli Ward to 'chemtrails' conspiracy theory

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Dan Nowicki, The Republic | azcentral.com

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(Photo: Thomas Hawthorne/The Republic)

After months of largely ignoring his chief Republican primary rival, U.S. Sen. John McCain's re-election team has launched an online advertising campaign linking former state Sen. Kelli Ward to the "chemtrails" conspiracy theory.

McCain, R-Ariz., is attempting to brand Ward as "Chemtrail Kelli" because in 2014 [she organized a town-hall meeting \(/story/news/politics/2014/06/27/state-lawmaker-listens-concerns-chemtrails/11445993/\)](http://www.azcentral.com/story/news/politics/2014/06/27/state-lawmaker-listens-concerns-chemtrails/11445993/) — which included the participation of taxpayer-paid state environmental staffers — to discuss community concerns about "chemtrails." The anti-government conspiracy theory speculates airplanes are spraying, through visible contrails that streak the skies, dangerous chemicals to change the weather or for darker motives.

"Kelli Ward's decision to host a forum regarding a debunked conspiracy theory using Arizona tax dollars shows her bad judgment," McCain campaign spokeswoman Lorna Romero said. "The fact is that Kelli Ward has often sided with conspiracy theorists, proving that she is too dangerous for Arizona families."

So far, the McCain campaign has circulated two videos with the "Chemtrail Kelli" theme on social media and other online platforms. A third is expected to launch after Memorial Day. The more recent video release ties Ward to right-wing conspiracy-pusher Alex Jones, who runs [the Infowars website \(http://www.infowars.com/\)](http://www.infowars.com/) and has hosted Ward on his radio program.

Chemtrail Kelli Ward's Bad Judgment



"... Ward's bad judgment keeps dangerous company," the ad's narrator says before a montage of clips of a wild-eyed Jones talking about chemtrails and "aliens."

"Chemtrail Kelli Ward fuels the conspiracy, using your tax dollars," the narrator adds.

"Kelli Ward, you're amazing. I'm going to pray that you get into the Senate," Jones says at the end of the video.

Is McCain in trouble? 5 keys to his re-election race

(<http://www.azcentral.com/story/news/politics/azdc/2016/05/22/5-takeaways-sen-john-mccain-re-election-race/84668758/>)

Ward, a Lake Havasu City Republican, has emphatically denied believing (<http://www.azcentral.com/story/news/politics/azdc/2015/04/18/kelli-ward-i-dont-believe-in-chemtrails/25968215/>) in the "chemtrails" theory herself, despite holding the Kingman event for her constituents.

"Senator McCain is running scared silly," Ward campaign spokesman Stephen Sebastian said in an emailed statement to *The Arizona Republic*. "Conspiracy theories are intellectually implausible because they require secrecy about complex coordination on a massive scale. When incorrect information about environmental quality issues is causing enough consternation to fill up a town hall meeting, it is a senator's job to connect concerned constituents with expert government officials to correct and clarify misconceptions."

Sebastian also protested what he called a double-standard, pointing to a story (<http://talkingpointsmemo.com/dc/john-mccain-letter-chemtrails>) on the liberal Talking Points Memo website that reported McCain himself in April 2015 forwarded to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency a letter expressing concerns about chemtrails. The TPM story says the McCain letter was provided to the website by Democratic U.S. Rep. Ann Kirkpatrick's U.S. Senate campaign.

Kelli Ward burning through U.S. Senate campaign cash

(<http://www.azcentral.com/story/news/politics/azdc/2016/02/13/kelli-ward-burning-through-arizona-senate-campaign-cash/80314082/>)

Why is Ward, "a Duke-educated woman and family physician," demeaned as a "documented conspiracy theorist" when McCain essentially did the same thing, Sebastian asked.

"Senator McCain used to believe in 'straight talk' and a higher level of debate," Sebastian said. "Sadly he has sunk to cynical and sexist character attacks to distract Arizona voters from his broken promises to fix the VA (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs) and secure the border."

Romero, McCain's spokeswoman, dismissed the comparison between McCain forwarding a letter to the EPA and Ward hosting a town-hall as preposterous.

"It's standard policy to forward constituent correspondence outside the purview of the Senate office to a relevant federal agency," Romero said in a written statement to *The Republic*. "The Senate office receives more than 600,000 pieces of mail per year, on issues ranging from veterans' benefits to UFOs. If you're trying to compare that to holding an official taxpayer-funded town hall meeting to entertain chemtrail conspiracy theories, you may have been abducted by aliens yourself."

Roberts: Kelli Ward courts conspiracy nut Alex Jones

(<http://www.azcentral.com/story/opinion/op-ed/laurieroberts/2016/03/24/roberts-kelli-ward-courts-conspiracy-nut-alex-jones/82223726/>)

In a related development, the liberal *Mother Jones* website on Thursday highlighted audio of Ward (<http://www.motherjones.com/politics/2016/05/kelli-ward-john-mccain-agenda-21>) talking with conspiracy-mongers Pete Santilli and Luca Zanna.

Santilli, an Internet radio host and 9/11 "truther," in September led "Operation Detain McCain," an effort to make a citizen's arrest of McCain (</story/news/local/phoenix/breaking/2015/09/05/anti-senator-mccain-rally-phoenix/71780582/>) at his Phoenix Senate office. Earlier this year, Santilli himself was arrested in connection with the weeks-long armed occupation (</story/news/2016/01/26/reports-protest-group-leader-ammon-bundy-arrested/79380650/?hootPostID=b33b4592d0b4ce59727130684403a6eb>) of a federal wildlife refuge in Oregon. Santilli has said he was at the scene as a journalist.

In the interview, Santilli and Ward talked about meeting each other in person at the 2014 Bundy Ranch standoff in Nevada.

FBI: Neoconservative radio show host Peter Santilli also arrested in Oregon sweep <https://t.co/sZAj0vRYxO>
(<https://t.co/sZAj0vRYxO>)[pic.twitter.com/zosFKLAb70](https://t.co/sZAj0vRYxO)
(<https://t.co/zosFKLAb70>)

— azcentral (@azcentral) January 27, 2016
(<https://twitter.com/azcentral/status/692210096676429824>)

Zanna, a radio host on Needles, Calif.-based KTOX-AM (1340), has a website called Love, Guns and Freedom (<http://www.lovegunsfreedom.com/>). Visitors can download a free copy of his booklet, "How to Defeat the New World Order." The intro of his 2013 radio interview with Ward said the broadcast was originating from "deep within the borders of occupied federal territory known as California."

Among other topics, Zanna echoes a far-fetched claim (<http://www.snopes.com/politics/conspiracy/russiansecurity.asp>) made on Jones' Infowars (<http://www.infowars.com/russian-forces-to-provide-security-at-us-events/>) and other conspiracy websites that there is a possibility of Russian and/or Chinese troops responding inside the United States in the event of a national emergency. He engaged Ward, then still a member of the Arizona Senate, in a conversation about military helicopters flying over central Phoenix. He also brought up United National helicopters in the skies over northwestern Arizona.

"I can tell you that I have an apartment down in Phoenix that I stay in during the session and I hear helicopters all the time, outside my window," Ward said when asked about military helicopters flying in Phoenix. "Now I don't know if they are medical helicopters. I don't know if they are searching for bad guys down on the ground because there is some kind of a shooting or some kind of an activity. ... And so I hear them. I hear them almost every night."

AZ State Senator Kelli Ward with Luca Zanna on Love Guns Freedom..



Sebastian, Ward's campaign spokesman, distanced Ward from Zanna.

"Dr. Ward did not know that Luca Zanna was such a lunatic before agreeing to the interview," Sebastian told *The Republic*. "However, Dr. Ward's polite silence and uncomfortable laughter did not indicate her assent to Zanna's crackpot insinuations. When he suggested that people were disappearing, Dr. Ward changed the subject to Senate rule changes."

As to Ward's comments about hearing helicopters, Sebastian said: "Medical and police helicopters are a common sound in any large city, and special operations forces do regularly conduct staged rescue exercises in urban areas as part of their training, as documented in the *Washington Post* today (<https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/checkpoint/wp/2016/05/26/special-operations-troops-assaulted-downtown-tampa-all-to-thunderous-applause/>) (Thursday). Nothing strange about it."

For his part, McCain has yet to target Ward in a television ad. His first spot of the campaign (<http://story/news/politics/azdc/2016/05/16/sen-john-mccain-attacks-ann-kirkpatrick-over-obamacare-vote/84456332/>) went after Kirkpatrick for voting for the Affordable Care Act, or "Obamacare." McCain's second TV commercial (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pcmgxa8ew5I>), which will run for three weeks starting Tuesday, focuses on his support for Luke Air Force Base in the West Valley.

The pro-McCain U.S. Chamber of Commerce also is running a television ad (<http://story/news/politics/azdc/2016/05/25/us-chamber-launches-obamacare-tv-attack-rep-ann-kirkpatrick/84931264/>) criticizing Kirkpatrick on the health-care issue.

Sen. John McCain attacks Ann Kirkpatrick over 'Obamacare' vote (<http://www.azcentral.com/story/news/politics/azdc/2016/05/16/sen-john-mccain-attacks-ann-kirkpatrick-over-obamacare-vote/84456332/>)

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