

# Reynolds used plane twice a month

## COVID relief paid \$4.7M for police aircraft

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Des Moines Register  
USA TODAY NETWORK

Republican Iowa Gov. Kim Reynolds took trips in the state's newest plane about once every two weeks over the course of a year, according to records obtained by the Des Moines Register, part of the USA TODAY Network.

A flight log shows how state officials have used the plane in the 13 months since its purchase. The disclosure follows a Feb. 24 report in the Des Moines Register that revealed Reynolds had been using the plane in an apparent break with past practice.

From Jan. 21, 2025, through Feb. 22 of this year, the log shows 138 total flights on Iowa State Patrol's Cessna 208B Grand Caravan and about 322 hours of flight time.

An invoice provided to the Des Moines Register in response to an open records request also revealed that the state spent \$4.7 million on the purchase of the Grand Caravan in late 2024.

The Iowa Department of Public Safety, the State Patrol's parent agency, bought the plane with federal COVID-19 relief funds that Congress allocated to state governments to help with the health and economic challenges that the pandemic caused.

Reynolds flew in the Grand Caravan for about 49 hours on 25 trips, the log shows. Her flights account for about 15% of total hours logged on the plane and 18% of total trips during that period.

The Iowa Democratic Party has criticized Reynolds' use of the plane.

Terra Hernandez, a party spokesperson, said in a Feb. 24 statement that the practice was "disrespectful" to taxpayers.

The use of a plane to transport a governor is not unique to Iowa, but the practice is expensive. Flying a Grand Caravan costs about \$830 an hour, according to Aviacost, a platform that tracks the price of operating various planes.

Reynolds' gubernatorial predecessor,



The Iowa Department of Public Safety bought a \$4.7 million plane with COVID-19 relief funds, and Gov. Kim Reynolds has used it to travel to 25 events over the course of 13 months. PROVIDED BY THE IOWA DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC SAFETY

fellow Republican Terry Branstad, previously said state officials sold a fleet of planes used for executive travel because maintaining them was a poor way to spend public money. He came under scrutiny during his first term in the 1980s for his frequent flights, sometimes to political events.

In addition to transporting the governor, State Patrol pilots have used the plane for training flights, accounting for about 20% of all hours logged on the Grand Caravan.

State officials redacted 53 entries in the log, saying details of those flights were exempt from disclosure under Iowa's open records law. The entries represent "law enforcement sensitive information," an Iowa Department of Public Safety spokesperson said. The redacted entries account for 53% of hours logged on the plane.

State Patrol pilots have occasionally used the plane to move inmates or items or to test the plane's equipment.

During a Feb. 26 news conference, Reynolds defended the purchase, telling reporters that Public Safety Commissioner Stephen Bayens asked for the plane. The Grand Caravan is bigger than the other five planes the State Patrol uses. Among other purposes, Reynolds

said, the plane allows a group of officers and K-9s to fly together to drug busts.

Reynolds said she only occasionally uses the Grand Caravan and only flies to official events. Flying allows her to work in Des Moines longer and hold more meetings before traveling, she added.

"I don't feel bad about it," she said during the news conference. "It's how I get out and get into the state and actually accomplish more."

Reynolds told reporters her flights represented "less than 3%" of "the 2025 hours flown." The Grand Caravan's logbook reflects her flights occupied a larger share of that particular plane's use.

Mason Mauro, a spokesperson for the governor, clarified in an email March 4, that Reynolds was referring to the amount of time she flies as a fraction of total flights in all six of the State Patrol's planes.

Reynolds flew about 54½ hours on state planes in 2025, Mauro said. About 5½ of those hours were likely on another State Patrol plane.

While Reynolds said she uses the plane only for official functions, the dates of some flights in the logbook indicate she has attended political events during those trips.

In 2025, a couple of months after the

purchase of the Grand Caravan, state Public Safety added a new responsibility to the State Patrol's air wing division in an annual report: "executive travel." That responsibility did not appear in previous reports.

Regardless of the expense, Iowa Ethics and Campaign Disclosure Board Executive Director Erica Eckley said the state's rules allow the governor to travel by plane to official events — that is, events that a governor believes she needs to attend to represent Iowa's residents.

For example, the flight log states Reynolds flew in the Grand Caravan to Eden Prairie, Minnesota, on July 17. She later announced in an online post that she pitched her state to business leaders there.

The log and Reynolds' social media posts show the governor attended a couple of political functions around the state after flying to those communities.

Mauro said Reynolds flew there for official meetings with business leaders, local government employees, farmers and a behavioral health provider during those trips. The governor's campaign committee later reimbursed the state for the miles driven from her official events to the political events in those communities, he said.

The committee, Reynolds for Iowa, reimbursed the state a total of \$920 for travel in 2025, according to a campaign finance report. The document does not itemize each trip.

Eckley said reimbursing the state for the specific miles driven between an official event and a political event aligns with a requirement spelled out by the ethics board in a 2011 opinion.

Because of the redactions, the version of the flight log shared with the Des Moines Register does not clarify how the Iowa State Patrol generally uses the Grand Caravan.

In its 2025 annual report, state Public Safety officials wrote that the State Patrol air wing division's "core mission" is traffic safety. The officials added that the division also searches for missing people and fugitives, assesses natural disasters, moves prisoners, moves executives, monitors drug traffickers and investigates other crimes.

# U.S. could resume intel operations in Mali

## Militants gaining ground in country's vast terrain

Jessica Donati  
REUTERS

DAKAR, Senegal — The U.S. is nearing a deal with Mali that will allow Washington to resume flying aircraft and drones over the West African country's airspace to gather intelligence on jihadist groups linked to al-Qaida, according to one current U.S. official and a former U.S. official.

Last month, Washington made the first move to implement the agreement by lifting sanctions targeting the defense minister and other senior officials who it said had ties with Russian mercenaries, a key request by Mali's government, the sources said. The U.S. hopes this will lead Mali to grant the U.S. permission to fly intelligence-gathering missions over the country's vast terrain where jihadists have been gaining ground, according to the current and former U.S. officials.

The Trump administration has sought to rebuild ties with Mali after they came under strain during the previous administration. In Washington, the goal to resume intelligence gathering is partly driven by a desire to find an American pilot who was kidnapped by armed men while working for Christian missionaries in neighboring Niger. The pilot is currently believed to be held in Mali by the local al-Qaida affiliate, Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin, the officials said.

The State Department declined to comment.

A Malian government spokesperson did not respond to a request for comment. But after the sanctions were lifted on Feb. 27, Mali's government praised the move, describing it as a step that would help "improve relations between our two countries, while reiterating respect for national sovereignty."

Mali, a gold-producing, landlocked nation in the Sahel region of Africa, is roughly twice the size of France. Like several of its neighbors in the Sahel, it is battling an increasingly violent insurgency led by JNIM.

JNIM has pursued widespread kid-



Motorcyclists line up to get fuel at one of the few gas stations with supply in Bamako, Mali, on Dec. 10, 2025. Jihadists attacked a fuel tanker convoy traveling through Mali late last year, according to the militants and the army.

AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES FILE

napping campaigns targeting foreign nationals to finance its operations in West Africa, according to U.S. crisis-monitoring group Armed Conflict Location & Event Data.

### Rebuilding ties despite setbacks

The top U.S. envoy to Africa, Nick Checker, visited Mali last month to meet with Malian Foreign Minister Abdoulaye Diop.

The goal was to convey Washington's "desire to chart a new course in the bilateral relationship and move past policy missteps," according to the State Department, an apparent reference to Biden administration policies. Diop praised American efforts to relaunch the relationship with a new approach based on mutual respect for its sovereignty and noninterference.

The Trump administration has largely dropped efforts to promote elections in the Sahel region, where military officials have overthrown elected but unpopular, Western-backed governments in recent years and turned to Russia for security support. That has been a wel-



Malian Foreign Minister Abdoulaye Diop met in February with the top U.S. envoy to Africa, Nick Checker. PAVEL BEDNYAKOV/POOL/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES FILE

come move in Bamako and other Sahelian capitals.

In the Sahel, perceived lecturing by Washington is often viewed as paternalistic and even racist, according to Catherine Nzuki of the Center for Strategic and International Studies, a U.S.-based think tank, which published a note about the U.S. loss of a base in Niger.

The Biden administration's efforts to promote democracy after the coups helped trigger a break with Niger in 2024, with Niamey ordering all U.S. troops to leave a newly built, sprawling drone base in Agadez after a meeting with Biden officials went poorly. The multimillion-dollar base was intended to underpin intelligence-gathering operations across the region.

But the Trump administration's effort to improve relations has also encountered setbacks. Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso in December took steps to implement a reciprocal travel ban on Americans after the three nations were added to the White House's travel ban list.

### Leaders under growing strain

In Mali, militants allied with al-Qaida and other groups have gained influence, spreading across the region despite a nearly decadelong intervention backed by France and the West, and later the efforts of Russian mercenaries. Over the past year, suspected jihadists have attacked gold mining assets and key highways, starving the capital of fuel for businesses and schools.

Reuters was unable to determine whether Mali was taking steps to give Washington permission to conduct missions in its airspace or when it was expected to take action.

The former U.S. official said cooperation was likely to come eventually because it was in Mali's interest to allow the United States to resume intelligence-gathering operations.

"They will derive direct benefit from U.S. ISR activities where their national capabilities are insufficient," the former official said, referring to intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance.

"This overflight would build on likely ongoing cooperation with other USG entities," the former official added, referring to U.S. government agencies.

The United States has shared intelligence with Mali that helped lead to a strike on senior JNIM leadership last year.

It wasn't immediately clear where the United States might base aircraft if Mali proceeds with granting permission to resume overflight operations.