

# [***UberX and mismatched furniture: How Trump campaign is reining in costs as it prepares for general election***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6BG8-5301-JBSS-S0NT-00000-00&context=1516831)

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**Body**

(CNN) &#8212; As former President [*Donald Trump*](https://www.cnn.com/politics/president-donald-trump-45) gears up for a costly general election campaign with President [*Joe Biden*](https://www.cnn.com/politics/joe-biden) and faces staggering legal expenses of his own, his campaign is actively working to keep costs in check.

Senior adviser Susie Wiles has privately joked that the campaign staff call her a "miser" - and she's not entirely wrong.

After a recent event, one Trump staffer was discussing the Uber he took home before quickly clarifying to the group that it was an UberX, and the cheapest available option. "Susie would kill me if she thought I spent more than I had to," the person noted, implying that Wiles paid such close attention to the line items that she would notice a lower-level staffer's car choice - a potentially marginal cost difference.

Senior adviser Chris LaCivita, meanwhile, has privately grumbled that the former president's signature large rallies are too expensive.Hehas encouraged the team to make a concerted effort to host his events at smaller, less costly venues, according to conversations with multiple Trump advisers. He has also [*said publicly*](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E_RJKAJb1z0) that the former president has stopped hosting as many rallies due to the enormous cost.

"Any organization that is concerned, or at least puts that level of concern, at the forefront, you're gonna get better bids for business," LaCivita told CNN about the campaign's attempt to cut costs across the board. "If you're not spending the majority of your money on touching voters, and pushing your candidate, then you're not running a good campaign."

One of the driving forces for why the Trump campaign has been so diligent about cost-cutting, the advisers say, is because they fear a repeat of the former president's 2020 general election financial struggles, when the campaign burned through hundreds of millions of dollars in a matter of months that left Trump's team [*facing an alarming cash crunch*](https://www.nytimes.com/2020/09/07/us/politics/trump-election-campaign-fundraising.html) weeks before the November 2020 election.

In addition to reining in spending on rallies and transportation, the campaign is also keeping a tight leash on the money being spent on hotels, meals and other everyday expenses typically associated with a large political operation, the advisers say. Even the furniture found in Trump's state headquarters across the country has been meticulously chosen so as not to accrue superfluous costs, one senior adviser noted.

"Anyone that's ever worked on a campaign knows that, at the headquarters, the furniture should be functional, and that's it. Mismatched and functional is the decor of the Trump campaigns' offices," a senior Trump adviser told CNN. "We don't have mahogany desks, and if we do, they're 200 years old and they're falling apart."

The senior Trump adviser noted that the 2020 campaign "went broke."

"From our standpoint, we look at everything through that prism," the adviser said. "The leadership of the campaign is intent on ensuring that that does not happen in this campaign, because that is the greatest sin that can be committed in ***politics***."

The more frugal approach to Trump's 2024 campaign, which has been a point of pride - and, on occasion, frustration for the former president's team - may also now be a necessity.

Trump has been hit with more than a half a billion dollars in legal penalties in recent weeks. In January, the former president was ordered to pay E. Jean Carroll $83.3 million dollars in her civil defamation case. Shortly after that, a New York judge ordered the former president to pay a $355 million judgment - which has since ballooned to $454 million, counting interest - following a civil fraud trial.

And those figures don't even include his mounting legal bills as he faces 91 charges in four criminal indictments. One trial, his New York criminal case involving hush money payments, is slated to begin in Manhattan on March 25.

Trump himself has also personally begun paying for some of his legal expenses, two senior Trump advisers told CNN - a stark departure from someone who has long loathed paying his legal bills and has a history of stiffing lawyers. One senior adviser told CNN Trump has spent at least six figures of his own money to cover the costs of his legal expenses.

In January alone, Trump's leadership PAC paid out more than $2.9 million to law firms and racked up an additional $1.9 million in unpaid legal bills, according to a recent filing with federal regulators.

The leadership fund, Save America PAC, has been the main vehicle underwriting astronomical legal bills for both the former president and some of his allies - spending more than $50 million in 2023, totaling nearly 85% of its spending. The PAC is now running low on money, ending January with a little more than $6 million in available funds.

The financial troubles of Save America, which was seeded with money Trump raised shortly after the 2020 election amid his false claims of election fraud, became apparent last year when Trump began to claw back money that Save America had donated to his super PAC, Make America Great Again, Inc., which was set up to support Trump's current White House bid.

So far, Save America has recovered more than $47 million from the super PAC, and 10% of every dollar Trump's political operation raises is funneled away from his campaign and into Save America.

Financial headwinds

With resounding early state wins, Trump appears to be on a glide path to the Republican presidential nomination - months before the party's July nominating convention. A recent memo circulated by Trump's senior advisers predicted that the former president is just weeks away from securing enough delegates to declare him the presumptive nominee - a turning point in which he'll need the infrastructure of the national GOP, and the funding that accompanies it - to launch his general election campaign.

However, recent filings show that Trump's political operation is trailing the Biden campaign significantly in the money game, entering February with roughly $30 million in cash reserves compared to nearly $56 million in Biden's equivalent account.

The Democratic National Committee has similarly trounced the Republican National Committee - ending January with $24.1 million in its coffers compared to the RNC's $8.7 million.

Trump's strapped financial reality has forced the Trump campaign to get creative in finding new cash avenues to pull from - as well as different ways to preserve resources - to continue funding both Trump's campaign and his legal battles, according to conversations with Trump's advisers and people close to the former president.

The campaign plans to continue relying on Save America for the bulk of his legal expenses, though they also privately acknowledge the financial strain it has faced is a result of the mounting legal bills that are continuing to pile up, the sources said.

Some of the legal bills originally paid for by Save America PAC have also been picked up by the Patriot Legal Defense fund, [*which was set up in 2023*](https://www.cnn.com/2023/07/30/politics/trump-legal-defense-fund/index.html) to help cover the costs of legal fees and lawyers for some of Trump's co-defendants and allies who are facing charges linked to the former president. This fund, which reported raising $1.5 million through the end of last year, will continue to be utilized, Trump's advisers say.

One avenue, however, that his advisers insist is not on the table - at least for now - is asking the RNC to step up and help shoulder the cost.

"There is no expectation of the RNC helping and we have no plans to ask them to divert funds for his legal bills," a senior Trump adviser told CNN.

That stance has come as a surprise to some Trump allies and former RNC members, who had expected thecommittee to revert to its process of helping pay the former president's legal bills when he became the party's nominee, a practice they began implementing while he was in office and continued until he announced his 2024 bid. It's especially surprising, they argue, given Trump's endorsed picks to run the RNC are expected to succeed in their efforts of taking over the committee's leadership.

Last month, Trump officially threw his support behind North Carolina Party Chairman Michael Whatley to serve as the RNC's new chair, and also endorsed his daughter-in-law, Lara Trump, to serve as co-chair.

LaCivita has also been tapped to serve as the RNC chief operating officer, but is expected to continue in his current role as co-campaign manager for the former president.

Trump's advisers argue the decision not to rely on the RNC for help covering the former president's legal costs is two-fold, the most pressing being the committee's current financial straits.

"How are they going to help with his legal fees? With what money?" a Trump adviser told CNN. The RNC entered 2024 with just $8 million in the bank, the lowest figure in a decade. Those fundraising struggles, in part, led Trump to call for new leadership at the committee.

Trump's advisers also argue they would rather use the RNC as a core driver of his general election campaign, preserving its donations to bolster both Trump and the broader infrastructure of the national Republican party.

However, given the strain on resources Trump's political operation is currently facing due to his staggering legal fees and penalties, their aversion to tapping into the RNC's reserves may be short-lived.

One RNC member recently authored a resolution that seeks to ban the RNC from paying Trump's legal bills. The committee's 168 members would have to take up the resolution, with some members saying they believed it was unlikely to pass**.**

Current and former RNC members, meanwhile, insist that their financial problems will improve once Trump becomes the presumptive GOP nominee and they can once again begin using his name and likeness to boost fundraising.

By Alayna Treene, Kristen Holmes and Fredreka Schouten, CNN

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