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Pardons, Inc.

How Trump and His Clemency-for-Cash Racket Let White-Collar Criminals and International Drug Dealers Walk Free and Dodge Billions in Restitution Owed to Their Victims

STAFF REPORT
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INTRODUCTION

President Donald Trump and a coterie of MAGA insiders have built up in his second Administration a cottage industry of shady operatives, big campaign donors, and lawyer influence-brokers who lobby the White House and the Trump family to secure presidential pardons and commutations on behalf of unrepentant white-collar fraudsters and unbending con men, corrupt foreign government officials and kleptocrat presidents, and international narco-traffickers. The new cash-for-clemency underworld operates outside the Department of Justice (DOJ) and its Office of the Pardon Attorney, which traditionally imposed specific proof requirements for recommending pardons: petitioner rehabilitation, remorse, redemption, and paid restitution, in addition to fairness, mercy, and overriding merit. But the MAGA pardon underworld operates entirely on the supplicant's willingness to pay for access to the President and his associates in his inner circle. This shocking new descent in presidential ethics and conduct undermines the federal justice system, robs victims of nearly $1.7 billion in restitution and fines, and effects a massive redistribution of wealth in favor of convicted criminals, MAGA insiders, and the President himself.

On his first day back in office, President Trump pardoned nearly 1,600 rioters and insurrectionists for crimes committed in the storming of the United States Capitol on January 6, 2021. In January 2026, five years after the insurrection, House Judiciary Democrats released two reports examining the effects of that mass pardon. The first report, "Where Are They Now: The Perpetrators of January 6th and the Defenders of Democracy Who Stopped Them," tracked the lives of both the rioters and the law enforcement officers and public servants who repelled them when the President incited an insurrectionary mob to back up the inside coup plotters working to steal the election. The second report, "One Year Later: Assessing the Public Safety Implications of President Trump's Mass Pardons of 1,600 January 6th Rioters and Insurrectionists," detailed the dangerous consequences of releasing so many violent offenders back into our communities. By the fifth anniversary of the attack on the Capitol, at least 33 pardoned insurrectionists had been arrested for or convicted of committing new violent crimes—including sexual assault, possession of child sexual assault material, assault, kidnapping, and reckless homicide. That number has now grown to at least 97, including Andrew Paul Johnson, who was sentenced to life in prison for repeatedly sexually abusing two middle-school aged children and attempting to buy their silence by promising them a share of the millions of dollars in restitution money he expected to receive from the Trump Administration.

If the January 6th pardons were primarily about politics and rewarding his street-fighting foot soldiers and political allies, the industrial-strength pardons that followed have overwhelmingly been about economics, specifically the enrichment of the President, his family, his businesses, and his miscellaneous projects. Pardons, Inc. caters to the highest bidder even if the policy in practice clearly favors right-wing political figures and donors. President Trump's pardon mill is a public-private auction conducted by a rapacious politician helping well-heeled criminals escape confinement and accountability, while leaving their victims without compensation or recourse.

Even by President Trump's debased standards, this is a profoundly disturbing development. During his first term, when President Trump issued a pardon, he usually shortened prison sentences while leaving other components of the sentence, including financial penalties and restitution to victims, "intact and in effect." In his second term, clemency goes much further, erasing hundreds of millions of dollars in unpaid restitution and expressly directing that no further fines or restitution be collected. For the first time in American history, President Trump is also granting clemency to entire business corporations. No president has ever used the clemency power to cancel financial obligations on anything approaching this scale, much less to blatantly allow unrepentant criminals to keep millions of dollars in stolen funds. Whoever said crime doesn't pay has not met Donald Trump and his pardoned class of white-collar criminals.

The cost of this corruption is *staggering*. Last June, House Judiciary Democrats released a memo, "President Trump's Pardons Cheat Victims out of an Astounding $1.3 Billion in Restitution and Fines, Allowing Fraudsters, Tax Evaders, Drug Traffickers to Keep Ill-Gotten Gains," detailing how President Trump's pardons had deprived victims, survivors, and taxpayers of $1.3 billion in restitution and fines owed to them and American taxpayers. In the past year, as Pardons, Inc. has continued to grow, that number has ballooned to nearly $1.7 billion—money that convicted criminals no longer have to pay back to their victims—now that President Trump has wiped away the restitution, fines, and forfeitures they had been ordered to pay as a result of their convictions.

President Trump has thoroughly corrupted the pardon power. This report describes just *some* of the costs of this operation, a cost borne principally by the victims of crime, told through the stories of the criminals who bought, begged, and flattered their way to clemency from the most corrupt White House in American history.

I. PRESIDENT TRUMP SELLS CLEMENCY TO THE HIGHEST BIDDER

Article II of the U.S. Constitution grants the President the power "to grant Reprieves and Pardons for Offences against the United States, except in Cases of Impeachment."

For more than 130 years, presidents of both parties have relied on the Office of the Pardon Attorney at DOJ for neutral advice on clemency. When a person applies for clemency, the career lawyers who work for the Pardon Attorney weigh the request against a detailed list of criteria outlined in the Justice Manual—including the applicant's behavior since the conviction, the seriousness of the offense, and whether the person has accepted responsibility for their crimes and made restitution to their victims.

To be sure, in years past, both Democratic and Republican presidents have granted some controversial pardons. But almost without exception, presidents of both parties have at least consulted with the Pardon Attorney before granting clemency. That system in DOJ exists—or, at least, it did before President Trump—to prevent the White House from even appearing to trade pardons for political favor or personal financial gain.

However, since taking office in 2025, President Trump has largely sidelined both the Pardon Attorney and any pretense of fairness or integrity in the pardon process. Like high-top sneakers, golden watches, and the Bible, the presidential pardon has been turned into White House merchandise for the savvy consumer in the know.

A. Trump's Demolition of the Clemency Process

On March 7, 2025, President Trump fired Pardon Attorney Elizabeth Oyer, a career official, after she declined to recommend restoring the gun rights of actor and Trump supporter Mel Gibson. As Ms. Oyer later testified, she was fired while more than 6,000 clemency applications remained pending before DOJ; her 40-person office of career staff was instead redirected to the completely novel project of restoring gun rights to people with criminal convictions.

On May 8, 2025, when it was clear that the Senate would not confirm election denier, January 6th participant, and Nazi sympathizer Ed Martin to serve as U.S. Attorney for the District of Columbia, President Trump withdrew the nomination and made him the new Pardon Attorney instead. Mr. Martin has since described his philosophy as "No MAGA left behind" and has used his office to privilege clemency applications from the Oath Keepers, the Proud Boys, and the two men convicted of plotting to kidnap Michigan Governor Gretchen Whitmer.

By early 2026, Mr. Martin had "totally decimated" the Office of the Pardon Attorney. At the time of this writing, nearly 14,000 legitimate clemency applications are pending before DOJ. Ed Martin, meanwhile, is reported to show up to work about once a week.

In place of the Pardon Attorney, President Trump created the White House position of "Pardon Czar" and appointed Alice Marie Johnson, herself a Trump first-term clemency recipient, to run a new pardon process out of the White House. This shift created the perfect environment for the emergence of a giant marketplace in the sale and purchase of clemency. By moving the process to a small and insular circle of White House advisors, President Trump made political and financial access, not independent merit, the key ingredient for a successful pardon application.

B. The Access Merchants

The main operators of Pardons, Inc. are not traditional clemency lawyers, but rather political fixers. Marty Obst, a Trump campaign veteran turned clemency lobbyist, described the market candidly: "[t]here's a legal process and a political process for pardons and clemency." CBS News found more than two dozen pardon-related lobbying registrations during President Trump's second term—a figure that fails to capture the "advisors" and "consultants" who are under no legal obligation to disclose either their clients or the lavish fees they charge for access to the Oval Office.

These fixers help clients craft personal narratives that carefully echo the President's grievances about federal prosecutors and then work to place those narratives before the White House. The list of MAGA personalities dominating this business demonstrates that political and financial access, rather than any sort of legal argument or justification, is what drives the award of pardons:

- **Brett Tolman**, a former U.S. Attorney who advised the first-term White House on clemency, has been involved in at least 12 second-term pardons or commutations.
- **Roger Stone**, who received first-term clemency after his conviction for obstructing a congressional investigation, has assisted in at least five pardons, although he claims he took no money for pardon advocacy.
- **Keith Schiller**, the President's longtime bodyguard and former Director of Oval Office Operations, collected $1 million from Fred Daibes—the New Jersey developer convicted of bribing Senator Robert Menendez with gold bars—pursuant to a lobbying contract for "executive relief."
- **Jack Burkman and Jacob Wohl**, far-right operatives who were previously convicted of operating a scheme to suppress Black voters, reported $3.2 million in lobbying revenue related to pardons in 2025. This included $960,000 from pardoned nursing-home executive Joseph Schwartz and $600,000 from the rapper Boosie Badazz.

Although he has yet to publicly disclose any of his specific pardon-related activities, no figure better epitomizes the cash-for-clemency economy in Trump's White House than **Boris Epshteyn**.

In November 2024, Mr. Epshteyn was alleged to have sought payment to promote candidates for Administration posts. He reportedly asked Scott Bessent for $30,000 to $40,000 per month to promote him as a potential appointee at Mar-a-Lago; Mr. Bessent now serves as Treasury Secretary. Former Missouri Governor Eric Greitens submitted a sworn declaration to the Trump transition team describing an "implicit expectation to engage in business dealings" with Mr. Epshteyn before Mr. Epshteyn would advocate on Mr. Greitens's behalf. Mr. Epshteyn denied wrongdoing, calling the claims "false and defamatory," and the President kept him as a close advisor. One year later, Mr. Epshteyn himself became a customer of the clemency system when the President pardoned him for his role in the effort to overturn the 2020 presidential election.

During the first Trump Administration, Rudy Giuliani allegedly bragged that he was selling pardons for $2 million, which he and President Trump would split. That mindset has metastasized—and that corrupt $2 million fee may seem like a quaint bargain today.

In the second Trump Administration, the scale of the money-for-access MAGA marketplace is just coming into view. Investigators at Reuters reviewed thousands of pardon, lobbying, and campaign finance records and identified 290 "influencers" who advocated 624 times as part of 197 successful clemency bids during President Trump's second term. Seventy-three of those influencers delivered more than one grant of clemency, at least 110 are known Trump allies, and 11 of them had themselves received clemency from President Trump. Intermediaries with proven access to the President's circle charge as much as $2 million per engagement. Some lobbying firms have fielded offers as high as $5 million to get a single case before the President, with one Trump-allied lobbyist describing the market as "the Wild West." Two MAGA insiders reportedly went further still, floating a $30 million plan to secure a pardon for one wealthy crypto defendant—a proposal that reportedly set off alarms even inside this thoroughly corrupt White House.

C. Pardons, Inc. at Work

Four case studies will illustrate the kinds of transactions that keep the wheels of Pardons, Inc. turning. In each of these cases, an unrepentant criminal pays huge sums to Trump insiders; the insider works to access the White House and place the case directly before President Trump; then President Trump grants a largely undeserving criminal a complete and unconditional pardon.

- **Trevor Milton**

In October 2022, Trevor Milton was convicted of securities and wire fraud for lying to retail investors. To inflate the value of his electric truck company, Mr. Milton produced a video of a prototype truck supposedly driving on its own. The vehicle was never autonomous, like Mr. Milton claimed—it had been towed to the top of a hill and allowed to roll down—but the video was widely circulated, and Mr. Milton's company was briefly valued higher than the Ford Motor Company. By the start of the second Trump Administration, Mr. Milton had been sentenced to four years in prison, and a federal judge was scheduled to rule on prosecutors' recommendation that he be ordered to pay nearly $700 million in restitution to his victims.

In the weeks before the 2024 election, however, Mr. Milton and his wife donated over $1.8 million to committees supporting the President's reelection, including $920,000 to the Trump 47 Committee in October 2024 and $750,000 in September 2024 to the MAHA Alliance super PAC affiliated with Robert F. Kennedy, Jr. Mr. Milton also hired two attorneys with direct ties to the President: Brad Bondi, brother of former Attorney General Pam Bondi, and Marc Mukasey, longtime attorney for both Eric Trump and The Trump Organization.

In March 2025, two weeks after prosecutors filed their $695.2 million restitution calculation, the President called Mr. Milton personally to inform him of a full and unconditional pardon and his decision to wipe out any obligation to repay his victims. President Trump also told Mr. Milton to "call Bobby and thank him," directing the lucky pardonee to Health and Human Secretary Robert F. Kennedy, Jr., whose super PAC had benefited from Mr. Milton's cash.

- **Paul Walczak**

In late 2024, former nursing home executive Paul Walczak pleaded guilty to a long docket of federal tax crimes—including theft of $10.9 million in payroll taxes deducted from his low-wage employees' paychecks putatively to pay FICA. Mr. Walczak was reported to have used his plunder of those unpaid taxes to fund his extravagant lifestyle, which included purchase of a $2 million yacht, numerous luxury vehicles, and massive nonstop spending at Saks Fifth Avenue, Cartier, and Bergdorf Goodman.

Shortly after President Trump's second inauguration, as he waited for his sentencing to prison, Mr. Walczak submitted a clemency application directly to the White House, bypassing the Office of the Pardon Attorney. In his letter, he emphasized that his mother, Elizabeth Fago, had raised millions of dollars for the President and other MAGA Republicans. He reminded the President that he had appointed his mother to serve on the National Cancer Advisory Board in the last weeks of President Trump's first term and that she had resisted President Joe Biden's termination of that appointment when the executive branch changed hands. He even cited her connection to the effort to publicize the content of Ashley Biden's diary during the 2020 presidential campaign.

Nothing happened for weeks. Then, in April 2025, Ms. Fago was invited to a $1 million-per-plate "candlelight" fundraising dinner at Mar-a-Lago promising face time with the President. The million-dollar fee represented far more than Ms. Fago had ever given to Republican causes in the past; she was confirmed to have attended the event, where she had the opportunity to make her son's case to President Trump directly.

In May 2025, a federal judge sentenced Mr. Walczak to 18 months in prison and ordered him to make $4.4 million in restitution payments. Twelve days later, President Trump granted him a full pardon and relieved him of any obligation to repay any of his victims.

- **Changpeng Zhao**

The October 2025 pardon of Binance founder Changpeng Zhao illustrates how President Trump and his family directly and personally benefit from pay-for-pardon schemes.

Once nicknamed the "richest man in crypto," Mr. Zhao pleaded guilty and went to prison in 2023 for allowing his company, Binance, to facilitate and conceal over 100,000 illicit financial transactions involving terrorist groups, ransomware, and child sexual abuse material.

After the 2024 election, Mr. Zhao mounted an aggressive clemency campaign. He retained lobbyist Ches McDowell, a longtime friend of Donald Trump, Jr., to lobby the White House on his behalf. Binance itself paid $260,000 to lobby the White House on issues that included "executive relief."

Over the same period, at Mr. Zhao's direction, Binance built ties to World Liberty Financial, the crypto venture co-founded by the President's family. A team of engineers from Binance built much of the digital infrastructure supporting World Liberty Financial. When World Liberty's new stablecoin failed to gain traction—plagued by allegations of fraud and undercut by massive financial losses at the company—Binance stepped in to save the Trump family's investment. Mr. Zhao brokered a deal between the Trump Administration, World Liberty Financial, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE): an Emirati investor purchased a $2 billion stake in Binance, paid for in World Liberty cryptocurrency; World Liberty, now flush with cash, began to stabilize after its shaky start. A few months later, the Trump Administration approved the sale of billions of dollars in cutting edge artificial intelligence chips to the UAE, despite widespread national security concerns about the transaction.

In October 2025, President Trump granted Mr. Zhao a full criminal pardon. Mr. Zhao maintains that his business relationship with the Trump family was "misconstrued." When asked why he granted the pardon, President Trump said he had "no idea" who Mr. Zhao is. The President and his family have made more than $1.4 billion from World Liberty Financial and other crypto ventures since November 2024.

- **Eliyahu Weinstein**

Eliyahu "Eli" Weinstein is both a repeat offender and a repeat player in President Trump's Pardons, Inc.

In 2016, Mr. Weinstein pleaded guilty to operating two separate Ponzi schemes. In the first, he stole hundreds of millions of dollars that his victims believed were being invested in real estate. The second, which he operated while on pretrial release for charges related to the first, involved a multimillion-dollar fraudulent securities offering. For these crimes, which together cost his victims a whopping $230 million, Mr. Weinstein was sentenced to serve 24 years in prison followed by three years of supervised release.

In the final moments of President Trump's first term, the President commuted Mr. Weinstein's sentence in both cases to time served. His release was the result of a costly campaign backed by prominent political figures, including Alan Dershowitz and President Trump's former White House Chief of Staff, Mark Meadows.

Soon after his release from prison, however, an apparently unreformed Mr. Weinstein began orchestrating a new scheme. Using the alias "Mike Konig" to hide his involvement in the project, Mr. Weinstein stole another $44 million from charitable investors who thought their money was being used to buy surgical masks, COVID tests, and baby formula for war-torn Ukraine. During his 2025 criminal trial, Mr. Weinstein referred to himself as "the Ponzi guy." He admitted on a recording played in court that he "finagled, Ponzied, and lied to people" to keep his operation afloat, even while spending lavishly on fine jewelry and luxury travel to Las Vegas.

In 2025, Mr. Weinstein and his co-conspirators were convicted of securities fraud, wire fraud, and an obstruction of justice charge related to an attempt to hide the money he owed to his original victims. Mr. Weinstein was sentenced to 37 years in prison and ordered to pay $44 million in restitution to his victims. In an announcement accompanying the sentence, former Special Attorney and would-be Acting U.S. Attorney for the District of New Jersey Alina Habba described the losses to Mr. Weinstein's investors as "staggering."

Mr. Weinstein remains in federal custody, but reports suggest that he has begun to assemble a team of attorneys and insiders to lobby President Trump for yet another round of clemency. Stay tuned for more adventures in endless pardons for endless corruption.

II. PARDONS, INC. ALLOWS THE WORST OF THE WORST TO ESCAPE ACCOUNTABILITY

President Trump's pardons are offered based on political and personal networks, large sums of money offered and given, and political ideology. The pardons have nothing to do with penal sentences served, contrition and remorse, reintegrating with society, complete restitution and fines paid to victims, community service, or demonstrated reform and rehabilitation.

Here we list just *some* of the criminals who bought or flattered their way to a Trump pardon or commutation, and the victims they left behind:

Juan Orlando Hernández

As President of Honduras, Juan Orlando Hernández used his office to corruptly assist and protect the Sinaloa Cartel's cocaine trade, helping the cartel to smuggle hundreds of tons of drugs into the United States. He participated directly in the traffic, bragging that he would "shove the drugs right up the noses of the gringos." In return for his patronage, Mr. Hernández used millions of dollars in dirty drug money to fuel his rise in Honduran politics.

In the United States, federal prosecutors spent more than 15 years building a case against Mr. Hernández. In 2024, a federal jury convicted him of multiple counts of drug trafficking and weapons trafficking. He received a 45-year prison sentence in June 2024. The case was hailed as a breakthrough in holding criminal elites and rulers accountable around the world.

But Mr. Hernández had spent years cultivating friends in President Trump's orbit, including Texas pipeline billionaire Kelcy Warren and tech investors Peter Thiel and Marc Andreessen. Those friends were heavily invested in Próspera, a private Honduran "charter city" and shady cryptocurrency playground. While in power, Mr. Hernández made Próspera possible; investors in the project stood to benefit from his return to Honduran politics. When convicted felon and Trump pardon recipient Roger Stone took up the convicted global narco-trafficker's case, he gave the game away: pardoning Mr. Hernández, he said, would save "the Próspera experiment."

Mr. Stone, along with former Republican Congressman Matt Gaetz and others at Mar-a-Lago, lobbied President Trump on behalf of Mr. Hernández; hours after Mr. Stone hand-delivered a letter from Mr. Hernández to the President, President Trump issued the pardon and Mr. Hernández went free as a bird.

Despite chronic understaffing at the agency, the Bureau of Prisons paid a tactical team overtime to drive Mr. Hernández from his maximum-security prison in West Virginia to the Waldorf Astoria in New York City, where he was treated to a luxury stay at taxpayer expense in one of New York's finest hotels.

Joseph Schwartz

Nursing home magnate Joseph Schwartz was sentenced to three years in prison for a $38 million payroll-tax fraud scheme. He also lost several wrongful death suits for neglecting his elderly residents and depriving them of basic medical care. In April 2025, Mr. Schwartz pleaded guilty to two counts of tax fraud and was sentenced to 36 months in prison.

From behind bars, Mr. Schwartz spent nearly $1.1 million on lobbyists to advocate for his pardon. He paid handsomely to reach MAGA influencer Laura Loomer, who lobbied publicly for his release. He attempted to drum up support for a pardon in pro-Israel evangelical circles. He purchased access to White House "Pardon Czar" Alice Marie Johnson and White House Counsel David Warrington.

Just three months into his 36-month sentence, President Trump granted Mr. Schwartz a full criminal pardon. Mr. Schwartz is no longer under any obligation to repay the government the $33 million he still owes in federal taxes, and he appears to be hiding from process servers who are trying to collect on the wrongful death judgments against him.

Timothy Leiweke

The second Trump Administration has been historically lax in the enforcement of federal antitrust laws—but the corrupt real estate development and kickback schemes engineered by Timothy Leiweke were too much for even this DOJ.

In July 2025, DOJ indicted Mr. Leiweke for orchestrating a scheme to rig the bidding process for construction of a new basketball arena in Austin, Texas. The investigation also revealed that Mr. Leiweke had steered other arena owners to sign exclusive ticketing deals with entertainment monopoly Live Nation-Ticketmaster in exchange for tens of millions of dollars in secret kickbacks. Mr. Leiweke faced 10 years in prison and a $1 million fine.

But in early 2025, Mr. Leiweke had paid a handsome $250,000 to President Trump's inauguration fund. Then Mr. Leiweke hired former Republican Congressman Trey Gowdy to lobby for clemency on his behalf. Just a few weeks after Mr. Gowdy and President Trump played golf together, President Trump out of the blue handed Mr. Leiweke a full criminal pardon, wiping out his case before it reached trial. Mr. Leiweke's company, Oak View Group, still runs the arena and collects a cut of its revenue.

Julio Herrera Velutini, Mark Rossini, and Wanda Vázquez Garced

In 2022, DOJ indicted three participants in an international bribery scheme: Venezuelan billionaire Julio Herrera Velutini was alleged to have funneled $300,000 toward the campaign of Puerto Rico Governor Wanda Vázquez Garced; in exchange, Governor Vázquez Garced was alleged to have removed a key regulator scrutinizing suspicious activity at Mr. Herrera Velutini's bank; and Mark Rossini, a disgraced former Federal Bureau of Investigation agent, was alleged to have acted as a go-between and "political consultant" delivering the bribe on Mr. Herrera Velutini's behalf.

In December 2024, while Mr. Herrera Velutini's prosecution was pending, his daughter Isabela Herrera contributed $2.5 million to MAGA Inc. Mr. Herrera Velutini then hired Christopher Kise, previously a member of the President's own criminal defense team, to negotiate with then-Deputy Attorney General Todd Blanche for an "unusually lenient" plea deal.

In May 2025, over the objections of career prosecutors, DOJ settled the case with a misdemeanor plea deal that the Trump-appointed judge criticized as "a mere slap on the wrist."

A month later, Mr. Herrera Velutini's daughter donated another $1 million to MAGA Inc. And in January 2026, President Trump pardoned Mr. Herrera Velutini, former Governor Vázquez Garced, and Mr. Rossini outright.

Isabela Herrera is a self-employed consultant whose only prior contribution to a federal campaign was a $20 donation to Biden Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg. The Campaign Legal Center has filed a complaint asking the Federal Election Commission to investigate the $3.5 million she paid to MAGA Inc., which appears on its face to be an illegal straw-donor vehicle for funneling illicit foreign money to the PAC in exchange for President Trump's leniency.

Jason Galanis

In September 2020, Jason Galanis, once branded "Porn's New King," was sentenced to nearly 16 years in prison and ordered to repay more than $160 million in restitution for his involvement in multiple financial frauds—including one involving the theft of millions of dollars from the Oglala Sioux Nation and another involving the defrauding of pension funds covering transit workers, longshoremen, and city employees throughout New York State. The case against Mr. Galanis spanned years. After an initial sentencing hearing in 2017, the first Trump Administration took special note of "the magnitude and pervasiveness" of Mr. Galanis's crimes.

Nearly a decade earlier, however, Mr. Galanis had been business partners with Hunter Biden, son of President Biden. And in 2023, from his prison cell, Mr. Galanis became a star witness for House Republicans searching desperately for some pretext to impeach the President. The impeachment push was an abject failure—it failed to produce a coherent charge against President Biden, let alone a single article of impeachment for consideration by the House—but Mr. Galanis successfully ingratiated himself in circles close to President Trump.

In March 2025, President Trump pardoned Mr. Galanis and wiped out any obligation to pay further fines or restitution. Days later, Mr. Galanis petitioned for the return of the $2 million he had already advanced to his victims. A federal court quickly denied this claim, outrageous even by the depraved standards of Trump pardonees.

Michele Fiore

Dubbed "Lady Trump" for her embrace of the right-wing fringe, Las Vegas City Council member Michele Fiore was convicted in 2024 for fraudulently raising funds for a memorial to two fallen police officers. Although a private developer had already paid for the memorial to Las

Vegas Metropolitan Police Officer Alyn Beck, Ms. Fiore solicited donations to the project—promising that "100% of the contributions" would go towards the construction. Instead, Ms. Fiore pocketed the money and spent $70,000 on rent, cosmetic surgery, and her daughter's wedding.

In 2025, prior to her sentencing, President Trump issued Ms. Fiore a complete criminal pardon. Ms. Fiore refuses to pay back the funds that she stole from her victims. One retired Las Vegas police officer who knows the family of the fallen officer put it bluntly: "[s]he stole from murdered police officers. She is a piece of garbage."

III. PRESIDENT TRUMP LET HIS FRAUDSTER BUDDIES KEEP NEARLY $1.7 BILLION IN STOLEN FUNDS

Since 2025, President Trump has allowed dozens of criminals to keep nearly $1.7 billion in restitution owed to crime victims and in government fines that would have otherwise supported the federal Crime Victims Fund—the primary source of aid from the federal government to domestic violence shelters, rape crisis centers, and gun violence prevention programs across the country. The President seems not to care that these cases involve real victims harmed by financial fraud on a massive scale. Below are just a few examples.

David Gentile

In 2021, federal investigators charged private equity executive David Gentile with running a "Ponzi-like scheme" that raised over $1.7 billion by manipulating financial statements, lying to investors, and committing outright fraud. His victims included thousands of mom-and-pop investors. In May 2025, the Trump Administration secured a 7-year prison sentence for Mr. Gentile. President Trump's handpicked U.S. Attorney for the Eastern District of New York argued that "[t]he sentences imposed today are well deserved and should serve as a warning to would-be fraudsters that seeking to get rich by taking advantage of investors gets you only a one-way ticket to jail." A court later ordered Mr. Gentile to pay $15.5 million in forfeiture.

Mr. Gentile reported to prison in November 2025. During his brief stay, he told other inmates that he expected to be released because Father Frank Mann—a retired priest from Queens who had cultivated a relationship with President Trump—was taking his case directly to the President. Over the years, Fr. Mann has tended to the Trump family graves, celebrated mass at the Trump White House, and earned a post from President Trump on Truth Social promoting his debut novel. Fr. Mann delivered the benediction at President Trump's second inauguration. For an eye-popping $2.5 million fee, Fr. Mann agreed to intercede with his friend President Trump on Mr. Gentile's behalf.

On November 29, 2025, less than two weeks into a 7-year prison term, President Trump commuted Mr. Gentile's sentence and wiped away his $15.5 million forfeiture obligation.

Stunned by the sudden reversal, career prosecutors in the Eastern District of New York opened an investigation into the possibility of "improper payments" being made to help facilitate Mr. Gentile's release. Fr. Mann initially denied any involvement in the commutation beyond offering "heartfelt prayers" for Mr. Gentile and his family—but the investigation surfaced several witnesses who described in detail Fr. Mann's strenuous effort to convince President Trump to intercede on Mr. Gentile's behalf. Weeks later, when the White House learned about the investigation into how Mr. Gentile was orchestrating his own release from prison, the case was abruptly closed.

Adriana and Andres Camberos

Adriana and Andres Camberos are also repeat players in President Trump's pardon sweepstakes.

In 2016, Adriana Camberos was convicted of conspiring to sell counterfeit 5-Hour Energy Drinks—a scheme involving millions of bottles diverted from Mexico, filled with a phony liquid, and resold in the United States. In late 2019, she reported to prison to begin serving a 26-month sentence—but quickly launched an effort to obtain clemency from President Trump. She retained Adam Katz, a defense lawyer with ties to President Trump, who in turn brought the case to former White House Counsel Stefan Passantino and then-Congresswoman Marjorie Taylor Greene. In January 2021, Ms. Camberos's brother Andres Camberos donated $50,000 to President Trump's 2020 campaign. At the end of his first term, President Trump commuted Ms. Camberos's sentence to time served but left her conviction and $145,000 fine intact. Neither sibling stayed out of trouble for long.

In October 2024, Ms. Camberos and Mr. Camberos were both convicted on multiple charges of fraud. Posing as grocery exporters in San Diego, California, the Camberos siblings negotiated steep discounts in the United States to distribute groceries in Baja California, Mexico; they drove their discounts even further by promising to send food to prisons and drug rehabilitation facilities in Mexico; then they resold the same products in the United States for a profit. They took elaborate steps to convince their victims that the business was legitimate: removing GPS trackers from packages, generating fake Mexican customs documents, and arranging fake "market visits" in Tijuana, Mexico, where they hired models to place their products on the shelves.

The scheme generated $58 million in gross profits over four years. Ms. Camberos and Mr. Camberos used the money to purchase a Ferrari F12 Berlinetta, a Lamborghini Huracán, multiple Range Rovers, multiple homes, and cryptocurrency. Ms. Camberos was sentenced to one year and one day in prison. Mr. Camberos was sentenced to a year of home confinement. The court ordered them to forfeit $30 million in illegal proceeds and to pay nearly $50 million in restitution to their victims.

The Camberos siblings once again retained Mr. Katz and Mr. Passantino to lobby the President for a second round of clemency—this time a pardon for both. On January 15, 2026, President Trump granted both Ms. Camberos and Mr. Camberos an unconditional pardon—allowing them to keep both the Ferrari and the Lamborghini and releasing them from any obligation to repay their countless financial victims.

BitMEX (a/k/a HDR Global Trading LTD)

President Trump appears to be the first president to pardon entire corporations—enabling him to scale up the fees generated by the pay-to-pardon scheme, the scope of the criminal activity he excuses, and the damage done to the victims of their corporate fraud.

In 2022, Benjamin Delo, Gregory Dwyer, Arthur Hayes, and Samuel Reed all pleaded guilty to violating federal anti-money laundering rules. Together, they had founded the Bitcoin Mercantile Exchange, or "BitMEX," a company that purported to operate as an offshore cryptocurrency derivatives exchange—but was actually based in the United States and facilitating money laundering on a massive scale. Together, the co-conspirators were ordered to pay $30 million in fines for their crimes.

In 2024, the company itself—now doing business as "HDR Global Trading LTD"—pleaded guilty to the same conduct and acknowledged its role in perpetuating fraud, money laundering, and the financing of terrorist activity. In 2025, a court sentenced the company to pay $100 million in fines.

But BitMEX and its officers had no intention of paying. They held huge cryptocurrency reserves and remained highly influential in the crypto world. They used that position to promote President Trump's cryptocurrencies, even hailing the President's meme coin $TRUMP as "a new weapon against political corruption." The publicity and the direct investment in Trump crypto products earned the President hundreds of millions of dollars from transaction fees alone. In hindsight, the rollout of the $TRUMP meme coin was a classic "pump-and-dump" scheme: it generated additional hundreds of millions in profits for insiders and the Trump family but left hundreds of thousands of investors—many of them Trump supporters—with steep losses.

On March 27, 2025, President Trump pardoned BitMEX and its founders, wiping out all $130 million in fines they owed to the federal government. The taxpayers, per usual, took a huge loss from this rampant corruption.

Ozy Media, Inc.

For a few years, Ozy Media, Inc. looked like a digital-media success story. It boasted newsletters, podcasts, and a popular online talk show hosted by founder and CEO Carlos Watson. It claimed to have landed media deals with Google and Oprah Winfrey. Under scrutiny, however, Ozy was struggling just to make payroll. Over time, Mr. Watson and Ozy Media COO Samir Rao orchestrated increasingly complex schemes to deceive investors regarding the company's finances.

In 2021, a *New York Times* report revealed that Mr. Rao had impersonated a YouTube executive on a phone call with Goldman Sachs to convince the bank to make a $40 million investment in Ozy Media. Mr. Watson had sat beside Mr. Rao, texting him instructions. Ozy Media shut down in the immediate fallout from the story. Fraud charges soon followed.

In 2024, both Mr. Watson and Ozy Media were convicted of conspiracy to commit fraud. Mr. Watson was sentenced to nearly 10 years in prison. He and the company were ordered to pay $37 million in restitution to the investors they scammed and to forfeit $59 million in fraudulent gains.

They never paid a dime. Mr. Watson retained New York attorney Arthur Aidala to get his case in front of the President. "We were going through the process," Mr. Aidala told reporters. "The message that we got was, 'Trump wants to know what Alan thinks.'" Alan Dershowitz, who does "consulting work" for lawyers seeking clemency for their clients but does not disclose his fees, addressed the questions that had been posed by the White House. Former White House strategist Steve Bannon also agreed to serve as a reference in the effort to secure Mr. Watson's pardon. Conservative commentator Angela Stanton King, herself the recipient of a Trump pardon in 2020, acknowledged acting as a "serious advocate" for Mr. Watson but declined to say how much she may have been paid for her advocacy.

On March 28, 2025, hours before Mr. Watson was due to report to federal prison, President Trump commuted his sentence to time served and wiped out all associated financial penalties. Months later, the Trump Administration also closed the government's remaining civil fraud case against Ozy Media. The defrauded investors will never be repaid.

CONCLUSION

President Trump has mothballed the traditional clemency review process at the Department of Justice and replaced it with a pay-to-play system that has nothing to do with accountability, public safety, or justice. As one attorney representing a deserving and long-waiting pardon petitioner explained, lamenting the corrupt new system that bypasses the Office of the Pardon Attorney, his client would "probably be better off if he broke into the Capitol or made a major donation to Trump's inauguration."

In recent months, often to justify immigration crackdowns or cuts to health care and food assistance programs, House Republicans have, hilariously, made "fighting fraud" one of their central talking points. In a recent post, Chairman Jim Jordan declared that "Real America wants fraudsters in prison." This is true. But convicted fraudster Donald Trump and the MAGA pardon-industrial complex are all about committing fraud, protecting fraudulent schemes, and pardoning convicted fraudsters. If the Chairman truly means for justice to be served—for fraudsters to serve their sentences and for their victims to be repaid the billions they have been swindled and cheated out of—then he will join House Democrats in exposing, examining, and eventually dismantling President Trump's pardon industry. Until then, House Republicans are simply perpetuating the fraud and protecting the fraudsters operating at the heart of the Trump Administration.

APPENDIX

Name	Offense	Pardon Date	Restitution*	Forfeiture*	Fines*
Ross William Ulbricht	Aiding and abetting distribution of drugs over internet; continuing criminal enterprise; computer hacking conspiracy; fraud with identification documents; money laundering conspiracy	1/21/2025		$183,961,921	
Coleman Boyd	Conspiracy to obstruct access to a clinic providing reproductive health services; violation of the FACE Act	1/23/2025			$10,000
Rod R. Blagojevich	Wire fraud under color of official right (eight counts); conspiracy/attempted; attempt to commit extortion under color of official right; conspiracy to solicit and solicitation of bribe (three counts); making false statements	2/10/2025			$20,000
Samuel Reed	Violation of the Bank Secrecy Act	3/27/2025			$10,000,000
Benjamin Delo	Violation of the Bank Secrecy Act	3/27/2025			$10,000,000
Gregory Dwyer	Violation of the Bank Secrecy Act	3/27/2025			$150,000
Arthur Hayes	Violation of the Bank Secrecy Act	3/27/2025			$10,000,000
HDR Global Trading Limited (BitMEX)	Violation of the Bank Secrecy Act	3/27/2025			$100,000,000
Trevor Milton	Securities fraud; wire fraud (two counts)	3/27/2025	$695,200,000		
Devon Archer	Conspiracy to commit securities fraud; securities fraud	3/25/2025	$43,427,436		
Jason Galanis	1. Conspiracy to commit securities fraud (two counts); securities fraud; investment adviser fraud 2. Conspiracy to commit securities fraud; securities fraud; conspiracy to commit investment adviser fraud	3/28/2025	$84,817,513		

Name	Offense	Pardon Date	Restitution	Forfeiture	Fines
Carlos Roy Watson *(joint liability with Ozy Media)*	Conspiracy to commit securities fraud; conspiracy to commit wire fraud; aggravated identity theft	3/28/2025	$36,769,154	$59,590,357	
Ozy Media, Inc.	Conspiracy to commit securities fraud; conspiracy to commit wire fraud	3/28/2025	*Joint liability with Carlos Roy Watson*	*Joint liability with Carlos Roy Watson*	
Michele Fiore	Conspiracy to commit wire fraud; wire fraud (six counts)	4/23/2025	$70,000		
Paul Walczak	Willful failure to pay trust fund taxes; failure to file return/information	4/23/2025	$4,381,266		
Scott Howard Jenkins	Conspiracy to commit bribery concerning programs receiving Federal funds, honest services mail fraud, and honest service wire fraud; honest services mail fraud; honest services wire fraud (three counts); bribery concerning programs receiving federal funds (seven counts)	5/27/2025			$600
James Callahan	Filing false labor union reports	5/27/2025	$315,000		
Julie Chrisley	Conspiracy to commit bank fraud; bank fraud (five counts); wire fraud; conspiracy to defraud the U.S. to obstruct and impede the Internal Revenue Laws; tax evasion; obstruction of justice	5/28/2025	$4,740,645		
Todd Chrisley	Conspiracy to commit bank fraud; bank fraud (five counts); conspiracy to defraud the U.S. to obstruct and impede the Internal Revenue Laws; tax evasion	5/28/2025	$17,270,742		
Lawrence S. Duran	Conspiracy to commit health care fraud; health care fraud (11 counts); conspiracy to defraud the United States and to receive and pay health care kickbacks; conspiracy to commit money laundering; money laundering (18 counts); structuring to avoid reporting requirements (six counts)	5/28/2025	$87,533,863		
Michael Gerard Grimm	Aiding and assisting in the preparation of false and fraudulent tax returns	5/28/2025	$148,907		

Name	Offense	Pardon Date	Restitution	Forfeiture	Fines
Michael Ray Harris	Conspiracy to possess with intent to distribute and to aid and abet possession and distribution of cocaine; aiding and abetting possession with intent to distribute cocaine; possession with intent to distribute cocaine	5/28/2025			$80,000
James M. Kernan	Knowingly and willfully permitting a convicted felon to be engaged in the business of insurance	5/28/2025			$250,000
Marlene Mary Kernan	Permitting a convicted felon to engage in the business of insurance	5/28/2025			$182,708
Tanner J. Mansell	Theft of property within special maritime jurisdiction	5/28/2025	$3,344		
John R. Moore, Jr.	Theft of property within special maritime jurisdiction	5/28/2025	*Joint liability with Tanner J. Mansell*		$1,000
Marian I. Morgan	Conspiracy to defraud the United States; wire fraud (7 counts); transfer of funds taken by fraud (5 counts); money laundering (6 counts); making false statements on income tax returns (3 counts)	5/28/2025	$19,958,995		
John G. Rowland	1. Conspiracy to defraud the United States; 2. Falsification of records in a federal investigation; conspiracy; causing false statements (two counts); illegal campaign contributions (two counts)	5/28/2025			$117,000
Charles Overton Scott	Conspiracy to commit securities fraud; securities fraud	5/28/2025	$500,000		$5,000
Alexander Sittenfeld	Bribery concerning programs receiving federal funds; attempted extortion under color of official right	5/28/2025			$40,000
Earl Lamont Smith	Theft of government property	5/28/2025	$163,330		
Imaad Shah Zuberi	Violations of the Foreign Agents Registration Act; tax evasion; foreign, conduit, and other illegal campaign contributions; tampering with a witness, victim or informant (obstruction of justice)	5/28/2025	$15,705,080		$1,750,000

Name	Offense	Pardon Date	Restitution	Forfeiture	Fines
Jeremy Young Hutchinson	1. Conspiracy to commit bribery 2. Aiding and abetting filing of false income tax return 3. Conspiracy; criminal forfeiture of property	5/29/2025	$355,535		
Edward Ruben Sotelo	Conspiracy; continuing criminal enterprise; possession with intent to distribute 1 kilogram of cocaine, aiding and abetting (two counts); use of telephone to facilitate commission of a felony (three counts); possession with intent to distribute 10 pounds of marijuana, and aiding and abetting; distribution of more than five kilograms of cocaine and aiding and abetting	5/29/2025			$50,000
January 6th Defendants	Varies	1/20/2025	$3,000,000		
George Santos	Wire fraud; aggravated identity theft	10/17/2025	$373,750	$205,003	
Changpeng Zhao	Failure to maintain an effective anti-money laundering program	10/21/2025			$50,000,000
Glen Casada	Conspiracy to defraud the United States; honest services wire fraud (four counts); use of a fictitious name to carry out a fraud; conspiracy to commit money laundering; money laundering (eight counts)	11/7/2025		$4,644	$30,000
Cade Cothren	Conspiracy to defraud the United States; honest services wire fraud (six counts); use of fictitious name to carry out unlawful business; conspiracy to commit money laundering; money laundering (seven counts)	11/7/2025			$25,000
Robert Henry Harshbarger, Jr.	Introducing misbranded drugs into Interstate commerce; health care fraud	11/7/2025	$848,504	$425,000	$25,000
Troy Lake	Conspiracy to violate the Clean Air Act	11/7/2025			$2,500
Michael McMahon	Acting as an agent of a foreign government without prior notification to the Attorney General; conspiracy to engage in interstate stalking; stalking	11/7/2025			$11,000

Name	Offense	Pardon Date	Restitution	Forfeiture	Fines
Darryl Strawberry, Sr.	Income tax evasion	11/7/2025	$430,000		
Joseph Lewis	Conspiracy to commit securities fraud; securities fraud (two counts). Note: Lewis previously paid his restitution and fines. Source	11/12/2025	$400,000	$34,413,979	$5,000,000
Joseph Schwartz	Willful failure to pay over employment taxes; failure to file the Annual 5500 Report	11/14/2025	$5,000,000		$100,000
David Gentile	Conspiracy to commit securities fraud; conspiracy to commit wire fraud; securities fraud; wire fraud (two counts)	11/26/2025		$15,581,317	
Juan Orlando Hernandez	Conspiracy to import cocaine into the United States; possessing machine guns and destructive devices in furtherance of the cocaine importation conspiracy; conspiracy to use and carry machine guns and destructive devices.	12/1/2025		$15,525,000	$8,000,000
Jacob Deutsch	Conspiracy to commit mail fraud and wire fraud	1/15/2026			$10,000
James Phillip Womack	Distribution of more than five grams of actual methamphetamine	1/15/2026			$1,900
Adriana Isabel Camberos	Conspiracy to commit wire and mail fraud; wire fraud and aiding and abetting (seven counts)	1/15/2026	$48,824,415	$13,207,566	
Andres Enrique Camberos	Conspiracy to commit wire and mail fraud; wire fraud and aiding and abetting (seven counts)	1/15/2026	*Joint liability with Adriana Isabel Camberos*	$14,473,590	
Arie Eric De Jong III	Conspiracy	1/15/2026	$2,254,593		$15,000
David Levy	Conspiracy to commit securities fraud; securities fraud	1/15/2026			$5,000
Terren Scott Peizer	Securities fraud; insider trading (two counts)	1/16/2026		$12,700,000	$5,250,000
Timothy S. Smith	Conspiring to defraud the Internal Revenue Service	2/12/2026	$1,637,830	$274,000	
Nathaniel Newton Jr.	Conspiracy to possess with intent to distribute marijuana	2/12/2026			$25,000
Joseph Klecko	Perjury	2/12/2026			$3,000
Billy Cannon	Conspiracy	2/12/2026			$10,000

Name	Offense	Pardon Date	Restitution	Forfeiture	Fines
Elite Diesel Service Inc.	Conspiracy to violate the Clean Air Act	2/12/2026			$62,500
Stephen E. Buyer	Securities fraud (four counts)	6/4/2026	$765,913	$354,027	$10,000
Jonathan Dean Achtemeier	Conspiracy to violate the Clean Air Act	7/3/2026			$25,000
Timothy Curtis Clancy, II *(joint liability with Clancy Logistics)*	Clean Air Act tampering	7/3/2026			$101,510
Clancy Logistics Inc.	Clean Air Act tampering	7/3/2026			*Joint liability with Timothy Clancy, II*
Joshua L. Davis	Conspiracy to defraud the United States and violate the Clean Air Act	7/3/2026			$50,000
Matthew Sidney Geouge	Conspiracy to defraud the United States and violate the Clean Air Act; tax evasion	7/3/2026	$1,205,532		
Jack Charles Harvard	False statement to a federally insured bank, and aiding and abetting	7/3/2026	$100,000		
Adam R. Kidan	Conspiracy to commit wire fraud and mail fraud; wire fraud	7/3/2026	$21,701,015		
Ryan Reginald LaLone	Violation of Clean Air Act	7/3/2026			$7,500
Wade James LaLone	Violation of Clean Air Act	7/3/2026			$4,000
Accurate Truck Service LLC	Conspiracy to violate the Clean Air Act	7/3/2026			$500,000
Diesel Freak LLC	Conspiracy to violate the Clean Air Act	7/3/2026			$750,000
Griffin Transportation Inc.	Conspiracy to violate the Clean Air Act	7/3/2026			$500,000
Barry Kendal Pierce *(joint liability with Custom Auto and GDP Tuning)*	Tampering with a monitoring device or method required by the Clean Air Act	7/3/2026			$1,000,000
Custom Auto of Rexburg LLC	Tampering with a monitoring device or method required by the Clean Air Act	7/3/2026			*Joint liability with Barry Kendal Pierce*

Name	Offense	Pardon Date	Restitution	Forfeiture	Fines
GDP Tuning LLC	Conspiracy to violate the Clean Air Act	7/3/2026			*Joint liability with Barry Kendal Pierce*
Aaron Lucas Roskin Rudolf	Conspiracy to violate the Clean Air Act	7/3/2026			$600,000
Mackenzie Scott Spurlock	Tampering with Clean Air Act monitoring device	7/3/2026			$32,000
		SUB-TOTALS:	**$1,097,902,363**	**$350,716,404**	**$204,812,218**
		OVERALL TOTAL:	**$1,653,430,985**		

* Data from U.S. Dep't. of Justice, Office of the Pardon Attorney, Clemency Grants by President Donald J. Trump (2025-Present) (unless other source linked).