

Mar. 18, 2026, 8:30 PM EDT

By Ken Dilanian

When CarolAnn Tutera learned that she and her relatives were scammed out of half a million dollars, she figured the money was gone for good.

But she had hope that the legal system offered a measure of justice: The man behind the company she invested in was convicted of fraud and sentenced to seven years in prison.

Then, late last year, she learned that President Donald Trump set him free.

“I think not only is it a betrayal, it’s an injustice to the system,” she told MS NOW. “How did you go from ‘you’re supposed to be in prison,’ to two weeks later, a swish of a pen, ‘you’re scot free?’”

A jury found David Gentile and his business partner guilty in 2024 of what prosecutors said was a billion-dollar fraud that victimized as many as 17,000 investors.

Ironically, Trump Justice Department officials celebrated when Gentile was sentenced in May 2025. He was just 12 days into his prison term in December when Trump granted him clemency, commuting his sentence and setting him free.

MS NOW has spotlighted the case as part of a series of stories examining Trump’s puzzling clemency decisions, which many experts have said amount to the most random and reckless use of that awesome presidential power in American history.

“

I think not only is it a betrayal, it’s an injustice to the system.”

CAROLANN TUTERA, VICTIM OF FINANCIAL SCAM

[Continue](#)

This site is now part of [Versant](#). By continuing to use this service, you agree to our [Terms](#). You also acknowledge that our updated [Privacy Policy](#) applies, including to your existing data. For details on your data rights, click [here](#).

We and our partners also use tools on this site to provide the services, personalize your experience, and for analytics, marketing, and advertising. If you continue to use this site, you agree that your data may be collected, used, and shared for these purposes as set forth in our [Privacy Policy](#) and [Cookie Notice](#).

A few examples:

- Crypto magnate Changpeng Zhao, the Binance founder, was pardoned in October 2025 [after his company invested in a cryptocurrency business](#) connected to Eric and Donald Trump, Jr. Zhao denied having any association with the president or his sons.
- Trump pardoned Italian Venezuelan billionaire Julio Herrera Velutini in January after [his daughter donated \\$3.5 million to a Trump super PAC](#). He also hired former Trump lawyer Christopher Kise.
- Convicted fraudster Paul Walczak was pardoned in April 2025 [after his mother contributed \\$1 million](#) to a Trump super PAC.
- Trump pardoned tech executive Trevor Milton in March 2025 [after Milton donated \\$1.8 million to pro-Trump political committees](#).

“The folks who are getting clemency today are not those who have earned it or who really deserve it,” said Liz Oyer, who was the DOJ’s pardons attorney until she was fired last year — after she said she balked at restoring the gun rights of the actor Mel Gibson, who was convicted of a domestic violence charge.

The majority of recipients, she said, are “people who are able to leverage political connections or wealth to essentially buy their way into clemency relief from the president, and that is really unfair to those who are deserving and who are patiently waiting their turn, but are being overlooked.”

White House spokeswoman Abigail Jackson said in an email that Trump has focused his mercy on “victims of weaponization and over prosecution,” adding, “Anyone spending money to lobby for pardons is foolishly wasting their money.”

Trump’s pardons and commutations have wiped away more than \$2 billion in court-ordered restitution and penalties, [according to public records flagged](#) by the California governor’s office. That includes [around \\$15.5 million](#) a judge ordered Gentile to pay to his victims.

This site is now part of [Versant](#). By continuing to use this service, you agree to our [Terms](#). You also acknowledge that our updated [Privacy Policy](#) applies, including to your existing data. For details on your data rights, click [here](#).

We and our partners also use tools on this site to provide the services, personalize your experience, and for analytics, marketing, and advertising. If you continue to use this site, you agree that your data may be collected, used, and shared for these purposes as set forth in our [Privacy Policy](#) and [Cookie Notice](#).

She pointed to [comments by White House press secretary](#) Karoline Leavitt, who called the case “another example that has been brought to the president’s attention of a weaponization of justice from the previous administration.”

But the sentences for Gentile and his partner were announced by Trump’s hand-picked U.S. attorney in New York and a top FBI official whom the president recently appointed to be deputy FBI director.

“

The folks who are getting clemency today are not those who have earned it or who really deserve it.”

LIZ OYER, FORMER DOJ PARDON ATTORNEY

They said Gentile “wove a web of lies” and deserved his prison term.

Jackson did not respond to a question about their comments, which were included in a DOJ [news release](#) celebrating the sentence.

“If the White House is really saying that Mr. Gentile did nothing wrong, why did they just commute his sentence and not pardon him entirely?” said Adam Gana, an attorney for Tutera and hundreds of other victims. “And why is his partner still rotting in prison?”

Jackson did not respond to those questions from MS NOW.

Prosecutors said Gentile faked financial statements and misrepresented the source of monthly investor distributions. The payouts came not from profits, but from other investors, prosecutors said: A hallmark of a Ponzi scheme.

Looking back now, Tutera knew something was wrong.

This site is now part of [Versant](#). By continuing to use this service, you agree to our [Terms](#). You also acknowledge that our updated [Privacy Policy](#) applies, including to your existing data. For details on your data rights, click [here](#).

We and our partners also use tools on this site to provide the services, personalize your experience, and for analytics, marketing, and advertising. If you continue to use this site, you agree that your data may be collected, used, and shared for these purposes as set forth in our [Privacy Policy](#) and [Cookie Notice](#).

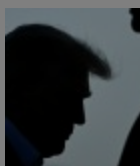


CAROLANN TUTERA NEAR HER HOME IN SCOTTSDALE, ARIZONA MS NOW

“I’m going to take your money and I’m going to pay out over here, and then I’m going to run out of money, so I can’t pay you back that money, and we’re just going to shuffle everything around for a while. That’s what it felt like.”

Gana said Gentile’s scheme “was a catastrophe for your retail Main Street investor” and that it was also indiscriminate.

Recommended



The Briefing with Jen Psaki

Trump says he’ll donate \$10 billion from his IRS lawsuit to charity. Americans shouldn’t buy it.

Jen Psaki, Sam Henneberry



Maddowblog

Trump’s pardon for Colorado’s Tina Peters suffers from one fatal flaw

Steve Benen

This site is now part of [Versant](#). By continuing to use this service, you agree to our [Terms](#). You also acknowledge that our updated [Privacy Policy](#) applies, including to your existing data. For details on your data rights, click [here](#).

We and our partners also use tools on this site to provide the services, personalize your experience, and for analytics, marketing, and advertising. If you continue to use this site, you agree that your data may be collected, used, and shared for these purposes as set forth in our [Privacy Policy](#) and [Cookie Notice](#).

For example, DOJ guidelines say an applicant should have shown remorse and served a significant portion of their sentence. Gentile maintained his innocence, despite the jury verdict.

But Trump hasn't played by the old rules.

For decades, those seeking pardons had to formally apply and submit to a rigorous DOJ set of criteria. Those who came under serious consideration were subjected to FBI background checks.

“

This should not have been a political issue.”

ADAM GANA, ATTORNEY FOR CAROLANN TUTERA AND OTHER VICTIMS OF DAVID GENTILE

“Most people who have received pardons from Donald Trump have not applied through the Justice Department,” Oyer said. “And there's no indication that even those who are applying through DOJ are actually being vetted and recommended by the career attorneys in the office of the pardon attorney.”

Oyer added Trump has embraced a narrative that “all presidents use the pardon power for personal and political purposes.”

But that is not true, she said.

“There are many isolated examples of other presidents doing that,” she added, including former President Joe Biden's blanket pardon of his son, Hunter Biden. “But that is not the norm, and most presidents don't do that most of the time. Most presidents don't do that in the systematic way that Donald Trump has done it.”

In reference to the pardon process, Jackson referred to the statements by Leavitt, [who told reporters in November](#) that there is a “very thorough review process here that moves with the Department of Justice and the White House Counsel's office.

This site is now part of [Versant](#). By continuing to use this service, you agree to our [Terms](#). You also acknowledge that our updated [Privacy Policy](#) applies, including to your existing data. For details on your data rights, click [here](#).

We and our partners also use tools on this site to provide the services, personalize your experience, and for analytics, marketing, and advertising. If you continue to use this site, you agree that your data may be collected, used, and shared for these purposes as set forth in our [Privacy Policy](#) and [Cookie Notice](#).

“I’m not going to take the vacations I thought I would,” she said. “I like to vacation with my son and my grandkids and his wife. But you know, they’re getting few and far between the older I’m getting, because now I really have to watch the funds.”

“So it’s having an impact,” she added.

Her sister, Julie Ullman, lost \$100,000. She’s an office manager, and that loss was devastating for her retirement plans.

“I’ll be working a lot longer than I anticipated,” she said.

“I don’t think we have a fair and equal system anymore,” she added.

Nora McKee contributed to this reporting. 



Ken Dilanian

Ken Dilanian is the justice and intelligence correspondent for MS NOW.

SPONSORED / DERILAERGO

Yleisimmän virheen nro 1, jonka niskakivuista...

SPONSORED / DERILAERGO

Kärsin niskakivuista, sitten löysin tämän yk...

This site is now part of [Versant](#). By continuing to use this service, you agree to our [Terms](#). You also acknowledge that our updated [Privacy Policy](#) applies, including to your existing data. For details on your data rights, click [here](#).

We and our partners also use tools on this site to provide the services, personalize your experience, and for analytics, marketing, and advertising. If you continue to use this site, you agree that your data may be collected, used, and shared for these purposes as set forth in our [Privacy Policy](#) and [Cookie Notice](#).

SPONSORED / EMSENSE

Burning feet? This is what I us...

SPONSORED / LULUTOX

Yksi siemaus ennen nukkumaanmenoa pu...

SPONSORED / EMSENSE

Edema Is Not From Salty Food. Meet the...

SPONSORED / LULUTOX

Juo tämä ennen nukkumaanme...

SPONSORED / OMGIFACTS

Top 10 Most Beau tiful Women In...

SPONSORED / FOLLICLEHEALTHNEWS

The Hidden Horm one That's Secr...

SPONSORED / LIFETECHINSIDER

Simple Method for Morning Mig...

SPONSORED / LIFETECHINSIDER

This site is now part of [Versant](#). By continuing to use this service, you agree to our [Terms](#). You also acknowledge that our updated [Privacy Policy](#) applies, including to your existing data. For details on your data rights, click [here](#).

We and our partners also use tools on this site to provide the services, personalize your experience, and for analytics, marketing, and advertising. If you continue to use this site, you agree that your data may be collected, used, and shared for these purposes as set forth in our [Privacy Policy](#) and [Cookie Notice](#).

MS NOW

Report exposes a Trump scheme to override...

MS NOW

'Secreta...

MS NOW

'Impeach...

SPONSORED / LUXXORY.COM

9+ Striking Photos of Women Showcasing...

SPONSORED / AKUSOLI

The Best Way to Get a Flat Stomach After 50...

This site is now part of [Versant](#). By continuing to use this service, you agree to our [Terms](#). You also acknowledge that our updated [Privacy Policy](#) applies, including to your existing data. For details on your data rights, click [here](#).

We and our partners also use tools on this site to provide the services, personalize your experience, and for analytics, marketing, and advertising. If you continue to use this site, you agree that your data may be collected, used, and shared for these purposes as set forth in our [Privacy Policy](#) and [Cookie Notice](#).

MS NOW

Nicolle on Trump: 'You cannot argue that he...

MS NOW

'Steppin...

MS NOW

Michael...

This site is now part of [Versant](#). By continuing to use this service, you agree to our [Terms](#). You also acknowledge that our updated [Privacy Policy](#) applies, including to your existing data. For details on your data rights, click [here](#).

We and our partners also use tools on this site to provide the services, personalize your experience, and for analytics, marketing, and advertising. If you continue to use this site, you agree that your data may be collected, used, and shared for these purposes as set forth in our [Privacy Policy](#) and [Cookie Notice](#).