

INVESTIGATIONS

Corruption

# Trump has granted clemency to 20 corrupt politicians—so far

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Photo illustration by Miru Osuga/CREW

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President Trump has pardoned or commuted the sentences of nine federal elected politicians and eleven state and local politicians convicted of corruption charges, letting a total of at least 20 corrupt politicians off the hook. As part of a larger pattern of decriminalizing political corruption, his Department of Justice has dropped cases or charges into two others. Trump also recently granted a pardon to a

politician indicted on bribery charges before his case went to trial.

While many of these politicians had already completed their prison sentences by the time Trump announced their pardons, eleven saw their sentences reduced significantly. Former Tennessee state senator Brian Kelsey spent just over two weeks in prison as a result of Trump's pardon, despite receiving a 21-month prison sentence after pleading guilty to illegal campaign finance charges. Another clemency recipient, former Texas Representative Steve Stockman, had served just 2 years of his 10 year sentence when he was released. Former New York Representative George Santos spent less than 3 months in prison, despite receiving an 87-month sentence after pleading guilty to wire fraud and aggravated identity theft.

Former Virginia sheriff Scott Jenkins and former Nevada politician Michele Fiore avoided prison time entirely. Jenkins, who faced 10 years in prison following his conviction for accepting \$75,000 in bribes, received a pardon this past Memorial Day—the day before he was supposed to start his sentence. Fiore was pardoned before her scheduled sentencing where she faced a maximum sentence of 140 years after being convicted of stealing funds meant to honor two slain police officers.

In total, Trump's pardons and commutations allowed eleven former politicians to evade roughly 66 and a half years of prison time, not including Fiore's potential sentence. Additionally, these pardons and sentence commutations covered guilty pleas or convictions for 166 counts of corruption-related crimes.

While Trump is not the first to grant clemency to corrupt elected officials, he out-did past presidents in corruption-related political pardons even by the end of his first term. So far in his second term, he's already pardoned 10 politicians of corruption-related crimes. With these pardons, Trump has indicated that corruption-related charges—ranging from bribery and fraud to acting as a foreign agent and

insider trading—are not important, despite the damage they do to public trust and cost to taxpayers.

The story of then-Representative Randall “Duke” Cunningham clearly illustrates the harm to the American people. While serving as a member of the Defense Appropriations Subcommittee, Cunningham conspired to accept bribes, including yachts, homes and luxury vehicles, in exchange for defense contracts, according to his plea agreement and sentencing memorandum. Federal investigators even found a “bribe menu,” in which Cunningham shamelessly spelled out the exact price of his political favors: \$140,000 and a luxury yacht for a \$16 million defense contract, and between \$25,000 to \$50,000 for every additional \$1 million in contracts. In his sentencing memo, federal prosecutors characterized these brazen acts of corruption as “unprecedented for a sitting member of Congress.” Trump—in the final hours of his first term—granted Cunningham a conditional pardon.

Trump’s pardon of former Representative Duncan Hunter was one of the most blatant displays of Trump’s use of the presidency to benefit his allies, and one of several pardons of politicians who had supported Trump. Hunter—one of the first members to endorse Trump in his first presidential run—and his wife were convicted of misusing more than \$150,000 of campaign funds for their own personal benefit and enjoyment. Hunter was sentenced to 11 months in prison for misuse of campaign funds but served no jail time after Trump pardoned Hunter and his wife in December 2020, during his final days in the White House.

In another instance, Trump crossed party lines to grant clemency to another official with whom he had personal connections, former Governor of Illinois and former Celebrity Apprentice contestant Rod Blagojevich. Blagojevich was convicted in 2011 of attempting to sell a Senate seat for \$1.5 million and trying to rescind \$8 million in state funds intended to reimburse pediatric doctors for the treatment of Illinois’ “sickest and poorest children” because a children’s-hospital CEO refused to donate \$25,000

to Blagojevich's campaign. Trump commuted Blagojevich's sentence in 2020 before pardoning him earlier this year and even considering him for an ambassadorship to Serbia.

Beyond pardons, Trump's Department of Justice has also furthered what appears to be an effort by Trump to decriminalize political corruption by dropping its criminal prosecution of former Representative Jeff Fortenberry and New York City Mayor Eric Adams. Trump also granted a pardon in December 2025 to Representative Henry Cuellar who was indicted for bribery in 2024 and whose trial was set for April 2026. Trump's Department of Justice has also largely dismantled its Public Integrity Section, which is charged with investigating and prosecuting corruption cases nationwide.

## Nine federal politicians granted clemency by Trump

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Former U.S. Representative (R-NY)

### George Santos

In April 2025, Santos was convicted of filing fraudulent FEC reports, embezzling funds from campaign donors, stealing identities, charging credit cards without authorization, obtaining unemployment benefits through fraud and lying in reports to the House of Representatives. He was sentenced to 87 months in prison. Trump commuted his sentence after he had served less than three months in prison in October 2025.

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Former U.S. Representative (R-NY)

### Michael Gerard Grimm

In 2014, Grimm pled guilty to one count of felony tax evasion, following investigations into potential other crimes as well as what he pleaded guilty for. Grimm was convicted for personally benefiting from aiding and assisting the preparation of a false tax return after underreporting \$900,000 in restaurant gross receipts and lowering payroll taxes. He served seven months in prison. Trump pardoned him in May 2025.

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**Former U.S. Representative (R-AZ)**

## Rick Renzi

In 2013, Renzi was convicted of “allegations of personal gain in a land swap deal.” He was sentenced to 36 months in prison and was later pardoned by Trump in January 2021.

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**Former U.S. Representative (R-CA)**

## Randall “Duke” Cunningham

In 2006, Cunningham pleaded guilty to charges he conspired to commit bribery and other crimes and was sentenced to 100 months in prison. In January 2021, he received a conditional pardon by Trump.

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**Former U.S. Representative (R-NC)**

## Robert “Robin” Hayes

In August 2020, the North Carolina Republican congressman was convicted of making false statements in a federal bribery and corruption FBI investigation. He was

sentenced to a year of probation and pardoned by Trump in January 2021.

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**Former U.S. Representative (R-CA)**

## Duncan Hunter

In March 2020, Hunter was sentenced to 11 months in prison after pleading guilty to misusing more than \$150,000 of campaign funds for personal benefit. Trump pardoned Hunter and his wife in December 2020.

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**Former U.S. Representative (R-MI)**

## Mark D. Siljander

In 2010, Siljander pled guilty to obstruction of justice and acting as an unregistered foreign agent, and he was later sentenced to 12 months in prison. Federal prosecutors “accused him of receiving \$75,000 from the Islamic American Relief Agency to push for its removal from a federal government list of charities suspected of funding terrorism.” Trump pardoned him in December 2020.

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**Former U.S. Representative (R-NY)**

## Chris Collins

In January 2020, Collins was sentenced to 26 months in prison after pleading guilty to insider trading charges. Trump pardoned Collins after he had served just two months in prison in December 2020.

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**Former U.S. Representative (R-TX)**

## Steve Stockman

In April 2018, Stockman was convicted of 23 felonies, including using charitable donations for personal use and to fund his campaign. Trump commuted his sentence in December 2020.

## Eleven state and local politicians pardoned by Trump

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Former State Representative and Tennessee House Speaker (R-TN)

## Glen Casada

In September 2025, Casada was sentenced to three years in prison for bribery related to a legislature's state-funded constituent mailer program. Trump pardoned him on November 7, 2025, allowing Casada to avoid prison time.

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Former State Senator (R-AR)

## Jeremy Young Hutchinson

In 2023, Hutchinson was sentenced to a total of 96 months for accepting multiple bribes in exchange for influencing policy in Missouri and Arizona in multiple schemes spanning seven years. Hutchinson received over \$350,000 in charity funds, among other bribes. Trump pardoned him on May 29, 2025 after he'd only served two years of his eight year sentence.

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Former Republican Governor of Connecticut

## John Rowland

In both 2006 and 2016, Rowland served time for federal corruption charges. After pleading guilty in 2004 to one count of conspiracy to steal honest services, Rowland served 10 months in a federal prison camp. In 2014, he was convicted of conspiring to hide his work in political services and subsequently was sentenced to 30 months in federal prison. Trump pardoned Rowland on May 28, 2025.

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**Former Cincinnati City Council member**

## Alexander “PG” Sittenfeld

In 2023, Sittenfeld was sentenced to 16 months in prison following a conviction for accepting tens of thousands of dollars in campaign contributions in exchange for guaranteeing votes for a development project. Trump pardoned Sittenfeld on May 28, 2025.

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**Former sheriff of Culpeper County, Virginia**

## Scott Jenkins

In late 2024, Jenkins was convicted of federal bribery charges, including accepting \$75,000 in bribes in exchange for allowing several businessmen to become law enforcement officers without training. He was sentenced to 10 years in prison in March 2025, but avoided prison time, receiving an unconditional pardon on May 26, 2025, the day before he was supposed to start his sentence.

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**Former Las Vegas City Councilmember and State Assembly Member (R-NV)**

## Michele Fiore

In October 2024, the former Nevada state Republican lawmaker was convicted of fraud for using over \$70,000 worth of charitable donations intended to honor two slain police officers for her own personal and political expenses. Trump pardoned Fiore in April 2025 before her sentencing. She faced up to 140 years in prison.

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#### Former State Senator (R-TN)

### Brian Kelsey

In August 2023, the former Tennessee state senator was sentenced to 21 months imprisonment after pleading guilty to campaign finance charges. Kelsey was pardoned by Trump just over two weeks after he began serving his sentence in federal prison.

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#### Former Democratic Governor of Illinois

### Rod Blagojevich

In 2011, Blagojevich was “convicted of corruption-related crimes, including trying to sell a U.S. Senate seat vacated by former President Barack Obama.” Blagojevich served as Illinois governor from 2003 to 2009. During that time, he allegedly turned “Illinois’ government into a moneymaking operation for himself by trying to, among other things, shake down a children’s hospital and racetrack owners.”

Trump and Blagojevich became acquainted when Blagojevich appeared on Trump’s reality show *Celebrity Apprentice* in 2010. Moreover, Trump “personally donated \$7,000 to Blagojevich’s campaigns (\$5,000 in 2002 and \$2,000 in 2007) before his conviction, and his hotel and casino organization donated another \$2,000 in 2003.”

Trump commuted Blagojevich's 14-year sentence in February 2020 before fully pardoning him in February 2025.

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**Former Detroit Mayor and State Representative**

## Kwame Kilpatrick

In 2013, the former mayor of Detroit Kwame Kilpatrick, a Democrat, was convicted of a racketeering and bribery scheme in which he exploited his public office for personal enrichment and sentenced to 28 years in prison. However, Kilpatrick was released from prison roughly 20 years earlier than his scheduled release date after Trump commuted his sentence in January 2021. Kilpatrick still owes hundreds of thousands of dollars in restitution to the federal government for his crimes, which he contests.

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**Former Palm Beach County Commissioner (R-FL)**

## Mary McCarty

In 2009, prosecutors alleged that McCarty, the former Republican county commissioner in Palm Beach Florida, used her position as commissioner to “personally enrich herself, her husband, and their associates through a series of municipal bond transactions.” She pleaded guilty and was sentenced to 42 months' imprisonment. Trump pardoned McCarty in December 2020.

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**Former State Assembly Member (R-CA)**

## Pat Nolan

In 1994, the former California Assemblyman pleaded guilty to one count of racketeering for “extorting campaign contributions from those who sought his support on

legislation.” Nolan was sentenced to 33 months in prison.  
He was pardoned by Trump in May 2019.

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