



### President Trump Grants Clemency to Multiple High-Profile Felons

President Trump issued a wave of commutations and pardons this week, as he granted clemency to 11 convicted felons, most notably former Illinois Governor Rod Blagojevich. The disgraced former governor was convicted a decade ago on a number of political corruption charges, including trying to sell the U.S. Senate seat that President Barack Obama vacated when he was elected president. Prior to Trump's actions and his release this week, Blagojevich had served 8 years of his 14-year prison sentence. The full list of Trump clemency recipients also included former San Francisco 49ers owner Edward DeBartolo Jr., financier Michael Milken, former New York City Police Commissioner Bernard Kerik, and former lobbyist David Safavian.

Trump had publicly weighed the idea of a commutation for Blagojevich for over a year. Back in May of 2018, he criticized the sentence for being too harsh and downplayed the former governor's crimes, stating that Blagojevich was convicted for "being stupid, saying things that every other politician, you know, that many other politicians say." Trump also expressed sympathy for him when he appeared on "Celebrity Apprentice" in 2010, just prior to the start of Blagojevich's first criminal trial. The president ultimately decided to commute his prison sentence despite the objections of White House aides and Republican members of Congress.

In addition to Blagojevich, Trump also granted clemency to former New York City Police Commissioner Bernard Kerik, who served three years in federal prison for charges including tax fraud and lying to officials. Kerik, who is a former business partner of Trump ally Rudy Giuliani, was nominated as homeland security secretary by President George W. Bush but withdrew from consideration due to potential tax violations. He also aided in the case of disgraced Navy SEAL chief Eddie Gallagher, who was initially demoted in rank after being convicted of bringing discredit to the armed services but was later pardoned by President Trump.

The other high-profile recipients of Trump's pardons and commutations were DeBartolo Jr., Milken, and Safavian. DeBartolo Jr. pleaded guilty in 1998 to failing to report a felony in a bribery case and agreed to pay up to \$1 million in fines, while also relinquishing his ownership of the San Francisco 49ers NFL franchise. Milken served 22 months of a 10-year prison sentence for violating securities laws related to insider trading schemes, and was released from prison in 1993. Safavian, who served as an official in President George W. Bush's administration, was sentenced to a one-year prison sentence back in 2009 for obstructing an investigation and making false statements in connection to the Jack Abramoff Indian lobbying scandal.

Trump's slew of clemency has raised questions about his intervention in criminal cases, especially due to the ongoing cases against two of his associates, Michael Flynn and Roger Stone, who are both facing impending sentencing. The question of presidential pardons and commutations now hovers over those two cases as well. So far, Trump has publicly defended Flynn and Stone, and has repeatedly declined to rule out the potential for future pardons.