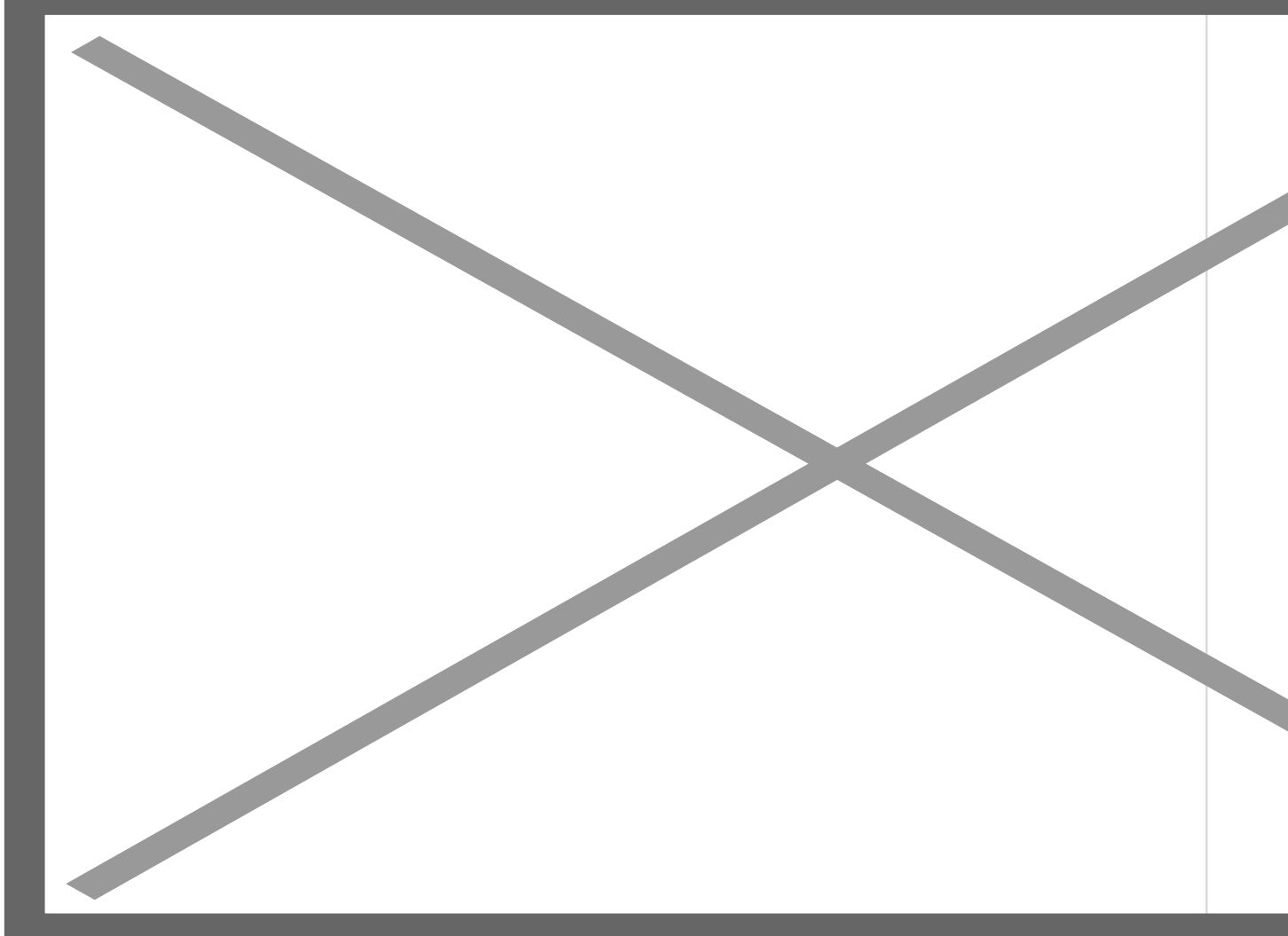


Trump issues 26 new pardons, covering friends and convicted criminals

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Roger Stone, Paul Manafort and Charles Kushner -- criminals on the loose!

Washington, December 24 (RHC)-- U.S. President Donald Trump has pardoned his former campaign chairman Paul Manafort, associate Roger Stone and Charles Kushner, a real estate developer and the father of his son-in-law, Jared.

Manafort was convicted as part of the special counsel probe into Russian meddling in the 2016 US election. Trump had earlier commuted the criminal sentence of Stone, who was convicted of lying under oath to lawmakers.

It was the second wave of pardons Trump has issued in two days and comes just after Trump arrived in Palm Beach, Florida for the holiday season. In total, he issued on Wednesday full pardons to 26 individuals and commuted part or all of the sentences of an additional three people.

In a statement issued late on Wednesday, Republican Senator Ben Sasse angrily denounced the pardons on individuals “who flagrantly and repeatedly violated the law and harmed Americans.” “This is rotted to the core.”

Trump’s pardoning of Manafort spared the longtime Republican operative from serving the bulk of his 7.5-year prison term. Manafort, 70, was among the first in Trump’s inner circle to face charges brought by Special Counsel Robert Mueller as part of his probe into Russian interference in the 2016 presidential election.

Stone was convicted in November 2019 by a Washington jury of lying under oath to legislators also investigating Russian interference in the 2016 election. Trump commuted his sentence in July, a day before Stone was due to begin serving a term of three years and four months.

Kushner, father of Trump son-in-law Jared Kushner, was sentenced to two years in prison after pleading guilty in 2004 to 18 counts of tax evasion, witness tampering and making unlawful campaign donations.

In an unusual twist, the man who prosecuted Charles Kushner was Chris Christie, now the former governor of New Jersey, who has also worked as an adviser to Trump. Christie was quoted by CNN as saying Charles Kushner’s case was “one of the most loathsome, disgusting crimes” he prosecuted.

Writing for The Atlantic magazine, Paul Rosenzweig, a senior counsel in the investigation of then-US President Bill Clinton, said the pardons may, in part, be “rewards” for the people involved “for their refusal to help in holding Trump to account”.

“Manafort, Stone, and Flynn, in different ways, were connected to Trump and allegations of criminality,” he wrote, also referring to Michael Flynn, who briefly served as the president’s national security adviser.

On Tuesday, Trump also pardoned four former guards for private contractor Blackwater, who were jailed for the 2007 killings of dozens of Iraqi civilians -- an act of war crimes against humanity.

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