

Trump suffers series of legal blows on taxes, Mar-a-Lago raid

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Ex-president Donald Trump suffered one major legal blow Tuesday and seemed on the brink of another, as the US Supreme Court ruled that his tax returns should be turned over to a committee of the House of Representatives, while an Appeals Court seemed ready to revoke a lower court decision to appoint a special master to review the materials seized in the FBI raid on Trump's Mar-a-Lago estate.

In a brief, two-sentence order, the Supreme Court rebuffed Trump's effort to block the House Ways and Means Committee from obtaining his income tax returns from the Internal Revenue Service. The decision was unanimous, including all three of the ultra-right justices nominated by Trump himself to the high court.

The committee first subpoenaed Trump's tax returns in 2019, the third year of his presidency, but the legal challenges have dragged on to nearly the end of the second year of Biden's presidency. The senior Democrat on the committee, Bill Pascrell of New Jersey, said the court case had gone on for 1,329 days, nearly as long as the American Civil War.

The delay was in large measure because it was heard at the lower-court level by a Trump-appointed federal district judge, Trevor McFadden, who conceded that court precedents were unequivocally against the then-president, then sat on the case for more than two years, until after Trump was defeated in the 2020 presidential election. His subsequent order to turn over the tax returns was then appealed to the circuit court, which upheld McFadden, and then appealed again to the Supreme Court.

Trump, who has fought a delaying action after being the first presidential candidate in half a century to refuse to release his tax returns during the campaign, voiced his rage against the Supreme Court decision, particularly against the justices he had himself

appointed.

"Why would anybody be surprised that the Supreme Court has ruled against me, they always do!" Trump wrote on the right-wing social media site he established after he was kicked off Twitter, Truth Social. "The Supreme Court has lost its honor, prestige, and standing, & has become nothing more than a political body, with our Country paying the price."

He added, "Shame on them!" and rehashed his grievances over the court refusing to hear his bogus legal challenges to his 2020 election defeat.

A second legal proceeding on Tuesday was a hearing before a three-judge panel of the US Court of Appeals for the 11th Circuit, sitting in Atlanta, Georgia, on Trump's effort to restrict the search of his Mar-a-Lago estate in Florida by having the documents seized reviewed by a "special master," a retired federal judge who could withhold some or all of the documents from the FBI and the Department of Justice.

The decision to appoint a special master was highly unusual, and was made by a Trump-appointed federal district judge, Aileen Cannon, who appeared to be rewarding the president who had placed her on the bench. Raymond Dearie, the retired federal judge chosen as special master, is going through 13,000 documents seized in the raid, except for more than 100 marked as secret, which the Justice Department has withheld. He is to determine whether any of the documents involve attorney-client privilege, or are Trump's personal property, as the ex-president claims.

The three appeals court judges asked questions that expressed skepticism over Trump's claim that as a former president, he was entitled to different treatment than any other target of a federal investigation. The chief judge of the circuit court, William Pryor, an appointee of George W. Bush, who was randomly

selected as part of the three-judge panel, remarked, “Other than the fact that this involves a former president, everything else about this is indistinguishable from any pre-indictment search warrant.”

He continued: “We’ve got to be concerned about the precedent that we would create that would allow any target of a federal criminal investigation to go into a district court and to have a district court entertain this kind of petition ... and interfere with the executive branch’s ongoing investigation.”

The other two judges on the three-judge panel were Trump appointees, but they appeared to share Pryor’s reluctance to set a precedent that a former president is above the law. Judge Andrew L. Brasher asked Trump lawyer James Trusty, a lawyer for Mr. Trump, to cite “a single decision by a federal court other than this one” that had issued the type of ruling he sought. Trusty ducked the question.

Trump’s lawyers also filed a new motion with Judge Cannon seeking release of an unredacted copy of the search warrant executed by the FBI agents who visited the Mar-a-Lago estate. As the *New York Times* noted in its report:

“An unredacted copy would give Mr. Trump’s lawyers access to sensitive information, like the witnesses prosecutors had interviewed or other details that might shed light on the Justice Department’s inquiry. Information like that would prove useful should the lawyers seek to challenge the legality of the search or begin to craft a defense against potential criminal charges.

“Asking Judge Cannon, who sits in the Southern District of Florida, to consider unsealing the warrant affidavit would have another effect in the case: It would ensure her continued involvement in the documents inquiry even if the appeals court ultimately dismisses her special master order.”

In other words, Trump’s legal team seeks to keep the pro-Trump judge on side, even if her most important intervention, naming the special master, is thrown out by the appeals court.

Press reports cited as many as nine total court cases brought by or against Trump in which there were legal actions in the course of the past week. These range from lawsuits against him by his niece Mary and his former fixer, Michael Cohen, both dismissed; the lawsuit against him by Jean Randall, who alleges

Trump sexually assaulted her, for which a court hearing has been scheduled; and the New York state prosecution over tax evasion and other financial flimflam by the Trump Organization, which moved forward despite a Trump countersuit.

The vast array of legal cases suggests two things: the vast range of Trump’s own criminal activities over many decades; and the effort by his opponents within the ruling elite to tie up his current political efforts—he announced his candidacy for president in 2024 last week—in legal knots, largely of his own making.



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