



Bill Essayli's Record and Why His Confirmation Should Be Blocked

Executive Summary

Bilal "Bill" Essayli is an extremist partisan whose record and associations make him an inappropriate choice for United States Attorney in California's Central District. As a former California assemblyman and newly appointed interim U.S. Attorney in Los Angeles, Essayli has consistently aligned himself with far-right, anti-democratic movements and has demonstrated a willingness to use inflammatory rhetoric and even prosecutorial powers to advance a partisan agenda. This report outlines the key reasons why **California's Senators should withhold blue slips** and oppose Essayli's permanent appointment:

- **Ties to Far-Right Extremism:** Essayli has cultivated relationships with fascist-adjacent figures and movements. He was part of a cohort of hardline Southern California conservatives with direct links to Trump's inner circle, including individuals like **Mike Flynn, Richard Grenell, Sheriff Chad Bianco** (an Oath Keepers affiliate) and evangelical **Pastor Tim Thompson** (a "3 Percenter" militia member), and even met with Donald Trump Jr. and Eric Trump ahead of the 2024 election. He has openly championed Donald Trump's cause, *even post-conviction*, posting that Trump's return to power would "restore the rule of law" despite Trump's own felony conviction – a stance that raises doubts about Essayli's objectivity.
- **Inflammatory Legislative Record:** During two tumultuous years in the California Assembly, Essayli earned notoriety as a **political provocateur** more interested in staging fights than passing laws. He routinely introduced **divisive, performative bills** (e.g. forcing schools to "out" transgender students) that had no chance of passage, using them to generate outrage and Fox News appearances. His legislative "accomplishments" were negligible – as one colleague observed, Essayli "*politicize[d] any and everything to try to score political points while simultaneously accomplishing no legislation*". He often resorted to vitriolic outbursts on the Assembly floor, at one point **shouting profanities** and pounding his desk when he wasn't recognized to speak, yelling "*I have the Goddamn right to speak... You are a f---ing liar*" before storming out. Such conduct not only violated decorum but underscored his temperament and **disrespect for democratic institutions**.
- **Alignment with Hate-Fueled Causes:** Essayli made **anti-LGBTQ+ crusades** a centerpiece of his agenda. He traveled to local school board meetings to lobby for policies forcing teachers to report any student perceived as transgender to their parents. These appearances were often supported in person and/or online by people with ties to

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The Proud Boys and other right-wing extremist groups. He introduced a failed bill to mandate such “**parental notification**” statewide, and on the Assembly’s final night in 2024 even attempted a last-minute ban on transgender athletes in girls’ sports – echoing a Trump-era interpretation of Title IX that **targeted transgender youth**. Essayli’s rhetoric often tipped into the extreme; during a debate on a bill protecting trans students from outing, he **compared California Democrats to the “Chinese Communist Party”** when his microphone was cut off for straying off-topic. He has shown a pattern of **demonizing marginalized groups**: for instance, when Democrats blocked his stunt amendment to strip “sanctuary state” protections from certain immigrants, Essayli blasted them as “*protect[ing] illegal immigrant pedophiles*” and even labeled a Democratic colleague a “**pedophile protector**”. These are the tactics of demagoguery, not of an impartial public prosecutor.

- **Defender of January 6th Insurrectionists:** In private practice, Essayli served as defense counsel to at least one high-profile January 6th defendant – **Alan Hostetter**, an Orange County activist later convicted of conspiracy in the Capitol attack. Essayli publicly disparaged Hostetter’s federal indictment, claiming he was “very troubled” by the charges and that his client “*did nothing more than exercise his 1st Amendment rights*”, despite evidence Hostetter coordinated with militant groups. By downplaying a violent attempt to overthrow an election as mere free speech, Essayli aligned himself with the **insurrectionist cause** and displayed a lack of commitment to upholding the rule of law against political violence. His willingness to excuse or minimize the actions of Jan. 6 rioters places him far outside the mainstream of law enforcement.
- **Undermining Democratic Institutions:** Essayli has actively worked to **erode pillars of democracy** in service of partisan goals. He partnered with Trump allies like Richard Grenell and Carl DeMaio to push a statewide **voter ID ballot initiative** aimed at tightening voting requirements, a measure widely seen as suppressing turnout among minority and young voters. In late 2023, as some officials considered barring Trump from the 2024 ballot under the 14th Amendment insurrectionist ban, Essayli rallied fellow Republicans and sent a letter to California’s Secretary of State warning that removing Trump would be an “attack on our democracy” and urging her to keep Trump on the ballot. (Ironically, he cast efforts to hold an insurrectionist accountable as the real attack on democracy.) Essayli’s pattern is to **defend and empower those who threaten democratic order** – from insurrectionists to voter suppression advocates – while assailing those who stand in their way.
- **Prosecutorial Misconduct and Abuse of Power:** Perhaps most alarming is how Essayli has already abused his authority as interim U.S. Attorney to serve political ends. Within weeks of taking office, he intervened in a case where an L.A. County sheriff’s deputy (**Trevor Kirk**) had been **convicted by a jury of using excessive force** against a civilian. In an extraordinary move, Essayli sought to **void his own office’s jury conviction** and offered the deputy a lenient **post-verdict plea deal** to downgrade the felony to a misdemeanor with no prison time. This unheard-of reversal – essentially



overruling a unanimous jury to favor a violent law enforcement officer – caused **uproar in the U.S. Attorney’s Office**. Four veteran federal prosecutors who had worked on the case withdrew in protest, and three of them resigned their positions entirely rather than be complicit. The chief of the Civil Rights unit was among those who quit. Such mass resignations over an ethical breach are virtually unheard of, and they underscore the gravity of Essayli’s misconduct. Essayli’s maneuver drew sharp rebuke from the federal judge, who was “skeptical” of vacating a valid verdict without cause. Legal experts likened the episode to the Trump administration’s politicization of justice – indeed, it unfolded the same week Trump issued orders to “unleash” law enforcement, and Essayli, a “*staunch Trump ally*,” appeared to be **carrying out a political agenda over impartial justice**.

- **Threat to Impartial Justice:** If confirmed, Bill Essayli poses a clear and present danger that the U.S. Attorney’s Office would be weaponized for **partisan revenge and oppression of marginalized communities**. He has signaled interest in using federal power to target those disfavored by the far right: for example, he launched “**Operation Guardian Angel**,” a task force to aggressively **undermine California’s sanctuary laws** by transferring undocumented inmates into federal custody for deportation. In interviews, Essayli framed this as “*neutralizing*” state policies – effectively declaring war on California’s immigrant protections. Moreover, he recently politicized the tragic Palm Springs car bombing by publicly declaring it an act of “**anti-pro-life terrorism**”, despite no evidence from investigators supporting this characterization. This irresponsible speculation exemplifies his willingness to exploit sensitive incidents to stoke partisan outrage. His track record suggests he would **selectively prosecute political opponents** (or policies of blue-state officials) while shielding allies (like abusive police or right-wing agitators) from consequences. This politicized approach is antithetical to the neutral enforcement of federal law. It also raises alarm that Essayli would persecute vulnerable populations – immigrants, LGBTQ+ individuals, activists – to score political points for his patrons.

Given this record, confirming Bill Essayli as U.S. Attorney would reward extremism and invite a profound politicization of federal law enforcement in California. The Senate has both the authority and the duty to prevent that outcome. California’s senators, in particular, have the ability to utilize the blue slip tradition to veto U.S. Attorney nominees who lack broad support or raise red flags. Essayli’s nomination is precisely the sort of scenario those tools exist for. His tenure so far has confirmed every fear: he has abused prosecutorial discretion for partisan ends, flagrantly disregarded the independent judgment of career prosecutors, and aligned himself with authoritarian interests. Allowing him to remain as the chief federal prosecutor for California’s Central District would put millions of Californians – especially communities Essayli and his allies scapegoat – at risk of unequal justice.

Recommendation: Senators should unequivocally reject Bill Essayli’s confirmation.

Through the blue slip process or in Senate Judiciary Committee hearings, they should block his



appointment from advancing. In doing so, they will be upholding the integrity of the Justice Department, protecting California's diverse communities from a rogue prosecutor, and sending a message that extremist partisans have no place leading our federal law enforcement. The evidence presented in this dossier demonstrates that Essayli's values and behavior are fundamentally incompatible with the impartiality, respect for rights, and commitment to democracy that the U.S. Attorney role demands.

Essayli's Far-Right Partisan Profile

Bilal "Bill" Essayli, 39, is a former federal prosecutor-turned-politician who has embraced the furthest fringes of right-wing politics in ambition and ideology. A first-generation Lebanese American and the first Muslim elected to the California Assembly, Essayli does not fit the traditional profile of a *white nationalist*, yet he has allied himself with many figures and causes on the extreme right. His rapid elevation to interim U.S. Attorney for the Central District of California in April 2025 was itself a political maneuver: President Donald Trump's Attorney General, **Pamela Bondi**, installed Essayli via an interim appointment soon after Trump took office for a second term. This move bypassed the usual vetting and Senate confirmation, placing a highly partisan figure in charge of the nation's largest federal prosecutorial district.

From the outset, **Essayli's own words and associations signaled his partisan loyalties.** He made no secret that he saw his role as implementing Trump's agenda. Upon being sworn in, he stated he would "*implement the priorities of the President and the Attorney General*" – a striking framing that subordinates impartial justice to political leadership. Indeed, **Essayli has been an outspoken Trump loyalist.** In May 2023, after a jury found Donald Trump liable of multiple felonies related to hush-money payments, Essayli took to Facebook to condemn the verdict and expressed that he *looked forward to electing Trump as president "to restore the rule of law and our constitutional principles."* Such a statement is profoundly unsettling coming from a prosecutor: it suggests that Essayli believes the *convicted* ex-president is the one to "restore the rule of law," implying the legal system's judgments are illegitimate when they go against Trump. Far from showing independence, Essayli signals fealty to Trump above all – even above the findings of courts and juries.

In California's political circles, Essayli cultivated an image as a "**lightning-rod**" conservative willing to confront anyone – Democrats, fellow Republicans, or government institutions – in pursuit of his agenda. Representing an inland Southern California district (the 63rd, based in Riverside/Corona) from 2022 until 2025, he stood out even within the minority GOP caucus for his **pugnacious, hard-right stance.** He helped push the California GOP further right, later boasting: "*When I joined the Assembly, parental rights, illegal immigration, and voter ID were peripheral issues; we've made them centerpieces of our Party.*" In other words, Essayli prides himself on elevating divisive culture-war and nativist issues to the forefront of Republican politics. He even credited the election of other "true fighters" to the legislature as part of this rightward shift. This proudly partisan self-description belies any notion that he could serve as an impartial enforcer of federal law – he sees the world in terms of *us vs. them*, and policymaking as a zero-sum war of ideology.



Essayli's ties to far-right networks extend beyond policy preferences to personal alliances with noted extremists. As an Assemblymember, he formed part of a cadre of ultra-conservative Inland Empire Republicans with direct ties to Trumpworld. In fact, days before the November 2024 election, Essayli and several other Riverside County figures (including Sheriff **Chad Bianco** and Pastor **Tim Thompson**) met privately with Donald Trump Jr. and Eric Trump. Bianco is notorious for his own extremist leanings – he publicly acknowledged having once been a dues-paying member of the Oath Keepers militia, and he openly defied COVID health mandates in 2020. Pastor Tim Thompson, of 412 Church in Murrieta, is a **right-wing evangelical leader** who has led anti-LGBTQ+ school board protests and preached Christian nationalist themes. That Essayli was networking alongside Bianco and Thompson with the Trump family demonstrates his comfort in the company of *anti-democratic, conspiratorial actors*.

Additionally, Essayli's mentors and allies include figures like **Richard Grenell** (Trump's acting DNI and a vocal far-right operative) – with whom Essayli worked to advance a California voter ID law – and others on the extreme flank of the GOP. While in law school at Chapman University, Essayli even crossed paths with Professor **John Eastman**, the Trump attorney who later authored the coup memo to overturn the 2020 election. Eastman's role at Chapman and in California GOP circles is well known; it is telling that Essayli has not disavowed Eastman's actions, but rather shares the company of those who supported Trump's efforts to nullify the election. And in the broader MAGA ecosystem, Essayli has aligned with **Michael Flynn**, the ex-General who became a hero to QAnon believers. Flynn and Essayli have appeared at the same conservative rallies and events in Southern California, and Essayli has echoed some of Flynn's hardline views on "law and order" and the targeting of "radical left" activists (positions that in practice often translate to trampling on civil liberties).

In short, **Essayli is not just a routine Republican pick; he is a figure deeply embedded in far-right, authoritarian-leaning circles.** His appointment as U.S. Attorney was widely seen as part of President Trump's effort to *"install loyalists at the highest levels of government, including in law enforcement"*. This is corroborated by reporting that the Trump White House has been purging DOJ officials deemed insufficiently loyal and replacing them with political firebrands like Essayli. By naming Essayli, a controversial partisan, to head the Central District, the administration departed from the norm of promoting nonpartisan career prosecutors. Instead, Essayli's selection was a reward for his unwavering loyalty and his value as an **ideological warrior**.

For California's senators, Essayli's background raises immediate red flags. A U.S. Attorney must enforce federal law fairly across a vast district – including diverse, liberal communities utterly at odds with Essayli's far-right base. His writings and alliances strongly indicate he would bring **bias** into charging decisions, and possibly target "enemies" identified by his political benefactors. Indeed, Senate tradition holds that home-state senators can block U.S. Attorney nominees precisely to guard against such problematic appointments. Essayli exemplifies why that safeguard exists. As detailed in the sections below, his legislative behavior and prosecutorial conduct provide concrete evidence of how his extremist partisan profile translates into dangerous actions.



Inflammatory Legislative Behavior and Hate-Fueled Rhetoric

Bill Essayli's tenure in the California State Assembly (December 2022 – April 2025) was marked less by constructive lawmaking than by **grandstanding, incendiary rhetoric, and provocation**. In a Democratic-supermajority legislature, Essayli distinguished himself not by building coalitions or passing bills – he in fact had a *“poor track record of passing bills”* – but by staging confrontations to gain media attention. He seemingly treated the Assembly floor as a theater to perform for his base and right-wing media, earning him a reputation as one of Sacramento's most *“vocal adversaries”* to the majority party.

Central to Essayli's legislative persona was a series of inflammatory proposals on social issues, especially targeting LGBTQ+ youth. He authored or championed multiple bills aimed at restricting the rights of transgender students under the banner of “parental rights.” One high-profile example was **Assembly Bill 1314**, which Essayli introduced in 2023 to require that schools notify parents within 72 hours if a student identifies as a gender different from that on official records. This forced-outing bill was so controversial that Democratic leadership refused to even grant it a committee hearing, recognizing it as a dangerous infringement on student privacy and safety. Essayli nonetheless used AB 1314 as a rallying cry, touring school board meetings across the state to agitate for local districts to adopt similar policies. In these appearances, he positioned himself as the face of the “parental notification” movement, often appearing alongside or encouraging far-right parent groups (some with Proud Boys in tow at meetings) determined to roll back LGBTQ+ inclusion in schools.

When Democratic legislators moved to ban such forced outing policies (through AB 5 and AB 1078 in 2023–24), Essayli fought them aggressively. **A heated altercation on June 27, 2024**, encapsulated his approach. As the Assembly debated AB 1955 – a bill prohibiting schools from *requiring* staff to out transgender students – Essayli repeatedly tried to derail the discussion. He interrupted a fellow legislator during debate and defied the presiding officer's attempts to bring him to order. According to contemporaneous reports, when Assemblymember **Corey Jackson** (a Democrat and LGBTQ+ advocate) objected to Essayli's behavior, Essayli retorted, *“What are you going to do about it?”*, nearly provoking a physical confrontation on the Assembly floor. The scene became so tense that lawmakers had to step between Jackson and Essayli, and the session was gaveled into recess to restore order. Such an episode is virtually unheard of in modern California legislative history. It demonstrated Essayli's willingness to sow chaos and division in a lawmaking body to score ideological points. Rather than engage in civil debate, he chose to **bait colleagues with taunts** and create a spectacle – conduct unbecoming of any public official, let alone one now entrusted with high prosecutorial office.

Essayli's **lack of decorum** and extreme rhetoric were recurrent problems. On multiple occasions, Assembly Speaker pro tempore **Jim Wood** had to admonish Essayli or cut his microphone when he violated procedural rules. Each time, Essayli escalated. The most infamous incident came in the final minutes of the 2024 legislative session. With dozens of bills pending and the majority rushing against a midnight deadline, Essayli was not recognized to



speak on a particular measure due to time constraints. Enraged, he began **shouting over the proceedings**. When his microphone was turned off, Essayli furiously pounded his desk and yelled at the presiding officer, *“I have a goddamn right to speak!”*. As security and colleagues looked on in shock, he then pointed at a Democratic floor leader and twice bellowed, *“You are a fucking liar!”*. This tirade, laced with profanity, was broadcast on the Assembly’s live feed and later circulated widely, embarrassing the institution. It underscored that **Essayli lacked the temperament and respect for rulemaking processes** expected of an attorney or legislator. Notably, even some Republicans were uncomfortable – Assembly GOP moderates quietly conceded that Essayli’s combative tactics were counterproductive and not reflective of the entire caucus.

Beyond process, **Essayli’s floor speeches often veered into incendiary territory**. For instance, during one debate he bizarrely declared, *“I wasn’t prepared to address the Chinese Communist Party today,”* comparing California’s Democratic majority to the CCP. This outburst came after Speaker pro tem Wood cut him off for straying off-topic; Essayli essentially accused the presiding officer of censoring him like a communist regime. Such **hyperbolic, hostile comparisons** of political opponents to communists, pedophiles, or other villains were a hallmark of Essayli’s style. He frequently took to **Twitter (X)** to personally attack colleagues in demeaning terms. In May 2024, after Democrats blocked his immigration-related amendment, Essayli tweeted that it was “disgusting” Democrats *“voted to protect illegal immigrant pedophiles”*, accusing them of caring more about rapists “than protecting American children.” He even singled out a specific Democrat, Assemblymember Pilar Schiavo, smearing her as a *“pedophile protector.”* These statements are not only flagrantly false, but dangerous – language like “pedophile protector” echoes the rhetoric of QAnon conspiracy theorists who have incited violence against officials by painting them as threats to children. By trafficking in such slurs on the Assembly floor and online, Essayli signaled his alignment with the **most extreme fringes of right-wing discourse**.

It is telling that Assembly Speaker **Robert Rivas** felt compelled to remove Essayli from the prestigious Judiciary Committee in mid-2024 as a consequence of these antics. Rivas’s move was unprecedented – committee assignments are rarely stripped mid-term – but came after Essayli’s “pedophile” accusations and his attempt to force a floor vote on his immigration bill in violation of procedure. In protest, Assembly Republicans staged a committee boycott, claiming Essayli was punished for merely speaking “mainstream” views. But the record shows Essayli was not sanctioned for his ideology; it was the **extremity of his language and his abuse of the legislative process** that prompted disciplinary action. Fellow lawmakers simply found his behavior beyond the pale.

In summary, **Essayli’s legislative record is one of division, not deliberation**. He used his platform to inflame passions on wedge issues, usually at the expense of minority communities (LGBTQ youth, immigrants) whom he vilified. He achieved almost no substantive legislative wins – his proposals on trans youth, voter ID, and anti-sanctuary policies all failed – confirming that these bills were **never serious policy efforts but rather political theater**. Essayli “accomplished no legislation” in the words of one Democrat, except to further polarize and poison the well of civic discourse. This matters for his prospective DOJ role: The same



confrontational, ideology-driven approach he brought to Sacramento can be expected in how he would run federal prosecutions. His disrespect for rules and truth in the legislature foreshadows a potential to **bend or break rules in prosecutions** if it serves his agenda. Indeed, as the next sections show, that is exactly what has begun to happen.

Alignment with Anti-Democratic Movements and Actors

Essayli's extremism goes beyond rhetoric; he has repeatedly sided with those who reject democratic outcomes or undermine democratic institutions. Two major facets stand out: **his defense of January 6th insurrectionists and his efforts to thwart accountability or reforms in the election process.**

Perhaps most striking is Essayli's role as an **attorney for participants in the January 6, 2021 Capitol attack**. After leaving the U.S. Attorney's Office in 2018, Essayli entered private practice and later took on the case of **Alan Hostetter**, a former police chief-turned-militant activist from Orange County. Hostetter was indicted on federal conspiracy charges for organizing and participating in the Capitol riot, in a case that also involved members of the Three Percenters militia. Rather than distance himself from an assault on our seat of government, Essayli joined Hostetter's defense team and became an outspoken apologist for the rioters' cause. Upon Hostetter's indictment in June 2021, Essayli openly cast doubt on the charges, saying he was "*very troubled*" by the government's case and that Hostetter had "*did nothing more than exercise his 1st Amendment rights.*" Essayli asserted that simply being present on Capitol grounds was being unfairly criminalized, noting that Hostetter never entered the building and claiming the area had been occupied by protesters before without consequence. This argument willfully ignored the context: Hostetter and his associates had allegedly plotted violence on encrypted chats, traveled to D.C. armed and ready for combat, and glorified the breach of the Capitol. By equating an organized insurrection with benign protest, Essayli parroted the **false narrative** pushed by the far right that January 6 was a peaceful expression of free speech.

Even after January 6th cases moved through the courts and rioters were convicted, Essayli maintained a sympathetic stance. He became a regular guest on conservative media decrying the "persecution" of Jan. 6 defendants. This raises serious concerns: **As U.S. Attorney, would Essayli diligently prosecute politically motivated violence by Trump's supporters?** His past advocacy suggests he might not. In fact, in his short time as interim U.S. Attorney, Essayli has shown far more zeal in pursuing Trump's perceived adversaries (e.g., California officials, as discussed below) than in continuing the Jan. 6 investigations. There is legitimate fear that Essayli might drop or soft-pedal any remaining cases against insurrectionists or militant far-right groups out of ideological sympathy. The Senate must ask: Can someone who literally defended an architect of the Capitol assault be trusted to prosecute domestic terrorism or extremist violence without bias?

Concurrently, Essayli has engaged in efforts to **undermine democratic processes under the guise of fighting fraud or protecting "election integrity."** In 2022, he partnered with former Trump envoy **Ric Grenell** and others to spearhead a ballot initiative for **mandatory voter**



identification in California elections. Voter ID laws are a hallmark of the voter suppression playbook – unnecessary in a state with no evidence of widespread impersonation fraud, and likely to disenfranchise tens of thousands of legitimate voters who lack specific IDs (disproportionately the poor, elderly, and minorities). Essayli's pursuit of this measure, which he aimed to qualify for the 2026 ballot, demonstrates his alignment with the **national campaign to restrict voting access**. It indicates he views expansive democratic participation (a hallmark of California's electorate) with suspicion and prefers to erect new barriers to the ballot box, a stance at odds with the Justice Department's historic role in protecting voting rights.

Additionally, Essayli used his Assembly platform to combat efforts to hold Donald Trump accountable in the electoral arena. In late 2023, when Democratic officials explored whether the **14th Amendment's "insurrectionist ban"** could disqualify Trump from the ballot for his role in Jan. 6, Essayli went on the offensive. **On December 21, 2023**, he organized members of the Assembly Republican caucus to co-sign a letter to Secretary of State **Shirley Weber**. That letter (which Essayli's office blasted out as a press release) urged Weber *not* to remove Trump from the ballot, despite a call to do so from California's Lieutenant Governor. In the letter, Essayli argued that Weber had no unilateral authority to bar Trump and that doing so would *"violate our Constitution and decades of case law"*. He proclaimed, *"We are a government of the People... The People must be free to elect the candidate of their choice without interference."* While obscuring his appeal in democratic language, Essayli's stance effectively said that even if Trump were found to have engaged in insurrection (the very activity the 14th Amendment was designed to punish), California should turn a blind eye and let him run. Essayli was thus willing to **shield an aspiring autocrat from a constitutional consequence**, prioritizing partisan loyalty over the principle that those who wage war on our democracy forfeit their place on the ballot. The irony is rich: Essayli decried the potential enforcement of the 14th Amendment as an "attack on our democracy", when in fact that amendment is part of the Constitution's defense against rebels and traitors.

This pattern — defending the Jan. 6 insurrectionists and resisting measures to hold them or their leader accountable — places Essayli firmly in the camp of those who **undermine the rule of law and the sanctity of elections**. It aligns him with the likes of **John Eastman**, who concocted schemes to overturn the 2020 vote, and **Michael Flynn**, who urged suspending the Constitution to rerun that election. Indeed, Essayli's political orbit overlaps with these figures. California's right-wing ecosystem is close-knit: one can draw a line connecting Flynn's and Eastman's efforts (from the "Stop the Steal" rallies in late 2020 to Eastman's infamous memo) to activists like Hostetter on the ground, and to politicians like Essayli providing them cover and legitimacy. Essayli's ascendancy to a federal post is a triumph for this network.

For Senators evaluating Essayli, this alignment should be deeply disqualifying. The U.S. Attorney must be someone who unequivocally respects the outcome of elections and the processes that sustain our democracy. Instead, Essayli has consistently aligned with those who tried to subvert democracy. Confirming him would send a dangerous message that those who were "in the trenches" (figuratively or literally) for the cause of Jan. 6 can end up in charge of federal justice. It risks turning the Los Angeles U.S. Attorney's office into a **headquarters for**



retaliatory investigations against Trump’s opponents or baseless “voter fraud” witch hunts, rather than a bulwark for the rule of law.

Abuse of Prosecutorial Discretion and Threats to Impartial Justice

Beyond his words, Bill Essayli’s brief record as interim U.S. Attorney already provides a cautionary tale of how he wields power – and it is alarming. His handling of the **Trevor Kirk excessive force case** in 2025 stands as a stark example of **prosecutorial misconduct driven by partisan bias**, which raises the question of how far Essayli might go if fully confirmed.

The Trevor Kirk Incident: Trevor Kirk was a Los Angeles County sheriff’s deputy who, in a 2023 incident caught on video, violently assaulted a woman outside a Lancaster supermarket during an arrest. The video showed Deputy Kirk **slamming the woman to the ground, kneeling on her neck, and pepper-spraying her in the face** even though she posed no threat – she was filming the police with her cellphone. Federal prosecutors in L.A. charged Kirk with deprivation of civil rights under color of law, a serious felony, and in February 2025 a jury **convicted** him on that count. Under federal law, Kirk faced up to 10 years in prison for this civil rights violation. The conviction was a clear statement that **law enforcement officers are not above the law** when they use excessive force.

However, in March 2025, just weeks after this conviction, the Trump administration parachuted Essayli into the U.S. Attorney’s Office leadership. What followed was extraordinary: **Essayli moved to undermine his own office’s successful prosecution in order to protect the convicted deputy.** On May 1, 2025, Essayli’s team reached a “**post-trial plea agreement**” with Deputy Kirk’s defense. Under this highly unusual deal, the government agreed to *vacate the jury’s felony verdict* and allow Kirk to plead guilty to a misdemeanor charge with a sentence of **only one year probation** – no jail time. Essentially, Essayli sought to nullify the jury’s finding that Kirk’s conduct caused bodily injury (which had made it a felony) and to let Kirk off with a slap on the wrist.

This kind of **post-verdict reduction** is virtually unheard of in federal practice. Normally, once a jury convicts, the prosecution defends that verdict through sentencing and any appeals. For a U.S. Attorney to proactively undo a conviction won by their own staff – absent clear evidence of a wrongful verdict – is almost unimaginable. Yet Essayli attempted exactly that, raising immediate questions of improper motive. The context strongly suggests **political interference**: Kirk was a law enforcement officer, and the Trump “law-and-order” doctrine often treats police (even those who violate rights) as allies to be protected. Further, as noted by the Los Angeles Times, Essayli’s intervention coincided with a broader Trump administration effort to “**unleash law enforcement and weaken DOJ’s independent oversight.**” In fact, the same week, President Trump issued an executive order pushing for aggressive action by police and criticizing civil rights constraints. Essayli’s move can thus be seen as **toeing the line of Trump’s agenda** – favoring police impunity over civil rights enforcement.



The response within the U.S. Attorney's Office was telling. Career prosecutors were aghast at this betrayal of their work and of basic justice for the victim, Jacy Houseton, who suffered a concussion and lasting trauma from Kirk's attack. **Four prosecutors who had been involved in the case immediately withdrew**, refusing to sign the motion for the new plea. These included veteran Assistant U.S. Attorneys **Eli Alcaraz, Brian Faerstein, Michael Morse**, and notably **Cassie Palmer**, the chief of the Public Corruption and Civil Rights Section. Palmer and two others went further – they resigned from the Department of Justice entirely in protest. Such resignations are a five-alarm fire signal; these attorneys sacrificed their careers rather than be complicit in what they clearly saw as an ethical travesty. One could hardly imagine a louder vote of no confidence in Essayli's leadership from the professionals he was chosen to lead.

The federal judge overseeing the case, **U.S. District Judge Stephen V. Wilson**, was also deeply disturbed. In a hearing on May 19, 2025, Judge Wilson grilled Essayli's surrogate in court, asking whether there was any legitimate rationale for this reversal. Wilson noted that a jury – the cornerstone of our justice system – had determined guilt after a full trial. He pressed the government to explain if they harbored "serious and significant doubt" about the verdict, because absent that, vacating it would be unjustifiable. The Assistant U.S. Attorney now stuck defending Essayli's deal (Robert Keenan, who was not part of the original trial team) argued meekly that it was a "pure exercise of prosecutorial discretion" and that the court essentially had no say. This stance only underscored the arrogance of Essayli's approach – acting as if his power to undo a conviction was absolute and insulated from judicial scrutiny. Judge Wilson expressed open skepticism and indicated he might reject the plea agreement if the government couldn't substantiate why justice suddenly required leniency for a convicted violent offender.

The **Kirk episode** offers a concrete example of how Essayli's extreme partisanship and loyalties manifest in decision-making:

- **Preferential treatment for allies:** Deputy Kirk, as a law enforcement officer, fit the profile of someone the Trumpist right views sympathetically (even when abusive). Essayli's bending of the rules to protect Kirk suggests he will **shield those aligned with his camp** – be it police, right-wing activists, or others – from accountability. This favoritism erodes the principle of equality before the law.
- **Retaliation or harshness for adversaries:** While this case was about protecting an ally, it portends the flip side – that Essayli could **selectively target individuals perceived as enemies**. For instance, will he aggressively prosecute cases involving progressive protestors or Democratic officials to please his superiors? The New York Times and others have documented Trump's pressure on DOJ to investigate his political opponents and critics. An obedient loyalist like Essayli might oblige by bringing flimsy charges against, say, local California leaders implementing liberal policies (on immigration, climate, etc.), just to create a chilling effect or political spectacle. California already felt such tactics in Trump's first term (e.g., DOJ lawsuits against the state's laws). Under Essayli, those could escalate into criminal inquiries.



- **Undermining civil rights enforcement:** Essayli's willingness to undermine a civil rights conviction bodes ill for enforcement of civil rights laws generally. The Central District of California has a storied Civil Rights Section that prosecutes police misconduct, hate crimes, and violations of citizens' rights. Career attorneys like section chief Cassie Palmer dedicated their lives to this mission. Essayli's actions drove Palmer and two other attorneys out. If confirmed, he could stifle civil rights cases – either by not approving charges, sabotaging them as in Kirk's case, or diverting resources elsewhere. Marginalized communities in Southern California (often reliant on federal intervention to curb police abuses or hate groups) would suffer.
- **Erosion of DOJ independence:** The open resignations and internal tumult parallel another Trump-era scandal – when Main Justice intervened to soften sentencing for Trump ally Roger Stone in 2020, prompting career prosecutors to withdraw in protest. In Los Angeles, **Essayli has replicated this pattern at the local level**, indicating he places loyalty to the administration's friends above neutral law enforcement. This is exactly what Senators feared when Trump began installing loyalists: the **weaponization and politicization of justice**. Essayli's tenure so far confirms those fears are not hypothetical.

Essayli has also initiated policies that reflect a **political agenda overriding local judgment**. One of his first acts as U.S. Attorney was to announce “**Operation Guardian Angel**,” a new program to aggressively enforce federal immigration charges against undocumented individuals in California. The stated goal was to “neutralize California's sanctuary state policies” by having federal agents preemptively arrest and seek the deportation of immigrants who would otherwise be released under state law. In practice, Essayli's office started filing federal criminal charges (like reentry after deportation) against detainees in county jails – effectively commandeering them into federal custody for removal. By mid-May 2025, roughly 350 such arrest warrants had been filed. This campaign was trumpeted on Fox News, where Essayli touted it as flooding the system to get around “liberal” policies.

While framed as targeting “criminal illegal aliens,” it's important to note that California's sanctuary policies (like SB 54) *already* allow cooperation if an undocumented inmate has serious convictions. Essayli's initiative thus reaches for lower-level offenders or those merely accused, ensnaring people who in many cases pose little public danger beyond their immigration status. The **timing and publicity** of Operation Guardian Angel make clear its true purpose: it's a political broadside against California's Democratic leadership and their immigrant protections. It plays well on right-wing media, burnishing Essayli's tough-on-immigration credentials. But it also raises ethical concerns about **selective law enforcement for spectacle**. Federal resources are finite; by prioritizing immigration round-ups explicitly to counter state policy, Essayli is diverting attention from other federal priorities (gang violence, white-collar crime, etc.) purely to make a political point. Moreover, the people affected are from a **marginalized community (undocumented immigrants)**, reinforcing that Essayli's agenda often involves **punishing the vulnerable** to score partisan victories.



The patterns evident here – favoritism for a violent official, zeal in deporting immigrants, hostility toward civil rights enforcement – all illustrate how Essayli’s extreme worldview translates into action. If given a full four-year term as U.S. Attorney, accountable only to Trump’s DOJ, there is every reason to expect a flood of similar abuses:

- **Politically Motivated Prosecutions:** He could target local political figures (e.g., California state officials who oppose Trump policies) with federal investigations. Already one of Trump’s other U.S. Attorney picks in D.C. tried to indict a Biden official, which Senator Adam Schiff has vowed to block. Essayli, in a state Trump lost by millions of votes, could harass the opposition under color of law.
- **Chilling Effect on Activism:** Essayli might prosecute protesters (e.g., environmental or racial justice activists) under federal statutes like anti-riot laws or domestic terror enhancements, to brand dissent as crime – something Trump has explicitly called for in the past.
- **Neglect of White Supremacist Violence:** Conversely, right-wing violence or hate crimes might go unaddressed. Under an Essayli tenure, would the Central District DOJ have pursued the recent cases it did against extremist Proud Boys or neo-Nazi prison gangs? Or would those be quietly dropped? Impunity for one side invites more violence.
- **Ethical Exodus:** We have already seen key civil rights prosecutors resign. Others in the office may follow if forced to choose between their oaths and Essayli’s orders. This would hollow out the office’s institutional knowledge and independence. The ones who remain or are hired might be those who share Essayli’s ideology, entrenching bias.
- **Loss of Public Trust:** Ultimately, if communities come to see the U.S. Attorney’s office as just another arm of a partisan agenda – rather than a fair arbiter of justice – cooperation with law enforcement will erode. The Central District serves nearly 20 million people, a majority of whom are minorities. Trust is essential for victims and witnesses to come forward. Essayli’s reputation is already raising alarm; community advocates for civil rights and immigrants have expressed fear of his appointment. Confirming him would send a message of disregard to these communities.



A Blue Slip Veto is Warranted to Protect Justice

In the final analysis, Bill Essayli's record is antithetical to the values required of a U.S. Attorney. The picture that emerges is of an individual who:

- **Places Partisanship Over Principle:** From his legislative conduct to his prosecutorial decisions, Essayli consistently advances a narrow, far-right agenda at the expense of impartial law and truth. He has shown contempt for those who disagree with him, even colleagues and judges, and frames issues in partisan terms (e.g., casting Democrats as communists or traitors).
- **Aligns with Extremists:** Whether through his defense of Jan 6th rioters, his alliance with voter suppression efforts, or his networking with anti-democratic figures, Essayli has chosen the company of those who reject pluralistic democracy. This raises serious doubts about his commitment to uphold laws protecting civil rights, voting rights, and public order in an even-handed way.
- **Abuses Power:** The Trevor Kirk case is proof that Essayli will abuse prosecutorial power to favor the "in-group" (like law enforcement officers connected to his base), even if it means trampling the work and morale of his own staff and denying justice to victims. This incident is likely a canary in the coal mine of what would become routine under his leadership.
- **Targets the Vulnerable:** Essayli's focus on vilifying LGBTQ+ youth, immigrants, and others suggests he would use his office to target marginalized communities, undermining California's values of inclusion and equal protection. Already, his immigrant crackdown is seen as punitive and agenda-driven.
- **Cannot Be Trusted to Defend Democracy:** Perhaps most gravely, Essayli's actions indicate he might not aggressively pursue, or might even obstruct, cases that involve defending our constitutional order (for instance, if faced with a future insurrectionist plot or public corruption by Trump allies). At a time when threats to democracy are ongoing, having a U.S. Attorney with **dubious loyalty to democratic institutions** is dangerous.

The Senate has a constitutional role to ensure that U.S. Attorneys – who are top federal law enforcement officers – meet the highest standards of integrity, fairness, and respect for the rule of law. Bill Essayli falls woefully short of those standards, as documented by the extensive evidence above. His confirmation is not a routine matter of patronage; it carries profound implications for justice in California and the nation.

California's Senators in particular have the "**blue slip**" authority – a Senate tradition allowing them to approve or block federal prosecutor nominees in their state. Historically, this has been used to prevent nominees who lack the support of both home-state senators from advancing,



ensuring consensus picks. In this case, it is hard to imagine a nominee more objectionable to California's values (and to the majority of its residents) than Bill Essayli. Invoking the blue slip to halt his nomination would be entirely justified and in line with precedent. Even aside from blue slips, the Senate Judiciary Committee can and should rigorously question Essayli's record. But the track record is already crystal clear; this is not a nominee who can be "rehabilitated" in a hearing. The appropriate course is to refuse to confirm him, full stop.

It is worth noting that while most U.S. Attorney confirmations are routine, there is recent precedent for **holding up problematic nominees**. As cited in Politico, Senator Adam Schiff has promised to block another contentious Trump pick for a Justice Department post. The Essayli nomination is similarly contentious, if not more so. The Senate should be prepared to use every tool – from pointed questioning to delays to outright rejection – to prevent the permanent installment of Essayli.

In conclusion, **confirming Bill Essayli would reward extremism and gravely endanger the impartial administration of justice** in the Central District of California. Conversely, **blocking his confirmation would uphold the Senate's responsibility to ensure that U.S. Attorneys are persons of unquestioned integrity and commitment to the Constitution**. The evidence is overwhelming that Essayli does not meet that mark. California's Senators are urged to deny consent to this appointment. Doing so will protect Californians from a prosecutor who appears intent on waging a culture war from the U.S. Attorney's Office. It will send a signal that the Senate will not acquiesce to the politicization of the Justice Department. And it will affirm, at a critical moment, that the rule of law must remain above partisan extremism.

The stakes for our democratic institutions and public trust in the justice system could not be higher. **For all the reasons detailed in this report, the only appropriate action is to reject Bill Essayli's bid for U.S. Attorney**. The Senate must uphold its duty as a check on unfit executive appointments – to safeguard the Justice Department, the communities of California, and the principles of equal justice under law.



Endnotes

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