

United States Senate
COMMITTEE ON THE JUDICIARY
WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6275

March 26, 2025

The Honorable Pamela J. Bondi
Attorney General
U.S. Department of Justice
950 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20530

Dear Attorney General Bondi:

We write to inquire into the deeply concerning circumstances surrounding Deputy Attorney General (DAG) Todd Blanche's termination of Pardon Attorney Elizabeth G. Oyer, including an ongoing effort to weaponize the restoration of gun rights to domestic abusers and other dangerous individuals.

Ms. Oyer is a dedicated civil servant whose background evidences professionalism and devotion to ensuring fairness in the federal criminal justice system.¹ However, on March 7, 2025, the Department of Justice (DOJ) terminated Ms. Oyer from her position as Pardon Attorney. According to Ms. Oyer, her termination notice consisted of a three-sentence memo, and DAG Blanche has not provided a reason for the decision.²

Ms. Oyer has revealed a troubling sequence of events that suggest her termination may be connected to her decision to decline to recommend restoration of actor Mel Gibson's gun rights.³ Gibson lost the lawful authority to possess a gun⁴ in 2011 when he pleaded no contest to misdemeanor battery,⁵ a charge stemming from allegations by his former girlfriend that he struck her and broke her teeth by punching her in the mouth.⁶

The Office of the Deputy Attorney General (ODAG) charged Ms. Oyer with recommending individuals whose gun rights should be restored, a striking deviation from the Pardon Attorney's traditional role.⁷ She dutifully compiled and submitted a list of such individuals, which ODAG returned with a request to add Gibson to the list.⁸ Ms. Oyer was concerned about the request

¹ *Former Pardon Attorney Elizabeth G. Oyer*, U.S. DEP'T OF JUSTICE (last accessed Mar. 18, 2025), <https://www.justice.gov/archives/pardon/staff-profile/former-pardon-attorney-oyer>.

² Elizabeth Oyer, *Trump's Lawyers Fired Me After I Refused to Let Mel Gibson Have Guns*, ROLLING STONE (Mar. 14, 2025), <https://www.rollingstone.com/politics/political-commentary/trump-justice-department-fired-mel-gibson-guns-1235296311/>.

³ *Id.*

⁴ See 18 U.S.C. § 922(g)(9).

⁵ Devlin Barrett, *Justice Dept. Official Says She Was Fired After Opposing Restoring Mel Gibson's Gun Rights*, N.Y. TIMES (Mar. 10, 2025), <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/03/10/us/politics/justice-department-mel-gibson.html>.

⁶ *Mel Gibson Pleads Guilty to Misdemeanor Batter, Avoids Jail: Is He Getting Off Easy?*, ABC NEWS (Mar. 11, 2011), <https://abcnews.go.com/Entertainment/mel-gibson-jail-free-abuse-case-off-easy/story?id=13107521>.

⁷ Barrett, *supra* note 5.

⁸ *Id.*

because of Mr. Gibson’s history of domestic abuse, and because, unlike the other candidates, Mr. Gibson had not been the subject of a thorough investigation to determine whether he was likely to reoffend.⁹ As she explained, “Giving guns back to domestic abusers is a serious matter that, in my view, is not something that I could recommend lightly, because there are real consequences that flow from people who have a history of domestic violence being in possession of firearms.”¹⁰

According to Ms. Oyer, after she notified ODAG that she would not recommend that Mr. Gibson’s gun rights be restored, an ODAG official “essentially explained to me that Mel Gibson has a personal relationship with President Trump and that should be sufficient basis for me to make a recommendation and that I would be wise to make the recommendation.”¹¹ Soon after Ms. Oyer declined to recommend the restoration of gun rights for Gibson, a prominent supporter of President Trump, she was fired.¹²

The push to restore Gibson’s gun rights and the termination of Ms. Oyer are apparently related to a troubling effort to politicize and streamline the restoration of gun rights to individuals convicted of domestic violence and other serious offenses without due consideration of the threat they may pose to their victims and public safety. Ms. Oyer objected to a proposal to automate the restoration of gun rights without reviewing the individualized circumstances of each offender.¹³ In the aftermath of Ms. Oyer’s termination, the current status of this dangerous proposal is unclear. This was followed by your issuance of an interim rule that would grant you authority to restore offenders’ gun rights, a power that you could then delegate to another DOJ official.¹⁴ The possibility that you could use this authority to automate the restoration of gun rights to domestic abusers and other dangerous individuals is chilling.

This is only the latest incident in a troubling pattern of the Trump Administration elevating politics over public safety to benefit the President’s supporters. Perhaps the most shocking example is the President’s irresponsible decision to grant a full and unconditional pardon to rioters who violently assaulted police officers at the United States Capitol on January 6, 2021. As noted in the Committee’s earlier letters to the Department, the shortsighted removal, forced retirement, or reassignment of experienced career officials has diminished DOJ’s ability to respond effectively to public safety threats.¹⁵ This purge will lead to the disruption of investigations, prosecutions, and, in this case, meaningful review of pardon and commutation applications to ensure that clemency is only granted to deserving individuals who do not pose a threat to public safety.

⁹ *Id.*

¹⁰ *Id.*

¹¹ *Id.*

¹² Oyer, *supra* note 2.

¹³ Barrett, *supra* note 7.

¹⁴ Withdrawing the Attorney General’s Delegation of Authority, 90 Fed. Reg. 13080 (Mar. 20, 2025) (to be codified at 27 C.F.R. pt. 478, 28 C.F.R. pt. 0).

¹⁵ See Letter from Senate Judiciary Committee Democrats to Acting Attorney General James McHenry & Acting Director Brian Driscoll (Feb. 3, 2025); and Letter from Senate Judiciary Committee Democrats to Attorney General Pam Bondi (Mar. 3, 2025).

DOJ's termination of Ms. Oyer, apparently without justification, is particularly troubling in light of the Trump Administration's purge of public servants, seemingly based on whether they are willing to carry out the President's agenda of political retribution against his perceived enemies. Indeed, Ms. Oyer described a climate of "classic bullying" inside DOJ, with those who "do not 'faithfully' and 'zealously' do the president's bidding" being "'rooted out' and silenced."¹⁶ "[T]he political leaders of the department," Ms. Oyer stated, "are forcing out career staff, ripping away ethical guardrails, and offering priority access to government benefits to loyalists and friends."¹⁷ These actions do not evince a Department dedicated to upholding justice without fear or favor.

Accordingly, in order to better understand DOJ's decision to terminate Ms. Oyer, please provide prompt answers to the following questions, no later than April 9, 2025:

1. Please detail the reasons for Ms. Oyer's termination, including the role that her decision to decline to recommend the restoration of Mel Gibson's gun rights played.
2. Please provide the names and roles of individuals involved in the decision to terminate Ms. Oyer.
3. Please provide the timeline for the decision to terminate Ms. Oyer.
4. Please provide all records reflecting or relating to communications between and among you, DAG Blanche, Principal Associate Deputy Attorney General (PADAG) Emil Bove, Associate Deputy Attorney General Paul Perkins, James McHenry, any other Office of the Attorney General (OAG) or ODAG official, and/or any White House official concerning the restoration of Mel Gibson's gun rights.
5. Please provide all records reflecting or relating to communications between and among you, DAG Blanche, PADAG Emil Bove, Associate Deputy Attorney General Paul Perkins, James McHenry, any other OAG or ODAG official, and/or any White House official concerning Ms. Oyer's termination.
6. Please provide a detailed explanation of your plans for restoring gun rights to individuals convicted of domestic violence and other offenses.
7. Will you commit that DOJ will not automate the restoration of gun rights, and that, before restoring any individual's gun rights, DOJ officials will review the particular circumstances of that individual, including the risk of reoffending, the threat posed to his or her victims, and the threat posed to public safety?

It is vitally important that DOJ attorneys be permitted to pursue justice for the United States of America and the American people, not serve as the personal law firm to President Trump, handing out legal favors to his rich and famous friends. To that end, we look forward to your transparency as to the reasons for the termination of Pardon Attorney Oyer.

¹⁶ Oyer, *supra* note 2.

¹⁷ *Id.*

Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,



Richard J. Durbin
United States Senator



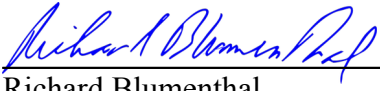
Sheldon Whitehouse
United States Senator



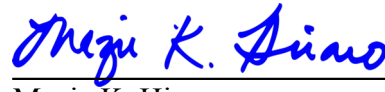
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Mazie K. Hirono
United States Senator



Cory A. Booker
United States Senator



Alex Padilla
United States Senator



Peter Welch
United States Senator



Adam B. Schiff
United States Senator

Cc: The Honorable Michael E. Horowitz, Inspector General, U.S. Department of Justice