

	C O N T E N T S	
1		
2	ORAL ARGUMENT OF	PAGE
3	PAUL W. CANE, JR., ESQ.	
4	On behalf of the Petitioner	3
5	GREGORY G. GARRE, ESQ.	
6	On behalf of the United States,	
7	as amicus curiae	22
8	DENNIS E. EGAN, ESQ.	
9	On behalf of the Respondents	33
10	REBUTTAL ARGUMENT OF	
11	PAUL W. CANE, JR., ESQ.	
12	On behalf of the Petitioner	59
13		
14		
15		
16		
17		
18		
19		
20		
21		
22		
23		
24		
25		

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25

P R O C E E D I N G S

(10:05 a.m.)

CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: We'll hear argument this morning in case 06-1221, Sprint/United Management Company v. Mendelsohn.

Mr. Cane.

ORAL ARGUMENT OF PAUL W. CANE, JR.

ON BEHALF OF THE PETITIONER

MR. CANE: Chief Justice Roberts, and may it please the Court:

A basic principal of evidence, the need for foundation, explains why the court of appeals should be reversed. An employment decision is made by the person who made it, the decisionmaker. If some other person harbors bias, that's unfortunate; but it is not probative of a claim by a plaintiff who is not affected by it. This Court's discrimination cases, both in the employment context and in other contexts, consistently focus on the decisionmaker's intent, not on the intent of other persons.

JUSTICE KENNEDY: If you were to read the district court's minute order -- and it is just that short minute order -- as saying that evidence of pattern and practice simply is not admissible, that would be error, would it not? Error to -- if the -- if that

1 had been his ruling, that would have been error. In
2 my court, you don't introduce pattern and practice.
3 That can't be --

4 MR. CANE: Yes, if the district court had
5 held that under no circumstances could a pattern or
6 practice of discrimination be shown, I think that would
7 have been error.

8 JUSTICE KENNEDY: Is there anything in the
9 other parts of the record colloquy, comments by the
10 district judge, that you think Respondents have called
11 to our attention to indicate that he had this sweeping
12 view?

13 MR. CANE: No. I don't think that's what
14 the court was focusing on. The district court focused
15 on the nexus of the disputed witnesses to the plaintiff.
16 The district court did not hand out a cookie cutter
17 ruling at the courthouse door. The district court did
18 not say oh, this is a discrimination case, here are the
19 rules of evidence I apply in a discrimination case.
20 What the district court here did was consider Sprint's
21 motion in limine, which was grounded in the evidence
22 that had emerged in discovery in this case.

23 Plaintiff then responded to that motion in
24 limine by trying to explain why the evidence was
25 relevant given the facts of this case.

1 The plaintiff then filed a witness list,
2 which explained what each of the disputed witnesses
3 would say in this case; and the plaintiff finally made
4 an offer of proof which again elaborated on what
5 plaintiff contended the disputed witnesses would say in
6 this case.

7 JUSTICE SCALIA: We don't really know, do
8 we, what the district court's order was based on?
9 Whether it was based on 401 or 403? Did the district
10 court explain its order at all? It didn't, did it?

11 MR. CANE: The district court did not
12 specifically invoke rule 403. I think it's -- my
13 reading of it is it is grounded in both 401 and 403.

14 The motion in limine relied on both 401 and
15 403, the district court told counsel that she wanted the
16 jury to be focusing on the claims of this plaintiff and
17 not be distracted by claims of others.

18 JUSTICE SOUTER: Well, to the extent that it
19 was grounded on 401, it was error, wasn't it?

20 MR. CANE: I don't think so, because I don't
21 think there's --

22 JUSTICE SOUTER: Well, if you have three
23 supervisors, and one is discriminating and another is
24 discriminating, isn't that some evidence that you're in
25 an industrial situation in which discrimination goes on,

1 and therefore doesn't it have the tendency that amounts
2 to relevance under 401?

3 MR. CANE: We have here five persons, who
4 out of 15,000 --

5 JUSTICE SOUTER: Well, what about my
6 question?

7 MR. CANE: The answer to the question is no,
8 it doesn't. As this Court taught in Teamsters --

9 JUSTICE SOUTER: No relevance at all?

10 MR. CANE: A pattern or practice is not
11 established by anecdotes. And what we have here are
12 anecdotes of 5 persons out of the 15,000 --

13 JUSTICE SOUTER: What about my question? We
14 have evidence that there are three supervisors, two of
15 them are discriminating. Isn't that some -- doesn't
16 that have some tendency to indicate that in an equivocal
17 situation, the third one was -- it may not be strong
18 evidence, it may not win the case, it may not be
19 powerful, but it has the tendency that gets you over the
20 line on 401, doesn't it?

21 MR. CANE: That's why I started with the
22 importance of emphasizing foundation. Because the --
23 to --

24 JUSTICE SOUTER: I don't want to -- I don't
25 want to emphasize my question, before we get the --

1 MR. CANE: For relevance to exist, there
2 would have to be a foundational showing.

3 JUSTICE GINSBURG: What do you mean by that?
4 You repeated several times there must be -- must lay a
5 foundation. You recognize, I think in your reply
6 brief, that some other supervisor evidence would be
7 relevant and admissible, but you refer to the
8 foundation.

9 Tell us what you think a proper foundation
10 would be.

11 MR. CANE: The foundation, Justice Ginsburg,
12 would be some linkage between the decisionmaking
13 supervisor and the supervisors whose acts or conduct is
14 assailed by the plaintiff. And if there's no showing of
15 nexus other than the fact that they both happen to draw
16 a paycheck from Sprint --

17 JUSTICE GINSBURG: What do you mean by
18 "nexus"? If they both work in the same physical
19 facility, is that a nexus?

20 MR. CANE: No. I think the nexus requires
21 more than a common zip code.

22 JUSTICE SOUTER: What if you've got 20
23 supervisors and you've got evidence that 19 of them have
24 discriminated after making expressly discriminatory
25 remarks? The 20th is the subject to the action. Is the

1 evidence of the 19 admissible?

2 MR. CANE: I think --

3 JUSTICE SOUTER: Is there a nexus there?

4 MR. CANE: I think, in a company that was
5 that small, where a nexus could be inferred, that there
6 was consultation or that there were directions from more
7 senior management, then I think that would be an
8 appropriate foundation.

9 JUSTICE SOUTER: All right. So, if we've
10 got 19 and there's a question of 1, we've got a nexus.
11 If we've got three and there's a question, two are
12 accounted for as discriminatory, and the question is the
13 third, we don't have a nexus. Is that the way you're
14 doing the math?

15 MR. CANE: I'm sorry. Did I under your
16 question to be three supervisors in the whole company or
17 three supervisors out of this vast company that we're
18 talking about?

19 JUSTICE SOUTER: At this point, I'm saying
20 three supervisors out of a whole company. Will that do
21 it?

22 MR. CANE: Not absent some reason to believe
23 that they conferred or they received directions.

24 JUSTICE SOUTER: Three supervisors, and
25 that's all there is in the company. That consists of

1 the company. Have we got a nexus then?

2 MR. CANE: If there were -- if two out of
3 three, I think there might be an argument that at least
4 it was a jury question at that stage.

5 JUSTICE SOUTER: Okay.

6 MR. CANE: But here we're dealing with a
7 70,000-employee company. We have five witnesses who are
8 principally assailing two persons.

9 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: So you agree that it
10 has to be a case-by-case determination? There's no
11 absolute rule either way?

12 MR. CANE: I think there -- there should be
13 a guiding principle. And the guiding principle was that
14 other-supervisor evidence should be presumptively
15 irrelevant, and that would be the rule in the normal run
16 of cases, at least in dealing with entities of this
17 magnitude.

18 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: So I assume it would
19 be addressed as it was here, in a motion in limine, the
20 plaintiff would say here are the witnesses we intend to
21 call; the company would say we don't think they're
22 relevant because, as you say, there's no connection
23 between them, and then the judge would decide.

24 MR. CANE: That's normally how --

25 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: That's on the issue

1 of relevance.

2 MR. CANE: That's normally how it would
3 present itself, and indeed the district court normally
4 would consider rule 403 consideration if that's the
5 case.

6 JUSTICE KENNEDY: Excuse me. Did I mishear
7 mishear you? You said it's a 7,000-person?

8 MR. CANE: 70,000. 7-0-0-0-0. Yes.

9 JUSTICE BREYER: If that's the way to do it,
10 you didn't do it that way, did you? I mean, as I read
11 it -- they put in here, on 163a, the motion that you
12 made to the district court said that you have to be
13 "similarly situated" -- "Plaintiff has to have been
14 'similarly situated' with other employees" -- and you
15 put that in quotes -- "similarly situated." And then
16 you say "employees may be 'similarly situated' only if
17 they have the same supervisor." Period. Not -- it
18 wasn't a period actually, but the rest of the sentence
19 isn't important. And then you cite Aramburu, which is
20 where the Tenth Circuit said that.

21 So I don't see how you can say this wasn't a
22 401 case. You were saying they weren't similarly
23 situated, period. And then the district judge virtually
24 quoted those words.

25 MR. CANE: The motion was grounded in both

1 rule 401 and 403 --

2 JUSTICE BREYER: Well, that may be, but the
3 -- I don't see -- I mean, that may be, but this is the
4 argument you made, and this was the argument the
5 district judge adopted. Is that not so or is it so?

6 MR. CANE: That is so, but what the district
7 judge adopted was grounded in the offer of proof that
8 had been made here and the evidence that was proffered
9 here. The district court was not issuing a blanket
10 ruling that would have governed any potential --

11 JUSTICE SCALIA: Excuse me --

12 JUSTICE SOUTER: How do we know?

13 JUSTICE SCALIA: Yes. How do we know
14 that's what the district court adopted? I have -- is it
15 the order on 24a of the appendix to the petition?

16 MR. CANE: Yes.

17 JUSTICE SCALIA: It doesn't mention -- it
18 doesn't mention which of the two of your arguments the
19 district court is relying on.

20 JUSTICE SOUTER: It doesn't mention the
21 offer of proof.

22 JUSTICE GINSBURG: And didn't the Tenth
23 Circuit read it to be an absolute prohibition? That it
24 must be the same supervisor? "'Similarly situated'
25 requires proof that Paul Reddick was the decisionmaker."

1 That seems as though that the district court thought
2 there -- it must be the same supervisor, and I thought
3 that's how the Tenth Circuit read --

4 MR. CANE: And I think --

5 JUSTICE GINSBURG: -- the district court.

6 MR. CANE: That would be the rule in the
7 normal run of cases where there is no showing of
8 connection or nexus to the --

9 JUSTICE SCALIA: We're not talking about the
10 rule. We're trying to find out what it was the district
11 court did.

12 Now, the court of appeals assumed the worst.
13 I mean, assumed what makes the case the hardest for you,
14 and that is the court of appeals assumed that the
15 district court relied on 401. Is it customary to assume
16 the worst?

17 MR. CANE: No. I think it would be
18 customary to assume that, particularly on an issue of
19 evidence, that the district court was presumptively
20 correct, and that --

21 JUSTICE SCALIA: If there's any basis on
22 which the district court's decision would have been
23 correct, the district court's decision is upheld.

24 MR. CANE: It could be affirmed on that
25 ground.

1 JUSTICE BREYER: That's why I don't
2 understand your answer. I'm confused here. What I
3 said, and you seemed to agree, is different from what
4 was just said, which you also seemed to agree.

5 I thought that you said in your brief that
6 you have to have been -- quote -- "similarly situated."
7 All right? "Employees must be similarly situated to
8 Plaintiff." That's true, isn't it? I'm quoting the
9 brief, from page 163. And then you say, "Employees may
10 be similarly situated only if they have the same
11 supervisor."

12 Then the district court says that plaintiff
13 may offer evidence who are "similarly situated" to her
14 and then -- quote -- "similarly situated employees" --
15 quote -- "for the purpose of this ruling requires proof
16 that Paul Reddick, his supervisor, was the
17 decisionmaker." That's why I thought it was fairly
18 clear, since he used the same words and substituted the
19 word "Paul Reddick" for the same supervisor, that he was
20 taking that right from your brief where you made that
21 general argument and said nothing about the particular
22 case in those sentences.

23 MR. CANE: The general rule applies because
24 there was no showing here of any relationship between
25 the decision at issue here and --

1 JUSTICE SCALIA: You -- you want to defend
2 the harder ground, I understand. But what Justice
3 Breyer has just said is not necessarily so. The
4 "similarly situated" argument applies under 403 as well.
5 If they're similarly situated, the -- the time it would
6 take to let in these other things and rebuttal of them,
7 plus the prejudicial effect on the jury, would be
8 outweighed by the fact that they're similarly situated,
9 and, therefore, that it is stronger proof. I don't see
10 that one can tell from the district court's order
11 whether the district court was relying on 401 or 403.

12 And certainly, you just don't want to defend
13 403. I think you're digging a hole for yourself.

14 MR. CANE: No, I absolutely want to defend
15 403. If there was any minimal probative value here,
16 Justice Scalia, all the countervailing 403 factors are
17 present.

18 JUSTICE ALITO: Well, don't we have to
19 address 403 in any event? Because the Tenth Circuit
20 ruled, as I understand it, ruled that the evidence could
21 not be excluded under 403. It would have been an abuse
22 of discretion --

23 MR. CANE: That is what the Tenth Circuit
24 said.

25 JUSTICE ALITO: -- for the trial judge to

1 have excluded it under 403.

2 MR. CANE: That is correct. Had the "me,
3 too" evidence been admitted, then we would have had to
4 respond with what might be called "not you, either"
5 evidence. And then the plaintiff would have made a
6 rebuttal to that showing, and we would have had trials
7 within a trial on whether these couple of persons that
8 plaintiff identified as potential bad actors were, in
9 fact, bad actors.

10 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Would that be done
11 typically at the motion in limine stage? I mean, do you
12 establish whether or not there was discrimination in the
13 "me, too" cases at trial or prior to the trial, outside
14 the jury's --

15 MR. CANE: I think it can happen both ways.
16 And really here it happened both ways, too, because
17 although it was teed up as a motion in limine, as the
18 trial evolved, the district court actually relaxed her
19 ruling and expanded it to permit attacks both on
20 Reddick, who was the direct supervisor, but also
21 decisions made by Blessing, who was Reddick's boss. And
22 the district court explained that, as she thought about
23 it further, that additional bit of latitude should be
24 given to both sides because there was evidence that
25 Blessing had consulted with Reddick. And, in other

1 words --

2 JUSTICE GINSBURG: But that didn't present
3 the other supervisor, which I think is more -- a better
4 way to comprehend this, because "me, too" could be 10
5 witnesses working under the same supervisor. But these
6 two people, as I understand it, were in the direct chain
7 of supervisory command.

8 MR. CANE: That's correct. And that to me
9 is the proper test. If the decisionmaker's supervisor
10 was demonstrated to be biased, then I think that has
11 some relevance because it raises a question as to
12 whether that bias --

13 JUSTICE GINSBURG: But that's not "other
14 supervisor." They are both supervisors of this
15 employee. She's in a unit that includes both superior
16 officers. I thought that the issue here was simply
17 other supervisors, witnesses who had worked for other
18 supervisors, people for whom the -- with whom the
19 plaintiff had no connection.

20 MR. CANE: And, more importantly, the other
21 supervisors were persons that were not shown to have any
22 connection with the decisionmaker with respect to this
23 plaintiff.

24 And so, yes, if you are going to define
25 "other supervisor" not to include the chain of command,

1 then that's the reason why I think there is no relevance
2 and a rule 403 --

3 JUSTICE GINSBURG: But you say -- I thought
4 you said in your reply brief that other-supervisor
5 evidence could be relevant.

6 MR. CANE: It could be relevant if there
7 were a showing that the bias on the part of the other
8 supervisors somehow tainted the decisionmaking of the
9 instant decisionmaker.

10 And in the cases that Ms. Mendelsohn cites
11 in her brief, those are all cases in which a directive
12 was given from a more senior official to the
13 decisionmaker.

14 What we have here are decisionmakers in
15 far-flung areas elsewhere within the company with no
16 showing whatsoever that there is any relationship
17 between them.

18 Each of the five disputed witnesses here
19 testified in deposition that they had no information
20 whatsoever to shed about the decisionmakers with respect
21 to Ms. Mendelsohn.

22 And so in those circumstances there's no
23 foundational showing of relationship, no foundational
24 showing of nexus.

25 JUSTICE KENNEDY: Was there an attempt by

1 the plaintiff during the discovery phase of the case to
2 show other evidence of pattern and practice, statistical
3 evidence; or was it just these five people? Was that
4 all that the plaintiff presented?

5 MR. CANE: It was just these five people.
6 The only statistics in the case were that the number of
7 persons over 50 in this particular unit, the Business
8 Development Strategy Group, actually increased; and that
9 the oldest person at any particular level within the
10 Business Development Strategy Group was retained and not
11 laid off.

12 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: What about the
13 spreadsheet evidence? I thought there was some effort
14 to show a connection through the spreadsheet showing the
15 age of the dismissed employees?

16 MR. CANE: That spreadsheet was linked to
17 some supervisor named Kennedy, who bore no relationship
18 to this department and no relationship to these
19 decisionmakers.

20 Let's assume -- that allegation is
21 untested -- but let's assume that Mr. Kennedy was
22 correctly identified as a bad actor. Again, that has no
23 relationship. It might have everything to do with any
24 layoff decision made by Kennedy or made by someone
25 Kennedy supervised. But it bears no relationship to

1 Ms. Mendelsohn's circumstances because there was no
2 showing that a similar spreadsheet was used by any of
3 her decisionmakers.

4 Let's assume that Kennedy is, like the two
5 others, Stock and Vorhies, perhaps a bad actor. That
6 just doesn't shed any meaningful light on the
7 circumstances of the plaintiff here; and even if it did
8 shed some -- some bit of light --

9 JUSTICE STEVENS: I am a little puzzled.
10 How many bad actors do there have to be before you can
11 draw an inference that someone superior to the bad
12 actors had a motivating part in the whole situation?

13 MR. CANE: I don't know that --

14 JUSTICE STEVENS: I mean, isn't that what
15 the inference they are trying to prove is there was
16 somebody upstairs that told everybody what to do.

17 MR. CANE: And they had full and fair
18 discovery to try and demonstrate that. But their own
19 witnesses testified that they were unaware of any
20 relationship between themselves and their decisionmaker
21 and the plaintiff and the plaintiff's decisionmaker.

22 JUSTICE KENNEDY: Does the record show in
23 this 70,000-person company how many supervisors there
24 were? Do we know that?

25 MR. CANE: No. It doesn't say, Justice

1 Kennedy.

2 Let me --

3 JUSTICE STEVENS: Let me ask this, though.
4 Does it show whether the person more senior to the five
5 supervisors involved here was the same person or a
6 different person?

7 MR. CANE: It is a different person. Sure,
8 if you go far enough up the corporate ladder, eventually
9 you will end up --

10 JUSTICE KENNEDY: The next step up would be
11 --

12 MR. CANE: Not the next step up, the next
13 step after that, and not the next step after that.

14 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Your theory doesn't
15 depend on where in the hierarchy the other supervisors
16 are located, I take it, if there's a connection? In
17 other words, if there's a lower-level supervisor who
18 discriminates and that is somehow communicated to the
19 supervisor in question, and whatever -- that you know,
20 the point is that the other one wasn't disciplined or
21 something, that would still -- under your theory that
22 would be admissible, correct?

23 MR. CANE: If a -- no matter what level, I
24 would agree that if a discriminating supervisor is in
25 the chain of command and supervises the decisionmaker,

1 then I think there's --

2 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: No, I'm talking
3 about a situation -- let's say it is a lower-level
4 supervisor outside the chain of command who commits
5 another "me, too" act, but that is communicated to the
6 other in a way that suggests, for example, that the
7 company tolerates it or accepts it.

8 I take it that that would be potentially
9 admissible subject to 403 under your theory.

10 MR. CANE: I think that's right. If there's
11 a showing that the actual decisionmaker could have been
12 tainted by it, I would agree with that.

13 JUSTICE KENNEDY: I see your white light is
14 on, but does 404 bear on the case, rule 404 of the
15 Rules of Evidence?

16 MR. CANE: Yes, I think it does. I think
17 that if you're going to have -- what we have here is, in
18 effect, an assault on the corporate character of the
19 company and not an assault --

20 JUSTICE KENNEDY: Have we said that 404
21 applies to corporations? Corporations have a character?

22 MR. CANE: I don't think the Court has ever
23 held that. I think the individual has a character, and
24 there is no character-evidence problem with showing that
25 a particular decisionmaker engaged in other

1 discriminatory conduct, because I think that falls
2 within the exception to 404. But where the
3 decisionmaker is somebody else, then what you really
4 have is an assault on the corporate character, and I
5 think that's impermissible.

6 Unless the Court has further questions, I'll
7 reserve the balance of my time.

8 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Thank you, Mr. Cane.
9 Mr. Garre.

10 ORAL ARGUMENT BY GREGORY G. GARRE
11 ON BEHALF OF THE UNITED STATES
12 AS AMICUS CURIAE

13 MR. GARRE: Thank you, Mr. Chief Justice,
14 and may it please the Court:

15 Evidence of discrimination by other
16 supervisors within a company is sometimes but not
17 always admissible in a disparate-treatment case to help
18 prove discrimination by the plaintiff's own supervisor.

19 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: That's under --
20 under 401, it's not always admissible, or do you need
21 403 to reach that conclusion?

22 MR. GARRE: I think you need to look at the
23 evidence under both rules, the first question being
24 whether it meets the minimum-evidence threshold in 401.
25 And that is a very low threshold set by the Federal

1 rules. The second question being whether it may be
2 excluded under rule 403, which would --

3 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: But you think
4 there are situations where other-supervisor evidence is
5 not admissible under 401 itself?

6 MR. GARRE: Yes. We do think that there are
7 some instances where other-supervisor evidence is not
8 admissible under 401. For example, if you have a large
9 company and you have a plaintiff in the Chicago office
10 claiming that her supervisor had it out for her and she
11 wants to put on the testimony of an employee in the
12 Seattle office who two years ago complained that her
13 supervisor had it out for her, we think that that would
14 not be relevant under 401.

15 JUSTICE SCALIA: Well, but here you have a
16 company of 70,000 people.

17 MR. GARRE: You have a company of 70,000
18 people, but you have allegations that supervisors in the
19 same division, implementing the same company-wide
20 reduction-in-force plan in the same timeframe and giving
21 similar explanations under similar circumstances,
22 engaged in discrimination.

23 We think that the district -- dissenting
24 judge in the court of appeals was right to say that
25 evidence of that kind is at least marginally relevant,

1 which would then put the focus on whether this evidence
2 could be excluded under 403.

3 JUSTICE SCALIA: It is hard to see what
4 wouldn't be marginally relevant if you think that's
5 marginally relevant. It has to be a different
6 supervisor in a different timeframe. I mean, sure.

7 MR. GARRE: Well, I think you've got other
8 situations as well, Justice Scalia. I think we've got a
9 situation of a general comment of discriminatory animus.
10 For example, older people just don't get it, something
11 like that. I think the -- the -- by a different
12 supervisor.

13 I think even if that's within the same
14 office, the plaintiff is going to be hard-pressed even
15 to meet the minimum-relevance threshold. But the
16 relevance threshold, as this Court has recognized in the
17 *Furnco v. Waters* case and the *Huddleston* case, this is
18 a broad threshold that allows evidence in. And then we
19 look at the other parts of Article IV of the Federal
20 Rules of Evidence to see whether it may be excluded --

21 JUSTICE ALITO: How do you articulate the
22 rule that separates these situations?

23 MR. GARRE: Well, I would point to several
24 criteria, Justice Scalia, in determining relevance.
25 First, whether you're dealing with same alleged -- same

1 kind of alleged discrimination and a common catalyst;
2 second, whether the proffered witnesses are working in
3 the same corporate vicinity; third, whether they are
4 alleging discrimination in the same timeframe; four,
5 whether they are alleging a pattern or practice of
6 discrimination.

7 JUSTICE ALITO: Well, that's the relevant
8 factors, but what do you look at the factors to
9 determine -- what's the test for determining whether
10 they are sufficient?

11 MR. GARRE: Well, you would look at the
12 proffered evidence. For example, in this case you have
13 evidence that all of the proffered witnesses were
14 terminated under the same companywide reduction in
15 force. You've got a common catalyst.

16 In this case, you've got employees who
17 worked in the same geographic vicinity, the headquarters
18 of Sprint, the same office complex or at least the same
19 vicinity. You've got witnesses who were terminated on
20 the same day --

21 JUSTICE SCALIA: Why is that relevant -- the
22 same vicinity? You're -- you're --

23 MR. GARRE: I think it is more likely --

24 JUSTICE SCALIA: Opposing counsel has said
25 they are -- they are three supervisors up. What does

1 the same vicinity have anything to do with this?

2 MR. GARRE: Where you have supervisors in
3 the same division, in the same vicinity, carrying out
4 the same plan, providing the same distinct explanations
5 in similar circumstances, a reasonable juror might infer
6 that plaintiff's own supervisor --

7 JUSTICE KENNEDY: Even if those supervisors
8 RIF'd two thousands employees, and only three made this
9 complaint?

10 MR. GARRE: Yes, with respect to the minimum
11 threshold of relevance. Keep in mind, once --

12 JUSTICE KENNEDY: No matter how many
13 employees were under the three supervisors --
14 hypothetical case, three supervisors. No matter how many
15 employees were under them, and no matter how many
16 employees were RIF'd, the three is sufficient so that
17 these witnesses could testify?

18 MR. GARRE: Well, I think if you're talking
19 about pattern or practice, maybe that doesn't --
20 certainly as a matter of law that's not a -- going to
21 prove a pattern of practice, and the employer can make
22 that argument to the district judge, to the jury, and
23 that evidence could be limited or excluded. If you have
24 got, for example, a -- a proffered witness who's
25 complaining that supervisors in the same complex used

1 the same distinctive explanation that my supervisor gave
2 me -- for example, in this case, several of the witnesses
3 were going to testify that their supervisors told them
4 they were being -- they were removed because their
5 positions were being eliminated, and then they later
6 found out that younger persons assumed their jobs.

7 JUSTICE KENNEDY: So take it in this case,
8 and in all cases, the plaintiff has the burden of laying
9 the foundation for this evidence; is that not correct?

10 MR. GARRE: The plaintiff has --

11 JUSTICE KENNEDY: And you say the foundation
12 is satisfied if they were the same supervisors in the
13 same division, I thought.

14 MR. GARRE: I --

15 JUSTICE KENNEDY: You want us to write that
16 in a case as a rule?

17 MR. GARRE: The plaintiff has --

18 JUSTICE KENNEDY: Without reference to how
19 many employees were involved?

20 MR. GARRE: The plaintiff has the burden of
21 showing that the evidence is relevant, Justice Kennedy.

22 JUSTICE GINSBURG: I think you said in your
23 brief that the plaintiff does not have to lay a
24 foundation. And that's the difference between you, I
25 thought -- with respect to Justice Kennedy's question.

1 Your brief takes the position that it is not necessary
2 to lay a foundation in order to introduce
3 other-supervisor evidence.

4 MR. GARRE: That's correct, and that's why
5 I said the plaintiff has to show that the evidence is
6 relevant, that it has some tendency to make a fact of
7 consequence more likely.

8 This Court in the Huddleston
9 case confronted --

10 JUSTICE SCALIA: Well, one -- one would have
11 some -- some tendency --

12 MR. GARRE: And Justice Scalia --

13 JUSTICE SCALIA: What about one instead of
14 three? Would that have some tendency? I guess it
15 would.

16 MR. GARRE: It might. And that probably
17 would be a strong candidate for exclusion under 403. In
18 the Furnco Construction --

19 JUSTICE SCALIA: Why, by the way, do you
20 think this was excluded under -- under 401 rather than
21 403?

22 MR. GARRE: Well, we -- we acknowledge that
23 the record isn't precisely clear on that. We think that
24 --

25 JUSTICE SCALIA: Well, then why should it be

1 assumed it was done properly rather than improperly?

2 MR. GARRE: Largely because of what was said
3 in the order, and because of the way it was briefed.

4 JUSTICE SCALIA: What was said in the order?
5 I see nothing in the order that indicates it is under
6 401.

7 MR. GARRE: Well, it doesn't say 401, but
8 the reason why this evidence can't come in is because the
9 -- the proffered witnesses didn't have the same
10 supervisor. The order is on page 24.

11 JUSTICE SCALIA: But --

12 MR. GARRE: What the court excluded was any
13 evidence of pattern --

14 JUSTICE SCALIA: That's very relevant to the
15 403 determination.

16 MR. GARRE: It's relevant, but it's
17 certainly not determinative, and we think in a case like
18 this, where this kind of evidence is the critical
19 evidence for the trial -- and it came up not only --

20 JUSTICE SCALIA: Picky, picky, picky on the
21 trial court. I must say.

22 MR. GARRE: Not --

23 JUSTICE SCALIA: It seems to me this order
24 should be -- should be given -- it should be treated as
25 if, it could be sustained, it should be sustained.

1 MR. GARRE: With respect, Justice Scalia, in
2 this case, this proffered evidence was the crux of the
3 trial, the critical issue. It came up not only in the
4 context of the motion in limine, it came up in the
5 context of the motion for a new trial. And if you look
6 at what the district court said in denying the motion for
7 a new trial, she said again -- and this is on page 436
8 of the JA -- she says, "none of the proffered evidence
9 makes it more likely that the decisionmakers in this
10 case discriminated against the plaintiff."

11 That's relevance language, and you're quite
12 right --

13 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Do you think -- the
14 determination of the relevance of the "me, too" evidence
15 -- and I assume also the 403 status -- needs to be made
16 at the motion in limine stage, or is it a question for
17 the jury?

18 MR. GARRE: Well, the district court serves
19 as a gateway. District courts have tremendous
20 discretion under the Federal rules to determine whether
21 or not evidence is relevant, and whether or not it
22 should be excluded under 403. So that determination is
23 made by the district court.

24 In some cases, as happened in the
25 Huddleston case -- that was a 404(b) case -- the Court

1 acknowledged in some cases evidence may go in and
2 then the jury may instruct that that evidence is
3 allowed.

4 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: So if it's -- if on
5 the "me, too" evidence it's a "he said/she said" type of
6 case, does that get admitted to the jury? Or is that
7 excluded at the motion in limine stage?

8 MR. GARRE: Well, if you're pointing to
9 other acts of discrimination by other supervisors that
10 are relevant, then that would be allowed in, and the
11 employer would come in and present their
12 counter-evidence --

13 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Well, they're only
14 -- it is only relevant, of course, if it is true; and if
15 the company denies that the "me, too" episode even took
16 place, don't you have to have a separate trial on that
17 before you can determine whether it's even admissible?

18 MR. GARRE: In our system we put that
19 evidence before a jury. If it is relevant under the
20 Federal rules, it is admissible. We put it before a
21 jury --

22 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Well, I get back to
23 my -- the predicate to my question. It's only relevant
24 if it happened.

25 MR. GARRE: And --

1 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: And it seems to me
2 we've had a lot of discussion whether it is relevant if
3 it happened, but we don't know how we determine whether
4 it happened or not.

5 MR. GARRE: In the Furnco case, the Court
6 said that -- that the evidence doesn't have to
7 conclusively demonstrate the fact. It simply has to be
8 relevant. We put relevant evidence before juries, we
9 instruct them on the consideration of that evidence,
10 we permit the defendants to put that evidence into
11 context, and then we ask juries to draw a conclusion --

12 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: So an allegation --
13 an allegation of discrimination in a "me, too" context
14 is automatically relevant?

15 MR. GARRE: No. I think you'd look at it
16 under the relevance threshold, and I think you'd look at
17 it under 403. 403 is going to exclude a lot of this
18 evidence. It is going to exclude the barely evidence,
19 the barely relevant evidence. But it -- we would expect
20 a trial court in this kind of situation to make some
21 kind of findings as to why this evidence is excludable,
22 and we would expect the court of appeals not to
23 undertake a de novo 403 balancing in its own instance.

24 JUSTICE GINSBURG: Mr. Garre, do I
25 understand correctly that the reason the Tenth Circuit

1 thought that the district court was ruling under 401,
2 making a relevance determination, was that the court of
3 appeals had a precedent in the area of employee
4 discipline, and the Tenth Circuit said well, the
5 district court was following that precedent, but that
6 precedent doesn't apply in this situation. So that's
7 why the court of appeals, as I understand it, read the
8 district court as applying an absolute ban.

9 MR. GARRE: That's correct, and that's the
10 way this case was litigated all the way until the
11 reply brief in this case. If there are no further
12 questions?

13 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Thank you,
14 Mr. Garre.

15 Mr. Egan.

16 ORAL ARGUMENT OF DENNIS E. EGAN

17 ON BEHALF OF THE RESPONDENTS

18 MR. EGAN: Mr. Chief Justice, and may it
19 please the Court:

20 If we'll turn to 3a in the white book, the
21 court of appeals properly understood that this was a
22 blanket order based on only one fact. If you weren't
23 supervised by Paul Reddick, it was not admissible. At
24 page 2a, the court said "prior to trial, Sprint filed a
25 motion in limine seeking to exclude, among other things,

1 any evidence of Sprint's alleged discriminatory
2 treatment of other employees. Relying exclusively on
3 Aramburu, Sprint argued that any reference to alleged
4 discrimination by any supervisor other than Reddick" --
5 it was irrelevant.

6 Throughout -- and let me mention here, Your
7 Honor, that the order of things was not as Mr. Cane got
8 it. He said the order was grounded on an offer of
9 proof.

10 If I may address the chronology, on December
11 15, 2004, Sprint filed its motion saying that if -- it
12 is not the same supervisor, it doesn't come in. There's
13 no mention, ever, about the facts of the proffer.
14 Never. It never came up below. We --

15 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Counsel, what if you
16 have a situation that's been referred to earlier, where
17 you have four other supervisors that are presented as
18 "me, too" evidence. They are in the Los Angeles office.
19 The defendant's supervisor is in the Fresno office. Is
20 that evidence relevant?

21 MR. EGAN: It depends what the evidence is
22 and what it is tied to, Your Honor.

23 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: It is just that they
24 -- they are alleged to have fired people for an
25 impermissible basis under the Age Discrimination Act as

1 well.

2 MR. EGAN: In your hypothetical was it was
3 during the same common employer initiated action, such
4 as a reduction in force?

5 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: All right, let's
6 take it and say yes.

7 MR. EGAN: Okay. What the court of appeals
8 noted here was that in this case it makes a difference
9 that we're talking about a common employer-initiated
10 event. We're not talking about --

11 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Well, but doesn't
12 that beg the question? We don't know. This isn't a
13 pattern and practice case. You don't have evidence of a
14 company-wide policy of discrimination. Take my
15 hypothetical. There are just four people who are
16 alleged to harbor age-based bias, and they -- in the Los
17 Angeles office. No connection to the Fresno supervisor
18 at all, other than that they work for the same company.
19 Is that enough for relevance?

20 MR. EGAN: If there is no connection, it
21 might not be, Your Honor.

22 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: It might not be
23 relevant.

24 MR. EGAN: Might not be relevant. Let me
25 say that --

1 JUSTICE SCALIA: But you assert that the
2 mere fact that it is pursuant to the same reduction in
3 force is enough of a connection.

4 MR. EGAN: Yes, Your Honor, because the
5 standard arises out of Article IV, which is entitled
6 "Relevancy and Its Limits." There are no categorical
7 bars within Article IV except when -- Congress and the
8 Court have mentioned them; 401 has no categorical bar.
9 The test is, does a fact have -- it's evidence that has
10 any tendency to make a fact of consequence more likely
11 than without it? So it depends. In rule 401, there is
12 no categorical bar. In Article IV, if there are areas
13 where there are problems, we list them. 407, 411 -- no
14 mention of liability insurance. 410.

15 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: 404.

16 MR. EGAN: 404(b), Your Honor. And in this
17 case the lower courts have used 404. We did not address
18 it. I don't think anybody really did in a brief, other
19 than the government mentioned the Huddleston case. The
20 Huddleston case is important because it says that there
21 is no preliminary determination as to whether or not
22 something is relevant. What you do is the court looks
23 at all the evidence. The evidence that Ellen Mendelsohn
24 wanted to offer had connections to it.

25 JUSTICE ALITO: Well suppose you're -- if

1 you're right on 401 and 402, would -- do we not still
2 have to go on and decide whether it would have been a
3 abuse of discretion for the trial judge to exclude this
4 under 403?

5 MR. EGAN: Your Honor, I believe that --

6 JUSTICE ALITO: If we find that it would not
7 have been an abuse of discretion, then how could we
8 affirm the Tenth Circuit?

9 MR. EGAN: Your Honor, I believe that what
10 you have to do is look at what the court did, because
11 what the court did was it ruled on what they presented,
12 which was not anything having to do with the weight of
13 the evidence, confusion of issues. There is nothing
14 indicated. And the court of appeals quoted its own law
15 that says we are in no position to speculate. As a
16 superintending court, they ruled only one thing -- a
17 categorical bar of evidence that was before it, and they
18 said that's wrong. You followed the wrong case law.

19 JUSTICE GINSBURG: But I thought they said
20 that it should be admitted. I thought they went to the
21 opposite extreme.

22 MR. EGAN: I'm not sure that they went to
23 that extreme. Their language is this, Your Honor: They
24 say, "Based on what we see" -- and they had the proffer
25 in front of them at that time, and they also have the

1 full transcript, which hasn't been talked about -- how
2 Ellen Mendelsohn's case and her theory tied into these
3 people.

4 JUSTICE GINSBURG: How did they?

5 MR. EGAN: Your Honor, in several different
6 ways. Barred evidence of culture. We had evidence of
7 culture from open remarks, that someone needs to be
8 "blessed with lots of runway ahead of them" in order to
9 get a good rating. Bonnie Hoopes and being told she
10 was too old for the job right after she receives that
11 memo, being told openly and repeatedly, "I'm too old for
12 the job." That there are too many --

13 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Are these episodes
14 that were necessarily communicated to the supervisor at
15 issue here?

16 MR. EGAN: No, Your Honor, but this is on
17 the question of culture.

18 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: You don't make the
19 -- you don't suggest that he was even aware of these
20 other anecdotes.

21 MR. EGAN: We do not suggest, but what we
22 say is that what was going on in the culture -- if you've
23 got a supervisor like Ted Stock, openly saying, "I can't
24 wait for RIF's, so that I can get rid of the older
25 people in my department." That supervisor's conclusion

1 is that it's okay.

2 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: But you're conceding
3 that we don't even know that that comment was
4 communicated in any way to the supervisor at issue here.
5 He may not have been aware of it. The supervisor -- he
6 may have been in Fresno and that supervisor in Los
7 Angeles.

8 MR. EGAN: Your Honor, what way do know is
9 that they attended the same meetings, the key leadership
10 meetings, that took place in January 2002 that covered
11 something very important to our case -- the
12 establishment of a forced ranking system and also a
13 discussion of the RIF's that are ongoing and continuing.
14 They're at the same meeting. It's after this meeting,
15 where Jack Welch is presented to the group, that they
16 come out with the philosophy of forced --

17 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: I assume there's no
18 dispute over any direct evidence you have that the
19 supervisor was being guided by a company policy or
20 statement or the RIF program that was discriminatory.
21 The issue here is whether or not you can bring in
22 testimony that -- which has no demonstrated connection
23 to the supervisor.

24 MR. EGAN: Your Honor, the rules of evidence
25 simply talk in terms of "not demonstrate a connection."

1 It doesn't exist. If we look at the rules of evidence,
2 the standard -- and the standard we believe applies here
3 -- is a two-step methodology. It would be, number one,
4 what is the party -- the thing the party is trying to
5 prove, such as culture -- is that a subsidiary fact of
6 consequence?

7 Something that's been missed in the
8 Petitioner's position and even in the district court, is
9 that rule 401 says that you have three levels of
10 evidence. The ultimate issue, and the Petitioner has
11 always said this doesn't prove that Reddick
12 discriminated against Mendelsohn. That's the ultimate
13 issue. We have many intermediary facts to which the
14 evidence relates. They are facts of consequence, and
15 the evidence had a tendency to show these facts of
16 consequence. So that --

17 JUSTICE SOUTER: May I ask you to elaborate
18 on that somewhat?

19 MR. EGAN: Yes, Your Honor.

20 JUSTICE SOUTER: I went through to kind of
21 pin down what the facts of consequence were. I went
22 through the offer of proof. I don't have my notes in
23 front of me, but I think my recollection is right on
24 this. It struck me that the admissible evidence that
25 was indicated by the offer of proof boils down basically

1 to this: There were three employees who would testify
2 that, following their dismissal, some or all of their
3 work was done by a younger person.

4 MR. EGAN: Yes, sir.

5 JUSTICE SOUTER: There was one employee who
6 would testify that he received -- she saw a spreadsheet
7 in front of one supervisor that indicated age.

8 There was one employee who would testify
9 that her immediate supervisor had made
10 age-discriminatory remarks.

11 And another employee would testify that her
12 supervisor's boss had made age-discriminatory remarks.

13 Now, basically, out of this company of
14 70,000, that seems to be the sum total of the -- the
15 kind of circumstantial evidence of culture that you
16 presented in the offer of proof.

17 Am I selling your offer of proof short here?

18 MR. EGAN: No, you are not, Your Honor. The
19 -- you have hit it precisely. And we believe that with
20 culture, it's the openness of what's going on. The
21 openness. The number of events goes to weight. All the
22 weaknesses and frailties of the evidence go to weight.
23 And we never got to that portion of determining the
24 weight of the evidence. The weight --

25 JUSTICE BREYER: All right. So what should

1 we do then? Sorry. Go ahead and conclude. But I want
2 to ask this after you finish answering Justice Souter.

3 MR. EGAN: Your Honor, we believe that --

4 JUSTICE BREYER: And finish your answer to
5 Justice Souter.

6 MR. EGAN: Thank you, Your Honor. The --
7 this ties in, in several different ways, if I can take
8 them all, to culture, to modus operandi, and this
9 wouldn't require discriminatory conduct. For instance,
10 the story line that jobs have been abolished and given
11 to youngers. That's where that would be, modus operandi.
12 The fact that the office shadow rating system -- they're
13 under the same rating system that's not supposed to
14 apply to employees like Ellen Mendelsohn and those who
15 we are presenting, but it was --

16 JUSTICE SCALIA: What if only one of these
17 three had existed? Only one these three?

18 MR. EGAN: One of these three what, Your
19 Honor?

20 JUSTICE SCALIA: One of these three other
21 employees who complained about age discrimination.
22 Would that have the same tendency to show it?

23 MR. EGAN: It depends what it's offered for
24 because relevance does --

25 JUSTICE SCALIA: You think one is enough?

1 MR. EGAN: If it's culture --

2 JUSTICE SCALIA: Yes.

3 MR. EGAN: -- and the CEO is saying that we
4 want to bring the average age down -- which never
5 happens -- but under --

6 JUSTICE SCALIA: No, I'm not talking about
7 somebody up at the top. I'm talking about somebody on
8 the same level as the supervisor that you're concerned
9 with. One other supervisor in this company of 70,000
10 has -- is accused of having made age-discriminatory
11 decisions.

12 MR. EGAN: Well, if they're just accused,
13 no, Your Honor. The assumption has to be --

14 JUSTICE SCALIA: Well, all of these are just
15 accused. We have -- none of this has been proven.

16 MR. EGAN: Your Honor, we have not even
17 addressed at any time the content of the decision -- I
18 mean the content of the testimony.

19 JUSTICE SCALIA: So --

20 JUSTICE SOUTER: Let's assume the testimony
21 at least shows these points that you and I agreed the
22 offer of proof offers to prove.

23 They're going to be met -- I think it's
24 reasonable to suppose, they're going to be met by
25 counter-evidence.

1 MR. EGAN: Yes, Your Honor.

2 JUSTICE SOUTER: We're going to have
3 litigation on these points, and they're going to take --
4 in effect, become subsidiary chapters in this trial.
5 And what concerns me, I guess, is that, at the end of
6 the day, it's -- it strikes me as though there is reason
7 to believe that the proof itself is not going to be
8 anything close to overwhelming. We will have had a
9 potentially confusing trial on this subsidiary
10 third-party evidence. And we seem to be very close, if
11 we have not gotten over the line, of the subsidiary
12 evidence, in effect, being substantially misleading or
13 prejudicial. And -- and basically I'm raising a
14 question of weight under 403.

15 What's your response to that?

16 MR. EGAN: My response, because I'm hearing
17 you talk about the mini-trial issues, first of all, as
18 you know, it will not happen here. We had a pretrial
19 January 29, 2007, after -- before Sprint had filed its
20 petition for cert, in which we discussed will this be a
21 longer trial. One and a half, maybe two days. The fact
22 of mini-trials, Your Honor, it just doesn't happen that
23 often. You can try joinder cases. I've tried joinder
24 cases with eight plaintiffs, and you handle that with
25 instructions. The answer isn't to keep out possibly

1 probative evidence; the answer is to let --

2 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: But what --

3 MR. EGAN: -- to let Sprint put on

4 counter-evidence --

5 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: What happens in this
6 case? Let's say there are five "me, too" situations
7 presented, and the court makes a determination in each
8 one, and the jury finds for the plaintiff. And then
9 it's appealed, and the argument on appeal is, well, in
10 three of those five cases there wasn't age
11 discrimination and here's why. And that evidence is --
12 and the court of appeals agrees, yes, those three
13 cases shouldn't have been admitted.

14 Is that reversible error?

15 MR. EGAN: Your Honor, I think that what you
16 handle that with is limiting instructions. It would be
17 the evidence of acts or statements of anyone else that
18 you've heard are relevant only to the intent of Paul
19 Reddick. No one would contend that Bonnie Hoopes was --

20 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: No, under my
21 hypothetical, in the three cases, the court of appeals,
22 let's say, determines that the alleged statements did
23 not occur. That's the argument. And this was admitted
24 to the jury in three of the five cases, and those
25 statements did not occur.

1 MR. EGAN: At least that's part of our
2 adversary system, Your Honor, where we have both sides
3 presenting and countering. The super --

4 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Is that reversible
5 error on appeal?

6 MR. EGAN: That it --

7 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Five -- cases and
8 the court of appeals determines that three did not
9 occur?

10 MR. EGAN: If it's determined under your
11 hypothetical --

12 JUSTICE BREYER: That's exactly what's
13 sort of bothering me. You are a trial lawyer.

14 MR. EGAN: Yes, Your Honor.

15 JUSTICE BREYER: And I'm not. And what's
16 worrying me most about this is I will say something that
17 will muck up quite a lot of trials. So, therefore, the
18 sentence that jumps out the page here was where the
19 court of appeals says that rule 403's exclusion is an
20 extraordinary remedy that should be sparingly -- used
21 sparingly.

22 Is that a general rule?

23 Because my impression was -- and this is why
24 I ask you as a trial lawyer -- is that if you take 401
25 and 402 and read them literally, we'll have trials that

1 last a thousand years.

2 And, really, the way a trial judge keeps the
3 trial under control is to say: Well, maybe there is
4 some slight tendency here to make a fact more likely
5 than not; but, even if that's so, this is a waste of
6 time.

7 And I thought that kind of decision is what
8 trial judges are there to make.

9 MR. EGAN: Yes, Your Honor.

10 JUSTICE BREYER: And, therefore, I thought
11 that this court of appeals is trying to second-guess
12 that trial court judge unless that trial court judge is
13 making an absolute rule, which he may have been.

14 But as soon as we get into this case, I
15 thought we might do quite a lot of harm by trying to let
16 the court of appeals second-guess trial courts on this
17 kind of thing.

18 Now, I would appreciate your response to
19 that.

20 MR. EGAN: Yes, Your Honor. That requires,
21 under 403 requires, a balancing. And I think you must
22 have, contrary to what -- all due respect -- Justice
23 Scalia suggested, rule 403 is the only rule that
24 expressly says "substantially outweighs." We have no
25 evidence here --

1 JUSTICE BREYER: Well, then, how are we
2 going to -- I'm not arguing about what it says so much
3 as I'm arguing about who has the right between the court
4 of appeals and the trial court to decide?

5 MR. EGAN: Your Honor --

6 JUSTICE BREYER: And all I'm worried
7 about -- and you tell me if that's the law in the Tenth
8 Circuit or elsewhere. I was an appeals court judge for
9 quite a while. And I think we have never -- not
10 "never," but hardly ever second-guessed a trial judge on
11 that kind of question.

12 MR. EGAN: Yes, Your Honor.

13 JUSTICE BREYER: Now, you tell me if the
14 rules are different in the Tenth Circuit? Do they out
15 there second-guess trial judges on this kind of question
16 all the time?

17 MR. EGAN: No, Your Honor.

18 JUSTICE BREYER: All right. If they don't
19 normally, why should they here? If this kind of rule is
20 -- as you say, this kind of evidence is like any other
21 evidence, any other evidence at all. It may be
22 relevant, or it may not be. It depends on the case. A
23 waste of time or not depends on the case.

24 MR. EGAN: Yes, Your Honor. And the problem
25 is, blanket evidentiary exclusion before trial.

1 JUSTICE BREYER: I got your blanket part. I
2 got that.

3 MR. EGAN: And so once you are there, we
4 have no quarrel if the Tenth Circuit -- and I think the
5 Tenth Circuit leaves room for sending it back, remand
6 it, and then the court could still make rulings, as the
7 Tenth Circuit said, on cumulative nature of evidence,
8 hearsay objections. These haven't been addressed.

9 Sprint has been --

10 JUSTICE BREYER: Oh, no, not -- I'm
11 saying -- well, you got my point, but you're just not
12 answering my question.

13 MR. EGAN: I am sorry, Your Honor. I'm not
14 understanding --

15 JUSTICE BREYER: And I don't want to repeat
16 it. And I'm not talking about whether it is hearsay or
17 not. I'm not talking -- I'm talking about whether it
18 comes in 401, 402, 403. That issue.

19 MR. EGAN: Yes, Your Honor. Our -- we
20 believe that it does. Because the evidence has a
21 tendency to make more probable than without the evidence
22 facts of consequence, on culture, on impeachment, on
23 pattern, on pretext.

24 That's our standard. We have no indication
25 here that the judge ever engaged in a balancing -- none.

1 JUSTICE SCALIA: Mr. Egan, what if I think
2 that, had he engaged in a balancing, it would have been
3 an abuse of discretion not to exclude it? What if I
4 think that?

5 Then what happens with this case?

6 MR. EGAN: If you believe that it is so
7 clear, then, of course, that would be -- if you believe
8 that it is so clear that it is an abuse of discretion
9 not to exclude it, then that is the prerogative of the
10 Court to do. But it must be done under this standard,
11 Your Honor; that is, the judge looks at the evidence and
12 asks the question like he would for submissibility.

13 What would a reasonable jury say, and is
14 there room for disagreement?

15 If you have Federal judges, for instance,
16 who disagree on admissibility --

17 JUSTICE SCALIA: No, but I am worried about
18 having five trials -- you know, one trial turning into
19 six trials. I mean those are the factors that I am
20 concerned about.

21 MR. EGAN: I understand, Your Honor. And --

22 JUSTICE SCALIA: Yes.

23 MR. EGAN: But let me just say this, if I
24 might. Discrimination cases are important. In the
25 McKennon case Justice Kennedy wrote for the unanimous

1 Court in saying every time a single plaintiff advances
2 the cause and prevails in a discrimination case, it
3 serves the national public purpose.

4 So it's important. And the idea of there
5 being cases on this, the courthouse doors should be
6 open. The decision may be -- may be --

7 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: What if I assume
8 your rule cuts the other way?

9 Let's say in this company of 70,000 or
10 17,000, or whatever it is, there are a thousand
11 supervisors. Four or five are alleged to have
12 discriminated on the basis of age.

13 I assume the company can call the other 995
14 and say: Are there any allegations against you? Did
15 you fire people? And did you in some cases keep the
16 oldest one?

17 And then they have to -- you know, they say
18 yes. So the, "me, too" evidence works both ways, right?

19 MR. EGAN: Absolutely. And that is
20 important, because in your Court's cases and
21 jurisprudence --

22 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: So if you are
23 talking about culture, what is the culture of the
24 company if 995 supervisors don't supervise -- don't
25 discriminate in their decisions and 5 do?

1 MR. EGAN: Your Honor, the culture -- they
2 have the right to bring on evidence, but the trial court
3 retains the discretion. And I hope this answers Justice
4 Breyer's question, also, of course retains the
5 discretion to keep out marginal evidence.

6 JUSTICE ALITO: Well, maybe, just as an
7 example, you could take Mr. Borel and Mr. Hoopes and
8 explain why their testimony should not have been
9 excluded under 403? As I read through it, the only
10 thing you have as to either one of them is that they
11 were replaced by young women in their position. That's
12 it as far as admissible evidence for either one.

13 Now, if you do that, 403 balancing
14 there, why doesn't that lead to exclusion?

15 MR. EGAN: Because John Borel's evidence
16 goes to pretext, Your Honor. And pretext under the
17 Reeves case is something that is highly, highly
18 important, and highly important to the trial lawyer.
19 His pretext evidence is twofold.

20 He was going to get a job before he knew
21 that he was RIF'd. He goes to apply for the job after
22 the RIF, and he is told: Sorry, you've got a secret
23 adverse rating.

24 Now, mind you, the company says: We don't
25 use these ratings.

1 Now, in Ellen Mendelsohn's trial without
2 corroboration, she's isolated. That's John Borel's
3 important testimony in this case. John Hoopes -- he's
4 told by a vice president why can't you hire someone
5 younger? Why would you hire someone age 48, which
6 indicates that at Sprint, it's something that is
7 determined to be okay. So that's --

8 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: So if the company can
9 admit evidence to show the opposite of your "me, too"
10 evidence by other supervisors and you say five shows the
11 culture of discrimination, how many are they allowed to
12 admit before -- to show the opposite culture? Presumably
13 more than five if they say this isn't representative.
14 You have to look at these 15 others.

15 MR. EGAN: I can't pick a number, Mr. Chief
16 Justice. And we're not saying that the five proves the
17 fact as you said of proving culture. But it is evidence
18 that is relevant to it. A reasonable juror --

19 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Right. There are
20 15, 30, or however many is equally relevant.

21 MR. EGAN: Yes, Your Honor.

22 JUSTICE KENNEDY: You said there was going
23 to be an agreement that this would be a trial for a day,
24 a day and a half.

25 MR. EGAN: Yes, Your Honor.

1 JUSTICE KENNEDY: Was that before or after
2 the premise that this testimony would not be admitted?

3 MR. EGAN: That was after the premise that
4 the testimony would not be admitted. But, Your Honor,
5 this was after remand.

6 JUSTICE KENNEDY: Well, of course, so then
7 -- you told us, oh it can be done in a day and a half.
8 But it wasn't done in a day and a half because these
9 five were excluded.

10 MR. EGAN: No, Your Honor. I'm sorry. What
11 happened here was the remand order, the reversal and
12 remand by the Tenth Circuit came down. We have a
13 pretrial because we're going back to trial. We have a
14 trial on January 29, 2007. Excuse me. A pretrial, and
15 at that trial the court asked well, will this be a long
16 trial, four weeks, five weeks? We say if you open up
17 discovery, if they want to bring people to refute --
18 Sprint said no.

19 JUSTICE KENNEDY: I don't think that has any
20 bearing on the ruling that the trial judge made that's
21 under review in the Court of Appeals for the Tenth
22 Circuit and that we're looking at here.

23 MR. EGAN: Well, Your Honor, it goes to
24 whether or not saying that there's going to be a lengthy
25 trial it is some evidence as you look at what the actual

1 experience is -- look at the cases cited by the
2 defendant. We cited them in our brief, where they let
3 in this evidence.

4 JUSTICE SCALIA: They may have just thought
5 the game isn't worth the candle. Just thought we've
6 sunk so much money into this case by now and it's just
7 not worth the risk.

8 MR. EGAN: That's fine, Your Honor. But
9 they should not take out the legs from the plaintiffs
10 to try to prove their case. We must squeeze every --

11 JUSTICE SCALIA: And that's indeed a problem
12 that concerns me. It is not just the question of whether
13 the trial is going to last for three weeks. It is a
14 question of whether, at the prospect that the trial will
15 last for three weeks and they will have to go out and
16 find other people in their organization and depose them
17 and bring them in to show them it is not the culture.
18 They just say it is not worth the candle. Just settle
19 the case and get out. All of these things are relevant
20 to how you rule on 403 it seems to me.

21 MR. EGAN: Your Honor, we're simply asking
22 for balance, because other supervisors --

23 JUSTICE SOUTER: Doesn't that get to the
24 point, though -- I mean, hasn't the last hour of
25 questioning from the Court shown that what really ought

1 to take place here is a remand to the trial court for a
2 403 balance?

3 MR. EGAN: Yes, Your Honor.

4 JUSTICE SOUTER: Okay.

5 MR. EGAN: And I think that't fine. If I
6 might offer some concluding thoughts because my time
7 is running down. The district court erred in
8 categorically barring all other supervisor evidence.
9 It was a categorical bar. When you get into the
10 chronology of what happened, you will see no indication
11 otherwise. Neither rule 401 nor rule 403 support such
12 a blanket prohibition. As I mentioned under Article IV,
13 there is no --

14 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: So you think the
15 court of appeals erred as well in ruling that the
16 evidence was admissible? Because as I understand your
17 answer to Justice Souter, it is that there should be a
18 403 evaluation and the court of appeals didn't allow the
19 district court to undertake that.

20 MR. EGAN: Your Honor, I think that what the
21 -- my reading of the Tenth Circuit, for what it's worth,
22 is that they were looking at the exclusionary order
23 based on the wrong legal rule and said, we are going to
24 reverse that. And that we see nothing that indicates
25 that the evidence is overly prejudicial, since that's

1 basically all that they were looking at.

2 There could be, and we assume there would
3 be, new motions filed upon remand, in which case we'll
4 answer anything going to the merits because we've never
5 been allowed to talk about the content of the testimony
6 itself. Will it be cumulative? Is it overly
7 prejudicial? We've got --

8 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: And if on the remand
9 that you conceded is necessary, that will take place in
10 the context of a motion in limine and not in the context
11 of a new trial?

12 MR. EGAN: It should be in the context of
13 going back and being remanded, for the court maybe to
14 make determination, but our position is in the context
15 of a new trial the court can address any new motion that
16 hasn't been made.

17 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: So you think a new
18 trial is required for the district court to make the 403
19 determination?

20 MR. EGAN: I think that you have to get back
21 before the district court procedurally.

22 JUSTICE KENNEDY: Has this Court said that
23 403 determinations must always be made on the record?

24 MR. EGAN: No, Your Honor, you haven't said
25 that they should be on the record, but we're not asking

1 for that. We're asking for some indication of what --

2 JUSTICE KENNEDY: Well, I thought that's
3 precisely what you are saying, there's been no
4 balancing shown, that he didn't do the balance.

5 MR. EGAN: Well, Your Honor, there should --
6 we believe, if -- as you write the opinion, there should
7 be -- the Court should show their work. You know, it's
8 -- it's something that I was taught in grade school, show
9 your work so we know what you did rule on. They should
10 follow the rules as well.

11 JUSTICE SCALIA: It seems very strange to me
12 that we -- there's been -- the case went to the jury
13 without the evidence you wanted to get in. The jury
14 found for the company. Now if the -- if the trial court
15 is going to properly exclude the evidence under 403, we
16 should then have the very same trial with a new jury?
17 That doesn't seem proper.

18 MR. EGAN: No, Your Honor, if may I answer
19 that question.

20 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Yes.

21 MR. EGAN: The only thing that can't happen
22 on remand -- I want to make sure this is clear -- is
23 that the judge can't exclude on the same basis that
24 caused the problem the first time; that is, well, it is
25 not Reddick; it's excluded. Not Reddick, it's excluded.

1 Any other factors would be open.

2 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Thank you, Mr. Egan.

3 MR. EGAN: Thank you.

4 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Mr. Cane, you have
5 five minutes.

6 REBUTTAL ARGUMENT OF PAUL W. CANE, JR.

7 ON BEHALF OF THE PETITIONER

8 MR. CANE: Let me begin by addressing
9 Justice Kennedy's question about the rule 403 issue. I
10 think there are two reasons why no remand is necessary.
11 The first, as Justice Scalia said, is that you assume
12 that the order is correct. You don't assume that it's
13 incorrect. The second --

14 JUSTICE GINSBURG: But the -- how can we
15 make that assumption when the Tenth Circuit says we know
16 why this district judge ruled as he or she did? We had
17 a precedent. It -- it dealt with employee discipline.
18 We said, categorically, it's got to be the same
19 supervisor; otherwise it's not relevant.

20 The district judge was simply applying that
21 case to this case.

22 MR. CANE: Neither --

23 JUSTICE GINSBURG: So it wasn't any 403
24 question. It was this doesn't some in.

25 MR. CANE: Neither that case nor this case

1 involved any attempt to show that foundation, the
2 linkage between these other persons, these other alleged
3 bad actors, and the decision here.

4 JUSTICE GINSBURG: But that's not -- the
5 point is that the Tenth Circuit said this judge made an
6 absolute rule: It doesn't come in. We know why he made
7 an absolute rule; that was our precedent.

8 MR. CANE: Well, I think the Tenth Circuit
9 -- it -- it applied the incorrect presumption. It
10 should have applied the presumption that an evidentiary
11 ruling is correct rather than incorrect.

12 JUSTICE BREYER: How could it have been?
13 What about the date problem he just mentioned? He said
14 -- your opponent said that when you filed this motion in
15 limine on December 15, 2004, by that time, there hadn't
16 been any fact-specific things at all brought up in the
17 trial that were relevant to this, and there's certainly
18 none in the motion that I could see.

19 MR. CANE: Well, that always will be true in
20 the case of a motion in limine. But the motion in
21 limine anticipated the specific evidence that had
22 emerged in discovery --

23 JUSTICE BREYER: But where does it say? I
24 can't find in the motion, although there is something on
25 disparate impact, anything that says well, you see, I

1 don't know about the general mine run of cases, but in
2 this particular case, it's not sufficiently material, it
3 is a waste -- it's not -- it is a waste of time. Now, I
4 just can't find that.

5 MR. CANE: I don't think district judges can
6 be expected to, you know, write opinions that are -- to
7 be affirmed to be worthy of publication in F. Supp.2d. I
8 think the district court considers the evidence thrown
9 at him or her, and in this case all --

10 JUSTICE BREYER: Did anyone argue that
11 before December 15, 2004, that we don't know about the
12 mine run of cases, but this case, in fact it's a waste
13 of time? Did anyone argue that before December 15,
14 2004?

15 MR. CANE: That's the time when --

16 JUSTICE BREYER: I'm asking yes or no; did
17 they or didn't they?

18 MR. CANE: No.

19 JUSTICE BREYER: Okay.

20 MR. CANE: Because that's when the court
21 considered notions in limine. The court was not setting
22 standards in anticipation of the trial until the trial.

23 JUSTICE KENNEDY: You said there were two
24 points about 403.

25 MR. CANE: Yes, the second is I agree with

1 Justice Alito's observation, or I think it was his
2 observation, that it would have been abuse -- an abuse
3 of discretion to admit this evidence anyway; and so
4 that gets you easily by the 403 issue. I don't think
5 you need -- there's a lot of court of appeals cases that
6 say that where 403 factors are obvious, where they're
7 implicit, there's not any obligation on the court of
8 appeals' part -- or on the district court's part -- to
9 -- to set them forth and explicitly engage in
10 any balancing.

11 JUSTICE GINSBURG: Do you not think that
12 there is an important value that the Tenth Circuit
13 recognized in making it clear that there is no absolute
14 bar? If we just assume in favor of the district court,
15 when we don't know that the district court didn't take
16 it as an absolute rule, that -- this is a point of law
17 that should be clarified for the benefit of district
18 courts. Either there's a categorical bar or there's
19 not.

20 MR. CANE: I think that, absent some showing
21 of relationship of nexus, then the presumptive rule in
22 the run of cases should be that this evidence should not
23 be admitted.

24 JUSTICE SCALIA: You -- you don't want that
25 clarification to be done at the expense your client, I

1 take it?

2 (Laughter.)

3 MR. CANE: Of course not. Of course not.

4 Let me respond to a couple of the Solicitor
5 General's points. The Solicitor General in his brief
6 said three things with which we agree: it's the
7 plaintiff's burden to lay foundation; anecdotes don't
8 comprise foundation --

9 JUSTICE GINSBURG: The -- the government
10 said it was not necessary to lay a foundation.
11 Mr. Garre confirmed that point.

12 MR. CANE: He did say that, Justice
13 Ginsburg, but that's not what their brief says.

14 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Thank you, Mr. Cane.
15 The case is submitted.

16 (Whereupon, at 11:07 a.m., the case in the
17 above-entitled matter was submitted.)

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A	
abolished 42:10	56:16
above-entitled 1:12 63:17	admit 53:9,12 62:3
absent 8:22 62:20	admitted 15:3 31:6 37:20
absolute 9:11 11:23 33:8 47:13 60:6,7 62:13,16	45:13,23 54:2 54:4 62:23
absolutely 14:14 51:19	adopted 11:5,7 11:14
abuse 14:21 37:3,7 50:3,8 62:2,2	advances 51:1
accepts 21:7	adversary 46:2
accounted 8:12	adverse 52:23
accused 43:10 43:12,15	affirm 37:8
acknowledge 28:22	affirmed 12:24 61:7
acknowledged 31:1	age 18:15 34:25 41:7 42:21 43:4 45:10 51:12 53:5
act 21:5 34:25	age-based 35:16
action 7:25 35:3	age-discrimin... 41:10,12 43:10
actor 18:22 19:5	ago 23:12
actors 15:8,9 19:10,12 60:3	agree 9:9 13:3,4 20:24 21:12 61:25 63:6
acts 7:13 31:9 45:17	agreed 43:21
actual 21:11 54:25	agreement 53:23
additional 15:23	agrees 45:12
address 14:19 34:10 36:17 57:15	ahead 38:8 42:1
addressed 9:19 43:17 49:8	ALITO 14:18 14:25 24:21 25:7 36:25 37:6 52:6
addressing 59:8	Alito's 62:1
admissibility 50:16	allegation 18:20 32:12,13
admissible 3:24 7:7 8:1 20:22 21:9 22:17,20 23:5,8 31:17 31:20 33:23 40:24 52:12	allegations 23:18 51:14
	alleged 24:25 25:1 34:1,3,24 35:16 45:22 51:11 60:2
	alleging 25:4,5
	allow 56:18
	allowed 31:3,10
	53:11 57:5
	allows 24:18
	amicus 1:20 2:7 22:12
	amounts 6:1
	anecdotes 6:11 6:12 38:20 63:7
	Angeles 34:18 35:17 39:7
	animus 24:9
	answer 6:7 13:2 42:4 44:25 45:1 56:17 57:4 58:18
	answering 42:2 49:12
	answers 52:3
	anticipated 60:21
	anticipation 61:22
	anybody 36:18
	anyway 62:3
	appeal 45:9 46:5
	appealed 45:9
	appeals 3:12 12:12,14 23:24 32:22 33:3,7 33:21 35:7 37:14 45:12,21 46:8,19 47:11 47:16 48:4,8 54:21 56:15,18 62:5,8
	APPEARAN... 1:15
	appendix 11:15
	applied 60:9,10
	applies 13:23 14:4 21:21 40:2
	apply 4:19 33:6 42:14 52:21
	applying 33:8 59:20
	appreciate
	47:18
	appropriate 8:8
	Aramburu 10:19 34:3
	area 33:3
	areas 17:15 36:12
	argue 61:10,13
	argued 34:3
	arguing 48:2,3
	argument 1:13 2:2,10 3:3,7 9:3 11:4,4 13:21 14:4 22:10 26:22 33:16 45:9,23 59:6
	arguments 11:18
	arises 36:5
	Article 24:19 36:5,7,12 56:12
	articulate 24:21
	asked 54:15
	asking 55:21 57:25 58:1 61:16
	asks 50:12
	assailed 7:14
	assailing 9:8
	assault 21:18,19 22:4
	assert 36:1
	assume 9:18 12:15,18 18:20 18:21 19:4 30:15 39:17 43:20 51:7,13 57:2 59:11,12 62:14
	assumed 12:12 12:13,14 27:6 29:1
	assumption 43:13 59:15
	attacks 15:19
	attempt 17:25 60:1
	attended 39:9
	attention 4:11
	automatically 32:14
	average 43:4
	aware 38:19 39:5
	a.m 1:14 3:2 63:16
	B
	back 31:22 49:5 54:13 57:13,20
	bad 15:8,9 18:22 19:5,10,11 60:3
	balance 22:7 55:22 56:2 58:4
	balancing 32:23 47:21 49:25 50:2 52:13 58:4 62:10
	ban 33:8
	bar 36:8,12 37:17 56:9 62:14,18
	barely 32:18,19
	Barred 38:6
	barring 56:8
	bars 36:7
	based 5:8,9 33:22 37:24 56:23
	basic 3:11
	basically 40:25 41:13 44:13 57:1
	basis 12:21 34:25 51:12 58:23
	bear 21:14
	bearing 54:20
	bears 18:25
	Beecause 6:22

beg 35:12	bring 39:21 43:4 52:2 54:17 55:17	29:17 30:2,10 30:25,25 31:6 32:5 33:10,11 35:8,13 36:17 36:19,20 37:18 38:2 39:11 45:6 47:14 48:22,23 50:5 50:25 51:2 52:17 53:3 55:6,10,19 57:3 58:12 59:21,21,25,25 60:20 61:2,9 61:12 63:15,16	Chicago 23:9 Chief 3:3,9 9:9 9:18,25 15:10 18:12 20:14 21:2 22:8,13 22:19 23:3 30:13 31:4,13 31:22 32:1,12 33:13,18 34:15 34:23 35:5,11 35:22 36:15 38:13,18 39:2 39:17 45:2,5 45:20 46:4,7 51:7,22 53:8 53:15,19 56:14 57:8,17 58:20 59:2,4 63:14	client 62:25 close 44:8,10 code 7:21 colloquy 4:9 come 29:8 31:11 34:12 39:16 60:6 comes 49:18 command 16:7 16:25 20:25 21:4 comment 24:9 39:3 comments 4:9 commits 21:4 common 7:21 25:1,15 35:3,9 communicated 20:18 21:5 38:14 39:4 company 1:4 3:5 8:4,16,17,20 8:25 9:1,7,21 17:15 19:23 21:7,19 22:16 23:9,16,17 31:15 35:18 39:19 41:13 43:9 51:9,13 51:24 52:24 53:8 58:14 companywide 25:14 company-wide 23:19 35:14 complained 23:12 42:21 complaining 26:25 complaint 26:9 complex 25:18 26:25 comprehend 16:4 comprise 63:8 conceded 57:9 conceding 39:2	
believe 8:22 37:5,9 40:2 41:19 42:3 44:7 49:20 50:6,7 58:6	burden 27:8,20 63:7 Business 18:7,10	49:17 50:2,10 50:25,25 51:6 52:5 53:10,11 55:8,13 56:17 56:19,20 57:18 58:2 59:11 66:6 67:14 70:22,23 71:5 71:25 72:2 72:17 73:3 75:6,10,19 77:3 78:12 79:21,21,25,25 80:20 81:2,9 81:12 83:15,16	Circuit 10:20 11:23 12:3 14:19,23 32:25 33:4 37:8 48:8 48:14 49:4,5,7 54:12,22 56:21 59:15 60:5,8 62:12 circumstances 4:5 17:22 19:1 19:7 23:21 26:5 circumstantial 41:15 cite 10:19 cited 55:1,2 cites 17:10 City 1:21 claim 3:16 claiming 23:10 claims 5:16,17 clarification 62:25 clarified 62:17 clear 13:18 28:23 50:7,8 58:22 62:13	benefit 62:17 better 16:3 bias 3:15 16:12 17:7 35:16 biased 16:10 bit 15:23 19:8 blanket 11:9 33:22 48:25 49:1 56:12 blessed 38:8 Blessing 15:21 15:25 boils 40:25 Bonnie 38:9 45:19 book 33:20 bore 18:17 Borel 52:7 Borel's 52:15 53:2 boss 15:21 41:12 bothering 46:13 Breyer 10:9 11:2 13:1 14:3 41:25 42:4 46:12,15 47:10 48:1,6,13,18 49:1,10,15 60:12,23 61:10 61:16,19 Breyer's 52:4 brief 7:6 13:5,9 13:20 17:4,11 27:23 28:1 33:11 36:18 55:2 63:5,13 briefed 29:3	cases 3:17 9:16 12:7 15:13 17:10,11 27:8 30:24 31:1 44:23,24 45:10 45:13,21,24 46:7 50:24 51:5,15,20 55:1 61:1,12 62:5,22 case-by-case 9:10 catalyst 25:1,15 categorical 36:6 36:8,12 37:17 56:9 62:18 categorically 56:8 59:18 cause 51:2 caused 58:24 CEO 43:3 cert 44:20 certainly 14:12 26:20 29:17 60:17 chain 16:6,25 20:25 21:4 chapters 44:4 character 21:18 21:21,23 22:4 character-evi... 21:24
	C				
	C 2:1 3:1 Cal 1:16 call 9:21 51:13 called 4:10 15:4 candidate 28:17 candle 55:5,18 Cane 1:16 2:3 2:11 3:6,7,9 4:4,13 5:11,20 6:3,7,10,21 7:1 7:11,20 8:2,4 8:15,22 9:2,6 9:12,24 10:2,8 10:25 11:6,16 12:4,6,17,24 13:23 14:14,23 15:2,15 16:8 16:20 17:6 18:5,16 19:13 19:17,25 20:7 20:12,23 21:10 21:16,22 22:8 34:7 59:4,6,8 59:22,25 60:8 60:19 61:5,15 61:18,20,25 62:20 63:3,12 63:14 carrying 26:3 case 3:4 4:18,19 4:22,25 5:3,6 6:18 10:5,22 12:13 13:22 18:1,6 21:14 22:17 24:17,17 25:12,16 26:14 27:2,7,16 28:9				

<p>concerned 43:8 50:20</p> <p>concerns 44:5 55:12</p> <p>conclude 42:1</p> <p>concluding 56:6</p> <p>conclusion 22:21 32:11 38:25</p> <p>conclusively 32:7</p> <p>conduct 7:13 22:1 42:9</p> <p>conferred 8:23</p> <p>confirmed 63:11</p> <p>confronted 28:9</p> <p>confused 13:2</p> <p>confusing 44:9</p> <p>confusion 37:13</p> <p>Congress 36:7</p> <p>connection 9:22 12:8 16:19,22 18:14 20:16 35:17,20 36:3 39:22,25</p> <p>connections 36:24</p> <p>consequence 28:7 36:10 40:6,14,16,21 49:22</p> <p>consider 4:20 10:4</p> <p>consideration 10:4 32:9</p> <p>considered 61:21</p> <p>considers 61:8</p> <p>consistently 3:19</p> <p>consists 8:25</p> <p>Construction 28:18</p> <p>consultation 8:6</p> <p>consulted 15:25</p> <p>contend 45:19</p> <p>contended 5:5</p>	<p>content 43:17,18 57:5</p> <p>context 3:18 30:4,5 32:11 32:13 57:10,10 57:12,14</p> <p>contexts 3:18</p> <p>continuing 39:13</p> <p>contrary 47:22</p> <p>control 47:3</p> <p>cookie 4:16</p> <p>corporate 20:8 21:18 22:4 25:3</p> <p>corporations 21:21,21</p> <p>correct 12:20,23 15:2 16:8 20:22 27:9 28:4 33:9 59:12 60:11</p> <p>correctly 18:22 32:25</p> <p>corroboration 53:2</p> <p>counsel 5:15 25:24 34:15</p> <p>countering 46:3</p> <p>countervailing 14:16</p> <p>counter-evide... 31:12 43:25 45:4</p> <p>couple 15:7 63:4</p> <p>course 31:14 50:7 52:4 54:6 63:3,3</p> <p>court 1:1,13 3:10,12 4:2,4 4:14,14,16,17 4:20 5:10,11 5:15 6:8 10:3 10:12 11:9,14 11:19 12:1,5 12:11,12,14,15 12:19 13:12</p>	<p>14:11 15:18,22 21:22 22:6,14 23:24 24:16 28:8 29:12,21 30:6,18,23,25 32:5,20,22 33:1,2,5,7,8,19 33:21,24 35:7 36:8,22 37:10 37:11,14,16 40:8 45:7,12 45:21 46:8,19 47:11,12,12,16 48:3,4,8 49:6 50:10 51:1 52:2 54:15,21 55:25 56:1,7 56:15,18,19 57:13,15,18,21 57:22 58:7,14 61:8,20,21 62:5,7,14,15</p> <p>courthouse 4:17 51:5</p> <p>courts 30:19 36:17 47:16 62:18</p> <p>court's 3:17,22 5:8 12:22,23 14:10 51:20 62:8</p> <p>covered 39:10</p> <p>criteria 24:24</p> <p>critical 29:18 30:3</p> <p>crux 30:2</p> <p>culture 38:6,7 38:17,22 40:5 41:15,20 42:8 43:1 49:22 51:23,23 52:1 53:11,12,17 55:17</p> <p>cumulative 49:7 57:6</p> <p>curiae 1:20 2:7 22:12</p>	<p>customary 12:15,18</p> <p>cuts 51:8</p> <p>cutter 4:16</p> <hr/> <p style="text-align: center;">D</p> <hr/> <p>D 3:1</p> <p>date 60:13</p> <p>day 25:20 44:6 53:23,24 54:7 54:8</p> <p>days 44:21</p> <p>de 32:23</p> <p>dealing 9:6,16 24:25</p> <p>dealt 59:17</p> <p>December 1:10 34:10 60:15 61:11,13</p> <p>decide 9:23 37:2 48:4</p> <p>decision 3:13 12:22,23 13:25 18:24 43:17 47:7 51:6 60:3</p> <p>decisionmaker 3:14 11:25 13:17 16:22 17:9,13 19:20 19:21 20:25 21:11,25 22:3</p> <p>decisionmakers 17:14,20 18:19 19:3 30:9</p> <p>decisionmake... 3:19 16:9</p> <p>decisionmaking 7:12 17:8</p> <p>decisions 15:21 43:11 51:25</p> <p>defend 14:1,12 14:14</p> <p>defendant 55:2</p> <p>defendants 32:10</p> <p>defendant's 34:19</p>	<p>define 16:24</p> <p>demonstrate 19:18 32:7 39:25</p> <p>demonstrated 16:10 39:22</p> <p>denies 31:15</p> <p>DENNIS 1:21 2:8 33:16</p> <p>denying 30:6</p> <p>department 1:19 18:18 38:25</p> <p>depend 20:15</p> <p>depends 34:21 36:11 42:23 48:22,23</p> <p>depose 55:16</p> <p>deposition 17:19</p> <p>Deputy 1:18</p> <p>determination 9:10 29:15 30:14,22 33:2 36:21 45:7 57:14,19</p> <p>determinations 57:23</p> <p>determinative 29:17</p> <p>determine 25:9 30:20 31:17 32:3</p> <p>determined 46:10 53:7</p> <p>determines 45:22 46:8</p> <p>determining 24:24 25:9 41:23</p> <p>Development 18:8,10</p> <p>difference 27:24 35:8</p> <p>different 13:3 20:6,7 24:5,6 24:11 38:5 42:7 48:14</p>
---	--	---	--	--

digging 14:13	dismissed 18:15	33:15,16,18	42:14,21	27:9,21 28:3,5
direct 15:20	disparate 60:25	34:21 35:2,7	employer 26:21	29:8,13,18,19
16:6 39:18	disparate-trea...	35:20,24 36:4	31:11 35:3	30:2,8,14,21
directions 8:6	22:17	36:16 37:5,9	employer-initi...	31:1,2,5,19
8:23	dispute 39:18	37:22 38:5,16	35:9	32:6,8,9,10,18
directive 17:11	disputed 4:15	38:21 39:8,24	employment	32:18,19,21
disagree 50:16	5:2,5 17:18	40:19 41:4,18	3:13,18	34:1,18,20,21
disagreement	dissenting 23:23	42:3,6,18,23	engage 62:9	35:13 36:9,23
50:14	distinct 26:4	43:1,3,12,16	engaged 21:25	36:23 37:13,17
discipline 33:4	distinctive 27:1	44:1,16 45:3	23:22 49:25	38:6,6 39:18
59:17	distracted 5:17	45:15 46:1,6	50:2	39:24 40:1,10
disciplined	district 3:22 4:4	46:10,14 47:9	entities 9:16	40:14,15,24
20:20	4:10,14,16,17	47:20 48:5,12	entitled 36:5	41:15,22,24
discovery 4:22	4:20 5:8,9,11	48:17,24 49:3	episode 31:15	44:10,12 45:1
18:1 19:18	5:15 10:3,12	49:13,19 50:1	episodes 38:13	45:11,17 47:25
54:17 60:22	10:23 11:5,6,9	50:6,21,23	equally 53:20	48:20,21,21
discretion 14:22	11:14,19 12:1	51:19 52:1,15	equivocal 6:16	49:7,20,21
30:20 37:3,7	12:5,10,15,19	53:15,21,25	erred 56:7,15	50:11 51:18
50:3,8 52:3,5	12:22,23 13:12	54:3,10,23	error 3:25,25	52:2,5,12,15
62:3	14:10,11 15:18	55:8,21 56:3,5	4:1,7 5:19	52:19 53:9,10
discriminate	15:22 23:23	56:20 57:12,20	45:14 46:5	53:17 54:25
51:25	26:22 30:6,18	57:24 58:5,18	ESQ 1:16,18,21	55:3 56:8,16
discriminated	30:19,23 33:1	58:21 59:2,3	2:3,5,8,11	56:25 58:13,15
7:24 30:10	33:5,8 40:8	eight 44:24	establish 15:12	60:21 61:8
40:12 51:12	56:7,19 57:18	either 9:11 15:4	established 6:11	62:3,22
discriminates	57:21 59:16,20	52:10,12 62:18	establishment	evidentiary
20:18	61:5,8 62:8,14	elaborate 40:17	39:12	48:25 60:10
discriminating	62:15,17	elaborated 5:4	evaluation	evolved 15:18
5:23,24 6:15	division 23:19	eliminated 27:5	56:18	exactly 46:12
20:24	26:3 27:13	Ellen 1:7 36:23	event 14:19	example 21:6
discrimination	doing 8:14	38:2 42:14	35:10	23:8 24:10
3:17 4:6,18,19	door 4:17	53:1	events 41:21	25:12 26:24
5:25 15:12	doors 51:5	emerged 4:22	eventually 20:8	27:2 52:7
22:15,18 23:22	draw 7:15 19:11	60:22	everybody	exception 22:2
25:1,4,6 31:9	32:11	emphasize 6:25	19:16	excludable
32:13 34:4,25	due 47:22	emphasizing	evidence 3:11,23	32:21
35:14 42:21	D.C 1:9,19	6:22	4:19,21,24	exclude 32:17
45:11 50:24		employee 16:15	5:24 6:14,18	32:18 33:25
51:2 53:11	E	23:11 33:3	7:6,23 8:1 9:14	37:3 50:3,9
discriminatory	E 1:21 2:1,8 3:1	41:5,8,11	11:8 12:19	58:15,23
7:24 8:12 22:1	3:1 33:16	59:17	13:13 14:20	excluded 14:21
24:9 34:1	earlier 34:16	employees 10:14	15:3,5,24 17:5	15:1 23:2 24:2
39:20 42:9	easily 62:4	10:16 13:7,9	18:2,3,13	24:20 26:23
discussed 44:20	effect 14:7 21:18	13:14 18:15	21:15 22:15,23	28:20 29:12
discussion 32:2	44:4,12	25:16 26:8,13	23:4,7,25 24:1	30:22 31:7
39:13	effort 18:13	26:15,16 27:19	24:18,20 25:12	52:9 54:9
dismissal 41:2	Egan 1:21 2:8	34:2 41:1	25:13 26:23	58:25,25

exclusion 28:17 46:19 48:25 52:14	40:13,14,15,21 49:22	forth 62:9	geographic 25:17	H
exclusionary 56:22	fact-specific 60:16	found 27:6 58:14	Ginsburg 7:3,11 7:17 11:22	half 44:21 53:24 54:7,8
exclusively 34:2	fair 19:17	foundation 3:12 6:22 7:5,8,9,11	12:5 16:2,13	hand 4:16
Excuse 10:6 11:11 54:14	fairly 13:17	8:8 27:9,11,24	17:3 27:22	handle 44:24 45:16
exist 7:1 40:1	falls 22:1	28:2 60:1 63:7	32:24 37:19	happen 7:15 15:15 44:18,22 58:21
existed 42:17	far 20:8 52:12	63:8,10	38:4 59:14,23	happened 15:16 30:24 31:24 32:3,4 54:11 56:10
expanded 15:19	far-flung 17:15	foundational 7:2 17:23,23	60:4 62:11	happens 43:5 45:5 50:5
expect 32:19,22	favor 62:14	four 25:4 34:17 35:15 51:11	63:9,13	harbor 35:16
expected 61:6	Federal 22:25 24:19 30:20	54:16	given 4:25 15:24 17:12 29:24 42:10	harbors 3:15
expense 62:25	31:20 50:15	frailties 41:22	giving 23:20	hard 24:3
experience 55:1	filed 5:1 33:24 34:11 44:19	Francisco 1:16	go 20:8 31:1 37:2 41:22	harder 14:2
explain 4:24 5:10 52:8	57:3 60:14	Fresno 34:19 35:17 39:6	42:1 55:15	hardest 12:13
explained 5:2 15:22	finally 5:3	front 37:25 40:23 41:7	goes 5:25 41:21 52:16,21 54:23	hard-pressed 24:14
explains 3:12	find 12:10 37:6 55:16 60:24 61:4	full 19:17 38:1	going 16:24 21:17 24:14	harm 47:15
explanation 27:1	findings 32:21	Furnco 24:17 28:18 32:5	26:20 27:3	headquarters 25:17
explanations 23:21 26:4	finds 45:8	further 15:23 22:6 33:11	32:17,18 38:22	hear 3:3
explicitly 62:9	fine 55:8 56:5	G	41:20 43:23,24	heard 45:18
expressly 7:24 47:24	finish 42:2,4	G 1:18 2:5 3:1 22:10	44:2,3,7 48:2	hearing 44:16
extent 5:18	fire 51:15	game 55:5	52:20 53:22	hearsay 49:8,16
extraordinary 46:20	fired 34:24	Garre 1:18 2:5 22:9,10,13,22	54:13,24 55:13	held 4:5 21:23
extreme 37:21 37:23	first 22:23 24:25 44:17 58:24 59:11	23:6,17 24:7	56:23 57:4,13 58:15	help 22:17
F	five 6:3 9:7 17:18 18:3,5	24:23 25:11,23	good 38:9	hierarchy 20:15
F 61:7	20:4 45:6,10	26:2,10,18	gotten 44:11	highly 52:17,17 52:18
facility 7:19	45:24 46:7	27:10,14,17,20	governed 11:10	hire 53:4,5
fact 7:15 14:8 15:9 28:6 32:7	50:18 51:11	28:4,12,16,22	government 36:19 63:9	hit 41:19
33:22 36:2,9	53:10,13,16	29:2,7,12,16	grade 58:8	hole 14:13
36:10 40:5	54:9,16 59:5	29:22 30:1,18	GREGORY 1:18 2:5 22:10	Honor 34:7,22 35:21 36:4,16
42:12 44:21	focus 3:19 24:1	31:8,18,25	ground 12:25 14:2	37:5,9,23 38:5
47:4 53:17	focused 4:14	32:5,15,24	grounded 4:21 5:13,19 10:25	38:16 39:8,24
61:12	focusing 4:14 5:16	33:9,14 63:11	11:7 34:8	40:19 41:18
factors 14:16 25:8,8 50:19	follow 58:10	gateway 30:19	group 18:8,10 39:15	42:3,6,19
59:1 62:6	followed 37:18	general 1:18 13:21,23 24:9	guess 28:14 44:5	43:13,16 44:1
facts 4:25 34:13	following 33:5 41:2	46:22 61:1	guided 39:19	44:22 45:15
	force 25:15 35:4 36:3	63:5	guiding 9:13,13	46:2,14 47:9 47:20 48:5,12
	forced 39:12,16	General's 63:5		

48:17,24 49:13 49:19 50:11,21 52:1,16 53:21 53:25 54:4,10 54:23 55:8,21 56:3,20 57:24 58:5,18 Hoopes 38:9 45:19 52:7 53:3 hope 52:3 hour 55:24 Huddleston 24:17 28:8 30:25 36:19,20 hypothetical 26:14 35:2,15 45:21 46:11	increased 18:8 indicate 4:11 6:16 indicated 37:14 40:25 41:7 indicates 29:5 53:6 56:24 indication 49:24 56:10 58:1 individual 21:23 industrial 5:25 infer 26:5 inference 19:11 19:15 inferred 8:5 information 17:19 initiated 35:3 instance 32:23 42:9 50:15 instances 23:7 instant 17:9 instruct 31:2 32:9 instructions 44:25 45:16 insurance 36:14 intend 9:20 intent 3:19,20 45:18 intermediary 40:13 introduce 4:2 28:2 invoke 5:12 involved 20:5 27:19 60:1 irrelevant 9:15 34:5 isolated 53:2 issue 9:25 12:18 13:25 16:16 30:3 38:15 39:4,21 40:10 40:13 49:18 59:9 62:4 issues 37:13	44:17 issuing 11:9 IV 24:19 36:5,7 36:12 56:12	<hr/> J <hr/> JA 30:8 Jack 39:15 January 39:10 44:19 54:14 job 38:10,12 52:20,21 jobs 27:6 42:10 John 52:15 53:2 53:3 joinder 44:23,23 JR 1:16 2:3,11 3:7 59:6 judge 4:10 9:23 10:23 11:5,7 14:25 23:24 26:22 37:3 47:2,12,12 48:8,10 49:25 50:11 54:20 58:23 59:16,20 60:5 judges 47:8 48:15 50:15 61:5 jumps 46:18 juries 32:8,11 jurisprudence 51:21 juror 26:5 53:18 jury 5:16 9:4 14:7 26:22 30:17 31:2,6 31:19,21 45:8 45:24 50:13 58:12,13,16 jury's 15:14 Justice 1:19 3:3 3:9,21 4:8 5:7 5:18,22 6:5,9 6:13,24 7:3,11 7:17,22 8:3,9	8:19,24 9:5,9 9:18,25 10:6,9 11:2,11,12,13 11:17,20,22 12:5,9,21 13:1 14:1,2,16,18 14:25 15:10 16:2,13 17:3 17:25 18:12 19:9,14,22,25 20:3,10,14 21:2,13,20 22:8,13,19 23:3,15 24:3,8 24:21,24 25:7 25:21,24 26:7 26:12 27:7,11 27:15,18,21,22 27:25 28:10,12 28:13,19,25 29:4,11,14,20 29:23 30:1,13 31:4,13,22 32:1,12,24 33:13,18 34:15 34:23 35:5,11 35:22 36:1,15 36:25 37:6,19 38:4,13,18 39:2,17 40:17 40:20 41:5,25 42:2,4,5,16,20 42:25 43:2,6 43:14,19,20 44:2 45:2,5,20 46:4,7,12,15 47:10,22 48:1 48:6,13,18 49:1,10,15 50:1,17,22,25 51:7,22 52:3,6 53:8,16,19,22 54:1,6,19 55:4 55:11,23 56:4 56:14,17 57:8 57:17,22 58:2 58:11,20 59:2	59:4,9,11,14 59:23 60:4,12 60:23 61:10,16 61:19,23 62:1 62:11,24 63:9 63:12,14
<hr/> I <hr/> idea 51:4 identified 15:8 18:22 immediate 41:9 impact 60:25 impeachment 49:22 impermissible 22:5 34:25 implementing 23:19 implicit 62:7 importance 6:22 important 10:19 36:20 39:11 50:24 51:4,20 52:18,18 53:3 62:12 importantly 16:20 impression 46:23 improperly 29:1 include 16:25 includes 16:15 incorrect 59:13 60:9,11				<hr/> K <hr/> Kansas 1:21 keep 26:11 44:25 51:15 52:5 keeps 47:2 Kennedy 3:21 4:8 10:6 17:25 18:17,21,24,25 19:4,22 20:1 20:10 21:13,20 26:7,12 27:7 27:11,15,18,21 50:25 53:22 54:1,6,19 57:22 58:2 61:23 Kennedy's 27:25 59:9 key 39:9 kind 23:25 25:1 29:18 32:20,21 40:20 41:15 47:7,17 48:11 48:15,19,20 knew 52:20 know 5:7 11:12 11:13 19:13,24 20:19 32:3 35:12 39:3,8 44:18 50:18 51:17 58:7,9 59:15 60:6 61:1,6,11 62:15	
				<hr/> L <hr/> ladder 20:8 laid 18:11 language 30:11	

<p>37:23 large 23:8 Largely 29:2 latitude 15:23 Laughter 63:2 law 26:20 37:14 37:18 48:7 62:16 lawyer 46:13,24 52:18 lay 7:4 27:23 28:2 63:7,10 laying 27:8 layoff 18:24 lead 52:14 leadership 39:9 leaves 49:5 legal 56:23 legs 55:9 lengthy 54:24 let's 18:20,21 19:4 21:3 35:5 43:20 45:6,22 51:9 level 18:9 20:23 43:8 levels 40:9 liability 36:14 light 19:6,8 21:13 limine 4:21,24 5:14 9:19 15:11,17 30:4 30:16 31:7 33:25 57:10 60:15,20,21 61:21 limited 26:23 limiting 45:16 Limits 36:6 line 6:20 42:10 44:11 linkage 7:12 60:2 linked 18:16 list 5:1 36:13 literally 46:25</p>	<p>litigated 33:10 litigation 44:3 little 19:9 located 20:16 long 54:15 longer 44:21 look 22:22 24:19 25:8,11 30:5 32:15,16 37:10 40:1 53:14 54:25 55:1 looking 54:22 56:22 57:1 looks 36:22 50:11 Los 34:18 35:16 39:6 lot 32:2,17 46:17 47:15 62:5 lots 38:8 low 22:25 lower 36:17 lower-level 20:17 21:3</p> <hr/> <p style="text-align: center;">M</p> <p>magnitude 9:17 making 7:24 33:2 47:13 62:13 management 1:3 3:4 8:7 marginal 52:5 marginally 23:25 24:4,5 material 61:2 math 8:14 matter 1:12 20:23 26:12,15 26:20 63:17 McKennon 50:25 mean 7:3,17 10:10 11:3 12:13 15:11 19:14 24:6 43:18 50:19</p>	<p>55:24 meaningful 19:6 meet 24:15 meeting 39:14 39:14 meetings 39:9 39:10 meets 22:24 memo 38:11 Mendelsohn 1:7 3:5 17:10,21 36:23 40:12 42:14 Mendelsohn's 19:1 38:2 53:1 mention 11:17 11:18,20 34:6 34:13 36:14 mentioned 36:8 36:19 56:12 60:13 mere 36:2 merits 57:4 met 43:23,24 methodology 40:3 mind 26:11 52:24 mine 61:1,12 minimal 14:15 minimum 26:10 minimum-evi... 22:24 minimum-rele... 24:15 mini-trial 44:17 mini-trials 44:22 minute 3:22,23 minutes 59:5 mishear 10:6,7 misleading 44:12 missed 40:7 Mo 1:21 modus 42:8,11 Monday 1:10</p>	<p>money 55:6 morning 3:4 motion 4:21,23 5:14 9:19 10:11,25 15:11 15:17 30:4,5,6 30:16 31:7 33:25 34:11 57:10,15 60:14 60:18,20,20,24 motions 57:3 motivating 19:12 muck 46:17</p> <hr/> <p style="text-align: center;">N</p> <p>N 2:1,1 3:1 named 18:17 national 51:3 nature 49:7 necessarily 14:3 38:14 necessary 28:1 57:9 59:10 63:10 need 3:11 22:20 22:22 62:5 needs 30:15 38:7 Neither 56:11 59:22,25 never 34:14,14 41:23 43:4 48:9,10 57:4 new 30:5,7 57:3 57:11,15,15,17 58:16 nexus 4:15 7:15 7:18,19,20 8:3 8:5,10,13 9:1 12:8 17:24 62:21 normal 9:15 12:7 normally 9:24 10:2,3 48:19 noted 35:8 notes 40:22</p>	<p>notions 61:21 novo 32:23 number 18:6 40:3 41:21 53:15</p> <hr/> <p style="text-align: center;">O</p> <p>O 2:1 3:1 objections 49:8 obligation 62:7 observation 62:1,2 obvious 62:6 occur 45:23,25 46:9 offer 5:4 11:7,21 13:13 34:8 36:24 40:22,25 41:16,17 43:22 56:6 offered 42:23 offers 43:22 office 23:9,12 24:14 25:18 34:18,19 35:17 42:12 officers 16:16 official 17:12 oh 4:18 49:10 54:7 okay 9:5 35:7 39:1 53:7 56:4 61:19 old 38:10,11 older 24:10 38:24 oldest 18:9 51:16 once 26:11 49:3 ongoing 39:13 open 38:7 51:6 54:16 59:1 openly 38:11,23 openness 41:20 41:21 operandi 42:8 42:11</p>
---	---	---	---	---

opinion 58:6	25:5 26:19,21	16:23 18:1,4	44:13 56:25	37:24
opinions 61:6	29:13 35:13	19:7,21 23:9	57:7	proffered 11:8
opponent 60:14	49:23	24:14 27:8,10	preliminary	25:2,12,13
Opposing 25:24	Paul 1:16 2:3,11	27:17,20,23	36:21	26:24 29:9
opposite 37:21	3:7 11:25	28:5 30:10	premise 54:2,3	30:2,8
53:9,12	13:16,19 33:23	45:8 51:1	prerogative	program 39:20
oral 1:12 2:2 3:7	45:18 59:6	plaintiffs 44:24	50:9	prohibition
22:10 33:16	paycheck 7:16	55:9	present 10:3	11:23 56:12
order 3:22,23	people 16:6,18	plaintiff's 19:21	14:17 16:2	proof 5:4 11:7
5:8,10 11:15	18:3,5 23:16	22:18 26:6	31:11	11:21,25 13:15
14:10 28:2	23:18 24:10	63:7	presented 18:4	14:9 34:9
29:3,4,5,10,23	34:24 35:15	plan 23:20 26:4	34:17 37:11	40:22,25 41:16
33:22 34:7,8	38:3,25 51:15	please 3:10	39:15 41:16	41:17 43:22
38:8 54:11	54:17 55:16	22:14 33:19	45:7	44:7
56:22 59:12	period 10:17,18	plus 14:7	presenting	proper 7:9 16:9
organization	10:23	point 8:19 20:20	42:15 46:3	58:17
55:16	permit 15:19	24:23 49:11	president 53:4	properly 29:1
other-supervi...	32:10	55:24 60:5	Presumably	33:21 58:15
9:14 17:4 23:4	person 3:14,15	62:16 63:11	53:12	prospect 55:14
23:7 28:3	18:9 20:4,5,6,7	pointing 31:8	presumption	prove 19:15
ought 55:25	41:3	points 43:21	60:9,10	22:18 26:21
outside 15:13	persons 3:20 6:3	44:3 61:24	presumptive	40:5,11 43:22
21:4	6:12 9:8 15:7	63:5	62:21	55:10
outweighed 14:8	16:21 18:7	policy 35:14	presumptively	proven 43:15
outweighs 47:24	27:6 60:2	39:19	9:14 12:19	proves 53:16
overly 56:25	petition 11:15	portion 41:23	pretext 49:23	providing 26:4
57:6	44:20	position 28:1	52:16,16,19	proving 53:17
overwhelming	Petitioner 1:5	37:15 40:8	pretrial 44:18	public 51:3
44:8	1:17 2:4,12 3:8	52:11 57:14	54:13,14	publication 61:7
	40:10 59:7	positions 27:5	prevails 51:2	purpose 13:15
P	Petitioner's 40:8	possibly 44:25	principal 3:11	51:3
P 3:1	phase 18:1	potential 11:10	principally 9:8	pursuant 36:2
page 2:2 13:9	philosophy	15:8	principle 9:13	put 10:11,15
29:10 30:7	39:16	potentially 21:8	9:13	23:11 24:1
33:24 46:18	physical 7:18	44:9	prior 15:13	31:18,20 32:8
part 17:7 19:12	pick 53:15	powerful 6:19	33:24	32:10 45:3
46:1 49:1 62:8	picky 29:20,20	practice 3:24	probable 49:21	puzzled 19:9
62:8	29:20	4:2,6 6:10 18:2	probably 28:16	
particular 13:21	pin 40:21	25:5 26:19,21	probative 3:16	Q
18:7,9 21:25	place 31:16	35:13	14:15 45:1	quarrel 49:4
61:2	39:10 56:1	precedent 33:3	problem 21:24	question 6:6,7
particularly	57:9	33:5,6 59:17	48:24 55:11	6:13,25 8:10
12:18	plaintiff 3:16	60:7	58:24 60:13	8:11,12,16 9:4
parts 4:9 24:19	4:15,23 5:1,3,5	precisely 28:23	problems 36:13	16:11 20:19
party 40:4,4	5:16 7:14 9:20	41:19 58:3	procedurally	22:23 23:1
pattern 3:23 4:2	10:13 13:8,12	predicate 31:23	57:21	27:25 30:16
4:5 6:10 18:2	15:5,8 16:19	prejudicial 14:7	proffer 34:13	31:23 35:12

38:17 44:14 48:11,15 49:12 50:12 52:4 55:12,14 58:19 59:9,24 questioning 55:25 questions 22:6 33:12 quite 30:11 46:17 47:15 48:9 quote 13:6,14,15 quoted 10:24 37:14 quotes 10:15 quoting 13:8	receives 38:10 recognize 7:5 recognized 24:16 62:13 recollection 40:23 record 4:9 19:22 28:23 57:23,25 Reddick 11:25 13:16,19 15:20 15:25 33:23 34:4 40:11 45:19 58:25,25 Reddick's 15:21 reduction 25:14 35:4 36:2 reduction-in-f... 23:20 Reeves 52:17 refer 7:7 reference 27:18 34:3 referred 34:16 refute 54:17 relates 40:14 relationship 13:24 17:16,23 18:17,18,23,25 19:20 62:21 relaxed 15:18 relevance 6:2,9 7:1 10:1 16:11 17:1 24:16,24 26:11 30:11,14 32:16 33:2 35:19 42:24 Relevancy 36:6 relevant 4:25 7:7 9:22 17:5,6 23:14,25 24:4 24:5 25:7,21 27:21 28:6 29:14,16 30:21 31:10,14,19,23 32:2,8,8,14,19 34:20 35:23,24 36:22 45:18	48:22 53:18,20 55:19 59:19 60:17 relied 5:14 12:15 relying 11:19 14:11 34:2 remand 49:5 54:5,11,12 56:1 57:3,8 58:22 59:10 remanded 57:13 remarks 7:25 38:7 41:10,12 remedy 46:20 removed 27:4 repeat 49:15 repeated 7:4 repeatedly 38:11 replaced 52:11 reply 7:5 17:4 33:11 representative 53:13 require 42:9 required 57:18 requires 7:20 11:25 13:15 47:20,21 reserve 22:7 respect 16:22 17:20 26:10 27:25 30:1 47:22 respond 15:4 63:4 responded 4:23 Respondents 1:22 2:9 4:10 33:17 response 44:15 44:16 47:18 rest 10:18 retained 18:10 retains 52:3,4 reversal 54:11	reverse 56:24 reversed 3:13 reversible 45:14 46:4 review 54:21 rid 38:24 RIF 39:20 52:22 RIF'd 26:8,16 52:21 RIF's 38:24 39:13 right 8:9 13:7,20 21:10 23:24 30:12 35:5 37:1 38:10 40:23 41:25 48:3,18 51:18 52:2 53:19 risk 55:7 Roberts 3:3,9 9:9,18,25 15:10 18:12 20:14 21:2 22:8,19 23:3 30:13 31:4,13 31:22 32:1,12 33:13 34:15,23 35:5,11,22 36:15 38:13,18 39:2,17 45:2,5 45:20 46:4,7 51:7,22 53:8 53:19 56:14 57:8,17 58:20 59:2,4 63:14 room 49:5 50:14 rule 5:12 9:11 9:15 10:4 11:1 12:6,10 13:23 17:2 21:14 23:2 24:22 27:16 36:11 40:9 46:19,22 47:13,23,23 48:19 51:8 55:20 56:11,11 56:23 58:9	59:9 60:6,7 62:16,21 ruled 14:20,20 37:11,16 59:16 rules 4:19 21:15 22:23 23:1 24:20 30:20 31:20 39:24 40:1 48:14 58:10 ruling 4:1,17 11:10 13:15 15:19 33:1 54:20 56:15 60:11 rulings 49:6 run 9:15 12:7 61:1,12 62:22 running 56:7 runway 38:8
<hr/> R <hr/>				<hr/> S <hr/>
R 3:1 raises 16:11 raising 44:13 ranking 39:12 rating 38:9 42:12,13 52:23 ratings 52:25 reach 22:21 read 3:21 10:10 11:23 12:3 33:7 46:25 52:9 reading 5:13 56:21 really 5:7 15:16 22:3 36:18 47:2 55:25 reason 8:22 17:1 29:8 32:25 44:6 reasonable 26:5 43:24 50:13 53:18 reasons 59:10 rebuttal 2:10 14:6 15:6 59:6 received 8:23 41:6				S 2:1 3:1 said/she 31:5 San 1:16 satisfied 27:12 saw 41:6 saying 3:23 8:19 10:22 34:11 38:23 43:3 49:11 51:1 53:16 54:24 58:3 says 13:12 30:8 36:20 37:15 40:9 46:19 47:24 48:2 52:24 59:15 60:25 63:13 Scalia 5:7 11:11 11:13,17 12:9 12:21 14:1,16 23:15 24:3,8 24:24 25:21,24 28:10,12,13,19 28:25 29:4,11 29:14,20,23

30:1 36:1 42:16,20,25 43:2,6,14,19 47:23 50:1,17 50:22 55:4,11 58:11 59:11 62:24 school 58:8 Seattle 23:12 second 23:1 25:2 59:13 61:25 second-guess 47:11,16 48:15 second-guessed 48:10 secret 52:22 see 10:21 11:3 14:9 21:13 24:3,20 29:5 37:24 56:10,24 60:18,25 seeking 33:25 selling 41:17 sending 49:5 senior 8:7 17:12 20:4 sentence 10:18 46:18 sentences 13:22 separate 31:16 separates 24:22 serves 30:18 51:3 set 22:25 62:9 setting 61:21 settle 55:18 shadow 42:12 shed 17:20 19:6 19:8 short 3:23 41:17 show 18:2,14 19:22 20:4 28:5 40:15 42:22 53:9,12 55:17 58:7,8 60:1 showing 7:2,14	12:7 13:24 15:6 17:7,16 17:23,24 18:14 19:2 21:11,24 27:21 62:20 shown 4:6 16:21 55:25 58:4 shows 43:21 53:10 sides 15:24 46:2 similar 19:2 23:21,21 26:5 similarly 10:13 10:14,15,16,22 11:24 13:6,7 13:10,13,14 14:4,5,8 simply 3:24 16:16 32:7 39:25 55:21 59:20 single 51:1 sir 41:4 situated 10:13 10:14,15,16,23 11:24 13:6,7 13:10,13,14 14:4,5,8 situation 5:25 6:17 19:12 21:3 24:9 32:20 33:6 34:16 situations 23:4 24:8,22 45:6 six 50:19 slight 47:4 small 8:5 Solicitor 1:18 63:4,5 somebody 19:16 22:3 43:7,7 somewhat 40:18 soon 47:14 sorry 8:15 42:1 49:13 52:22 54:10	sort 46:13 Souter 5:18,22 6:5,9,13,24 7:22 8:3,9,19 8:24 9:5 11:12 11:20 40:17,20 41:5 42:2,5 43:20 44:2 55:23 56:4,17 sparingly 46:20 46:21 specific 60:21 specifically 5:12 speculate 37:15 spreadsheet 18:13,14,16 19:2 41:6 Sprint 7:16 25:18 33:24 34:3,11 44:19 45:3 49:9 53:6 54:18 Sprint's 4:20 34:1 Sprint/United 1:3 3:4 squeeze 55:10 stage 9:4 15:11 30:16 31:7 standard 36:5 40:2,2 49:24 50:10 standards 61:22 started 6:21 statement 39:20 statements 45:17,22,25 States 1:1,13,20 2:6 22:11 statistical 18:2 statistics 18:6 status 30:15 step 20:10,12,13 20:13 STEVENS 19:9 19:14 20:3 Stock 19:5 38:23	story 42:10 strange 58:11 Strategy 18:8,10 strikes 44:6 strong 6:17 28:17 stronger 14:9 struck 40:24 subject 7:25 21:9 submissibility 50:12 submitted 63:15 63:17 subsidiary 40:5 44:4,9,11 substantially 44:12 47:24 substituted 13:18 sufficient 25:10 26:16 sufficiently 61:2 suggest 38:19,21 suggested 47:23 suggests 21:6 sum 41:14 sunk 55:6 super 46:3 superintending 37:16 superior 16:15 19:11 supervise 51:24 supervised 18:25 33:23 supervises 20:25 supervisor 7:6 7:13 10:17 11:24 12:2 13:11,16,19 15:20 16:3,5,9 16:14,25 18:17 20:17,19,24 21:4 22:18 23:10,13 24:6 24:12 26:6	27:1 29:10 34:4,12,19 35:17 38:14,23 39:4,5,6,19,23 41:7,9 43:8,9 56:8 59:19 supervisors 5:23 6:14 7:13,23 8:16,17,20,24 16:14,17,18,21 17:8 19:23 20:5,15 22:16 23:18 25:25 26:2,7,13,14 26:25 27:3,12 31:9 34:17 51:11,24 53:10 55:22 supervisory 16:7 supervisor's 38:25 41:12 support 56:11 suppose 36:25 43:24 supposed 42:13 Supp.2d 61:7 Supreme 1:1,13 sure 20:7 24:6 37:22 58:22 sustained 29:25 29:25 sweeping 4:11 system 31:18 39:12 42:12,13 46:2
<hr/> T <hr/>				
T 2:1,1 tainted 17:8 21:12 take 14:6 20:16 21:8 27:7 35:6 35:14 42:7 44:3 46:24 52:7 55:9 56:1 57:9 62:15				

63:1	theory 20:14,21	thousands 26:8	47:3,8,12,12	undertake 32:23
takes 28:1	21:9 38:2	three 5:22 6:14	47:16 48:4,10	56:19
talk 39:25 44:17	thing 37:16 40:4	8:11,16,17,20	48:15,25 50:18	unfortunate
57:5	47:17 52:10	8:24 9:3 25:25	52:2,18 53:1	3:15
talked 38:1	58:21	26:8,13,14,16	53:23 54:13,14	unit 16:15 18:7
talking 8:18	things 14:6	28:14 40:9	54:15,16,20,25	United 1:1,13,20
12:9 21:2	33:25 34:7	41:1 42:17,17	55:13,14 56:1	2:6 22:11
26:18 35:9,10	55:19 60:16	42:18,20 45:10	57:11,15,18	untested 18:21
43:6,7 49:16	63:6	45:12,21,24	58:14,16 60:17	upheld 12:23
49:17,17 51:23	think 4:6,10,13	46:8 55:13,15	61:22,22	upstairs 19:16
taught 6:8 58:8	5:12,20,21 7:5	63:6	trials 15:6 46:17	use 52:25
Teamsters 6:8	7:9,20 8:2,4,7	threshold 22:24	46:25 50:18,19	
Ted 38:23	9:3,12,21 12:4	22:25 24:15,16	tried 44:23	V
teed 15:17	12:17 14:13	24:18 26:11	true 13:8 31:14	v 1:6 3:5 24:17
tell 7:9 14:10	15:15 16:3,10	32:16	60:19	value 14:15
48:7,13	17:1 21:1,10	thrown 61:8	try 19:18 44:23	62:12
tendency 6:1,16	21:16,16,22,23	tied 34:22 38:2	55:10	vast 8:17
6:19 28:6,11	22:1,5,22 23:3	ties 42:7	trying 4:24	vice 53:4
28:14 36:10	23:6,13,23	time 14:5 22:7	12:10 19:15	vicinity 25:3,17
40:15 42:22	24:4,7,8,11,13	37:25 43:17	40:4 47:11,15	25:19,22 26:1
47:4 49:21	25:23 26:18	47:6 48:16,23	turn 33:20	26:3
Tenth 10:20	27:22 28:20,23	51:1 56:6	turning 50:18	view 4:12
11:22 12:3	29:17 30:13	58:24 60:15	two 6:14 8:11	virtually 10:23
14:19,23 32:25	32:15,16 36:18	61:3,13,15	9:2,8 11:18	Vorhies 19:5
33:4 37:8 48:7	40:23 42:25	timeframe	16:6 19:4	
48:14 49:4,5,7	43:23 45:15	23:20 24:6	23:12 26:8	W
54:12,21 56:21	47:21 48:9	25:4	44:21 59:10	W 1:16 2:3,11
59:15 60:5,8	49:4 50:1,4	times 7:4	61:23	3:7 59:6
62:12	54:19 56:5,14	told 5:15 19:16	twofold 52:19	wait 38:24
terminated	56:20 57:17,20	27:3 38:9,11	two-step 40:3	want 6:24,25
25:14,19	59:10 60:8	52:22 53:4	type 31:5	14:1,12,14
terms 39:25	61:5,8 62:1,4	54:7	typically 15:11	27:15 42:1
test 16:9 25:9	62:11,20	tolerates 21:7		43:4 49:15
36:9	third 6:17 8:13	top 43:7	U	54:17 58:22
testified 17:19	25:3	total 41:14	ultimate 40:10	62:24
19:19	third-party	transcript 38:1	40:12	wanted 5:15
testify 26:17	44:10	treated 29:24	unanimous	36:24 58:13
27:3 41:1,6,8	thought 12:1,2	treatment 34:2	50:25	wants 23:11
41:11	13:5,17 15:22	tremendous	unaware 19:19	Washington 1:9
testimony 23:11	16:16 17:3	30:19	understand 13:2	1:19
39:22 43:18,20	18:13 27:13,25	trial 14:25 15:7	14:2,20 16:6	wasn't 5:19
52:8 53:3 54:2	33:1 37:19,20	15:13,13,18	32:25 33:7	10:18,21 20:20
54:4 57:5	47:7,10,15	29:19,21 30:3	50:21 56:16	45:10 54:8
Thank 22:8,13	55:4,5 58:2	30:5,7 31:16	understanding	59:23
33:13 42:6	thoughts 56:6	32:20 33:24	49:14	waste 47:5 48:23
59:2,3 63:14	thousand 47:1	37:3 44:4,9,21	understood	61:3,3,12
that't 56:5	51:10	46:13,24 47:2	33:21	Waters 24:17

<p>way 8:13 9:11 10:9,10 16:4 21:6 28:19 29:3 33:10,10 39:4,8 47:2 51:8 ways 15:15,16 38:6 42:7 51:18 weaknesses 41:22 weeks 54:16,16 55:13,15 weight 37:12 41:21,22,24,24 44:14 Welch 39:15 went 37:20,22 40:20,21 58:12 weren't 10:22 33:22 we'll 3:3 33:20 46:25 57:3 we're 8:17 9:6 12:9,10 35:9 35:10 44:2 53:16 54:13,22 55:21 57:25 58:1 we've 8:9,10,11 24:8 32:2 55:5 57:4,7 whatsoever 17:16,20 white 21:13 33:20 win 6:18 witness 5:1 26:24 witnesses 4:15 5:2,5 9:7,20 16:5,17 17:18 19:19 25:2,13 25:19 26:17 27:2 29:9 women 52:11 word 13:19</p>	<p>words 10:24 13:18 16:1 20:17 work 7:18 35:18 41:3 58:7,9 worked 16:17 25:17 working 16:5 25:2 works 51:18 worried 48:6 50:17 worrying 46:16 worst 12:12,16 worth 55:5,7,18 56:21 worthy 61:7 wouldn't 24:4 42:9 write 27:15 58:6 61:6 wrong 37:18,18 56:23 wrote 50:25</p> <hr/> <p style="text-align: center;">X</p> <hr/> <p>x 1:2,8</p> <hr/> <p style="text-align: center;">Y</p> <hr/> <p>years 23:12 47:1 young 52:11 younger 27:6 41:3 53:5 youngers 42:11</p> <hr/> <p style="text-align: center;">Z</p> <hr/> <p>zip 7:21</p> <hr/> <p style="text-align: center;">0</p> <hr/> <p>06-1221 1:6 3:4</p> <hr/> <p style="text-align: center;">1</p> <hr/> <p>1 8:10 10 16:4 10:05 1:14 3:2 11:07 63:16 15 34:11 53:14 53:20 60:15</p>	<p>61:11,13 15,000 6:4,12 163 13:9 163a 10:11 17,000 51:10 19 7:23 8:1,10</p> <hr/> <p style="text-align: center;">2</p> <hr/> <p>2a 33:24 20 7:22 20th 7:25 2002 39:10 2004 34:11 60:15 61:11,14 2007 1:10 44:19 54:14 22 2:7 24 29:10 24a 11:15 29 44:19 54:14</p> <hr/> <p style="text-align: center;">3</p> <hr/> <p>3 1:10 2:4 3a 33:20 30 53:20 33 2:9</p> <hr/> <p style="text-align: center;">4</p> <hr/> <p>401 5:9,13,14,19 6:2,20 10:22 11:1 12:15 14:11 22:20,24 23:5,8,14 28:20 29:6,7 33:1 36:8,11 37:1 40:9 46:24 49:18 56:11 402 37:1 46:25 49:18 403 5:9,12,13,15 10:4 11:1 14:4 14:11,13,15,16 14:19,21 15:1 17:2 21:9 22:21 23:2 24:2 28:17,21 29:15 30:15,22</p>	<p>32:17,17,23 37:4 44:14 47:21,23 49:18 52:9,13 55:20 56:2,11,18 57:18,23 58:15 59:9,23 61:24 62:4,6 403's 46:19 404 21:14,14,20 22:2 36:15,17 404(b) 30:25 36:16 407 36:13 410 36:14 411 36:13 436 30:7 48 53:5</p> <hr/> <p style="text-align: center;">5</p> <hr/> <p>5 6:12 51:25 50 18:7 59 2:12</p> <hr/> <p style="text-align: center;">7</p> <hr/> <p>7,000-person 10:7 7-0-0-0-0 10:8 70,000 10:8 23:16,17 41:14 43:9 51:9 70,000-emplo... 9:7 70,000-person 19:23</p> <hr/> <p style="text-align: center;">9</p> <hr/> <p>995 51:13,24</p>
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