SUPREME COURT OF THE UNITED STATES

IN THE S	OPREME COORT	OF THE	ONTLED	STATE
			_	
PAUL ERLINGER,)	
	Petitioner	,)	
v.) No.	23-370
UNITED STATES,)	
	Respondent.	•)	
			_	

Pages: 1 through 103

Place: Washington, D.C.

Date: March 27, 2024

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1	IN THE SUPREME COURT OF THE UN	NITED STATES
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3	PAUL ERLINGER,)
4	Petitioner,)
5	v.) No. 23-370
6	UNITED STATES,)
7	Respondent.)
8		
9		
10	Washington, D.	C.
11	Wednesday, March 2	27, 2024
12		
13	The above-entitled matter	came on for
14	oral argument before the Supreme	e Court of the
15	United States at 10:06 a.m.	
16		
17	APPEARANCES:	
18	JEFFREY L. FISHER, ESQUIRE, Menl	lo Park, California; on
19	behalf of the Petitioner.	
20	ERIC J. FEIGIN, Deputy Solicitor	General, Department
21	of Justice, Washington, D.C.	; on behalf of the
22	Respondent, supporting the F	Petitioner.
23	D. NICK HARPER, ESQUIRE, Washing	gton, D.C.;
24	Court-appointed amicus curia	ae in support of the
25	judgment below.	

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1	PROCEEDINGS
2	(10:06 a.m.)
3	CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: We will hear
4	argument first this morning in Case 23-370,
5	Erlinger versus United States.
6	Mr. Fisher.
7	ORAL ARGUMENT OF JEFFREY L. FISHER
8	ON BEHALF OF THE PETITIONER
9	MR. FISHER: Mr. Chief Justice, and
10	may it please the Court:
11	Robust and clear precedent dictates
12	the outcome here. In case after case, this
13	Court has held that judges applying ACCA may
14	find only what crime with what what crime
15	with what elements a defendant was previously
16	convicted of, nothing more.
17	And the Court has grounded that rule
18	directly in the Sixth Amendment. A judge may
19	not increase a defendant's sentencing range
20	based on offense-related conduct that the prior
21	jury did not need to find.
22	ACCA's occasions clause, as this Court
23	construed it in Wooden, requires exactly that
24	kind of factual inquiry. The whole point of the
25	clause in fact is to require something more

- 1 than just three convictions before an ACCA
- 2 sentence is imposed. As such, the Apprendi rule
- 3 directly applies to it.
- 4 That leaves amicus's objection that
- 5 the Court should eschew that straightforward
- 6 analysis because applying the Sixth Amendment
- 7 here would somehow harm defendants. But, as the
- 8 briefs filed by criminal defense organizations
- 9 show in this case, that concern is unfounded.
- 10 Guilty pleas, waivers, and
- 11 stipulations, in all candor, make the occasions
- 12 clause not really an issue that's litigated in
- most cases. But, in the rare cases, in fact, in
- 14 the handful of cases a year where you're going
- 15 to have a defendant who disputes the -- the
- occasions issue, as well as the underlying
- 17 Section 922(g) charge, bifurcation is a
- 18 time-honored solution that courts have already
- 19 shown that they can apply to resolve that
- 20 situation and avoid any prejudice to the
- 21 defendant.
- The Court should endorse that practice
- and reverse the court of appeals.
- I'm happy to take the Court's
- 25 questions.

1 JUSTICE THOMAS: Mr. Fisher, wouldn't 2 it be more straightforward to overrule 3 Almendarez-Torres? MR. FISHER: Obviously, that's one 4 thing the Court could do if and when necessary, 5 but I don't --6 7 JUSTICE THOMAS: Well, do you think we should? 8 MR. FISHER: I think the Court should 9 10 someday, but I don't know the Court needs to do 11 it in this case. I think that -- our position 12 in this case is what the Court has already said 13 in Mathis and Descamps makes perfectly clear that the occasions clause falls outside of 14 15 Almendarez-Torres, and I think, you know, the 16 reason we didn't brief the case that way is 17 because the Court's ordinary practice is not to consider overruling a case unless you had to. 18 19 JUSTICE THOMAS: But don't you have --20 it -- it seems that you and the government can 21 agree where you draw the line, right? 2.2 MR. FISHER: I think, Justice Thomas, 23 we agree on a whole lot. So we agree that the test is whether or not it -- the fact at issue 24 is part of the prior conviction. And the 25

- 1 government uses the word "integral" to the prior
- 2 conviction. We think "inherent" in the prior
- 3 conviction.
- 4 So we agree with the test. We do have
- 5 some quibbles perhaps on the margins of how that
- 6 test would apply, but, again, this case wouldn't
- 7 present any of those issues.
- 8 JUSTICE ALITO: Well,
- 9 Almendarez-Torres is a -- an established
- 10 principle of -- an established precedent of the
- 11 Court that's been relied upon and reaffirmed in
- 12 subsequent cases, so if we were to reexamine
- that, would it then be appropriate to reexamine
- 14 the entire question that was opened up in
- 15 Apprendi? Or you -- would you just like us to
- open up the part that might yield a decision
- 17 that's favorable to you?
- 18 MR. FISHER: Well, I'm not even asking
- 19 you to do that today, Justice Alito.
- JUSTICE ALITO: Well, you --
- MR. FISHER: But, if you -- but, if
- 22 you did, I suppose fair is fair.
- JUSTICE ALITO: -- you -- you sort of
- took -- you sort of took Justice Thomas's bait.
- 25 MR. FISHER: I --

```
1
                (Laughter.)
 2
               MR. FISHER: -- I -- I suppose
 3
      fair would be fair and the Court could go back
      to first principles, and I think those first
 4
     principles, as the Court -- as the Court's
 5
 6
      opinions in Apprendi showed, you know, would
7
     dictate the right to jury trial applies to all
      facts necessary to include in --
8
                JUSTICE ALITO: Well, that remains to
 9
10
     be seen, but anyway, when you --
11
               CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Well, but --
12
      I'm sorry.
13
                JUSTICE ALITO: I'm sorry.
14
                CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Go ahead.
15
                JUSTICE ALITO: When -- when -- when
16
     you say that we should say something favorable
17
      about bifurcation, do you mean we should just
18
      say that it's a discretionary determination for
19
      trial judges, or you want us to hint more than
20
      that?
21
                MR. FISHER: Well, I think, as I
2.2
     understand the argument on the other side, it's
23
      that you should not apply the Sixth Amendment
24
     here because it would prejudice defendants.
25
      so there's a ready answer to that question,
```

- 1 which is bifurcation. It's the time-honored
- 2 solution Justice Thomas identified in his
- 3 Apprendi concurrence and we show in the papers
- 4 has been endorsed by the Court in the past.
- 5 I think the Spencer versus Texas case
- from nine -- from the '60s was one in which the
- 7 Court, I think, gently endorsed bifurcation, and
- 8 that was a state case. This is a federal case.
- 9 And so I think the Court, if it wanted to,
- 10 could -- could express a little more support for
- 11 that.
- I -- frankly, I don't know what the
- argument would be against bifurcation, Justice
- 14 Alito. As I said, there are only a handful of
- cases a year where this is even going to arise.
- 16 There are fewer -- right now, there are fewer
- 17 than 200 ACCA cases a year, and, of course, most
- 18 of those are plea bargains.
- 19 So there's only a handful of cases a
- 20 year. And bifurcation occurs in things like
- 21 criminal forfeiture, it occurs in all kinds of
- 22 civil cases, and so just to move the fact
- finding from the judge over to the jury, I don't
- think it's very much to ask.
- 25 JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: The -- the broader

- 1 argument on the other side by the amicus is that
- 2 the historical practice is much more mixed and
- 3 that there were a variety of practices in the
- 4 1800s and earlier --
- 5 MR. FISHER: Yeah.
- 6 JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: -- 1900s on this
- 7 question and that recidivism, the question of
- 8 whether a defendant committed prior offenses,
- 9 was not routinely put before juries, in part
- 10 because it was related to punishment and in part
- 11 because it was perceived as different, because
- 12 it's harmful to defendants in most cases to have
- it paraded before the jury.
- So that historical practice, I think,
- 15 because it's mixed, actually supports
- 16 Almendarez-Torres and supports, arguably, the
- 17 amicus says -- I want to get your response --
- 18 the -- what -- the approach that they're
- 19 suggesting here, that Descamps and Mathis were
- 20 statutory cases, not constitutional cases.
- 21 Your response?
- MR. FISHER: Right. So I think the
- history question is an important one, and then
- 24 I'll turn to Descamps and Mathis. And starting
- 25 with the -- the way you should answer -- look at

- 1 the history question, we think, after Gaudin and
- 2 Apprendi, the question would be whether amicus
- 3 can show a uniform or near-uniform --
- 4 JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: Why --
- 5 MR. FISHER: -- historical tradition.
- 6 JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: -- why is that?
- 7 So I'm sorry to interrupt.
- 8 MR. FISHER: Yeah.
- 9 JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: But that's a key
- 10 point.
- 11 MR. FISHER: I -- I --
- 12 JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: I think it's the
- 13 -- the burden usually to establish a
- 14 constitutional right because it's not in the
- 15 text. The text, we have to -- and, therefore,
- we have to look at what the understanding of
- 17 that text was, and we look at historical --
- 18 MR. FISHER: Yeah.
- 19 JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: -- practice, and
- it would seem to me, to get something
- 21 established in the Constitution, you would need
- 22 to show more of a uniform historical practice,
- 23 which I think some of the prior writings and
- 24 commentary has assumed. But, when you get --
- 25 when you get into it, it's a more mixed picture,

1 I think. 2 MR. FISHER: So, Justice Kavanaugh --3 JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: So those are two 4 different questions. MR. FISHER: No, I think there's a lot 5 6 there and we want to work through it. And --7 and I will say, to cut to the chase, I think whatever test you apply on the history and 8 9 tradition, we're going to win, but I think what 10 the test is is -- is perhaps an important 11 question for the future. 12 And if you look at Gaudin, that's a 13 Sixth Amendment jury trial case, and what the 14 Court says is, to carve out an exception from 15 the general rule that the jury has to find all 16 the elements, the government in that case or the 17 other side has to show an overwhelming history 18 and tradition. 19 And I think, once Apprendi extended 20 the Gaudin all elements rule to any fact that 21 increases a sentence and creates what the 2.2 Apprendi Court itself called the general rule,

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JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: Well --

subject only to the exception of

Almendarez-Torres, then --

23

24

1 MR. FISHER: -- to fall in that 2 exception, I think you have to make the 3 Gaudin text point, but let me --4 JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: -- as you well 5 know, whether you call it the rule or the 6 exception kind of loads the dice, but the 7 established principle in some states from -from early on in our history was that these --8 9 these issues were not put -- put before the 10 jury. You can call that the exception or the 11 rule. But recidivism was not put before the 12 jury precisely because it's so harmful and is --MR. FISHER: Well, Justice Kavanaugh, 13 14 let's just cut right to that then. 15 JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: Yeah. 16 MR. FISHER: I think that mix has identified only four states where recidivism was 17 18 put to the judge instead of the jury when it 19 increases a defendant's sentence --20 JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: Right. And there 21 2.2 MR. FISHER: -- up until the mid -- up 23 until the 20th Century. 24 JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: Right. And there

25

weren't --

```
1
                MR. FISHER: And I think that's a --
 2
                JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: -- 50 then, so
 3
      four out of, you know, whatever it was.
 4
                MR. FISHER: Four out of -- by the
 5
      time -- all the way into the 1920s --
                JUSTICE KAVANAUGH:
 6
                                    Yeah.
 7
                MR. FISHER: -- four states. And then
      I don't think that's enough to show any kind of
 8
 9
      meaningful history. And, again, that's just on
10
      the Almendarez-Torres question, Justice
11
     Kavanaugh.
12
                JUSTICE KAVANAUGH:
                                    Yeah.
13
                MR. FISHER: As to the different
14
      occasions type question that you have in front
15
      of you in this case, there is a sum and total of
16
      zero states up until 1929 that required any sort
17
      of finding like this that was allowed to be made
18
     by the -- by a judge instead of a jury.
19
                So what amicus has done is cobbled
20
      together four states that would just, you know,
      cut against overruling Almendarez-Torres and
21
2.2
      then a handful of other states with a few other
23
     kinds of findings here and there that are not
      offense-related conduct findings, which is what
24
25
     you have here.
```

1 The, you know, amicus, I think the 2 only other category of findings that amicus is 3 really able to put much together on is the date of a prior conviction for -- for --4 for understanding that it's a prior conviction 5 or a second conviction or that sort of thing. 6 7 But, again, that has to do with the inherent nature of the conviction. It's not anything to 8 do with the offense-related conduct. 9 10 And so that's what makes this an easy 11 case. Whether you do it under Descamps and 12 Mathis -- and I'll come to that in a minute 13 because you asked me whether those are just 14 statutory -- but the rule in those cases or just 15 first principles, history and tradition, you 16 land in the same spot. 17 So let me turn to Descamps and Mathis then because you asked that as well. We think 18 the Court, to use the Court's own words in 19 20 Mathis, said what it meant in those cases, and 21 the Court was very clear that one of the three 2.2 reasons why the categorical approach was 23 construed the way and -- and applied the way it 24 was was because of the "serious Sixth Amendment concerns that would arise," and the Court, I 25

- 1 think, even went a step further in Mathis and
- 2 expressed an unambiguous rule in Sixth Amendment
- 3 terms that any facts beyond the elements of the
- 4 prior offense that are related to the conduct of
- 5 that prior offense have to be made by the jury
- 6 and cannot be made by the judge. And that's
- 7 stated unequivocally in Sixth Amendment terms in
- 8 the Mathis opinion.
- 9 JUSTICE JACKSON: Can I ask --
- 10 JUSTICE BARRETT: Mr. Fisher, can you
- 11 maybe address what history and tradition are on
- 12 your side? Because Justice Kavanaugh's question
- said, oh, it would be loading the dice if you
- 14 say that it's amicus's burden to show the
- 15 history and tradition. So can you talk about
- 16 the history and tradition of fact finding by the
- jury in cases of recidivism that supports your
- 18 side?
- 19 MR. FISHER: Yeah. So that's laid out
- quite thoroughly in our blue brief, that even
- 21 when it came to a prior conviction itself, the
- 22 overwhelming practice was for the jury to make
- those findings, and that's laid out quite
- thoroughly in our brief. I don't think there's
- a dispute that that was the common law rule.

- 1 And any other fact that amicus identifies, the
- 2 answer is the same.
- 3 And, Justice Barrett, I think
- 4 something else that's important to understand is
- 5 that the occasions inquiry in this case, you
- 6 know, arose from some 1960s reform movements
- 7 about recidivism statutes, so there is no direct
- 8 analogue from history because this is a
- 9 innovation of the '60s and beyond. And so --
- 10 and so it's really amicus that would depart from
- 11 history by letting this fact be found by the --
- 12 the judge instead of the jury.
- JUSTICE BARRETT: One other question.
- 14 Do you agree with the government amicus that the
- 15 harmless error analysis would apply?
- 16 MR. FISHER: Yes. I think Neder --
- JUSTICE BARRETT: I thought that.
- 18 MR. FISHER: -- dictates that harmless
- 19 error would apply in these cases, and so I think
- 20 there's -- this case would be one of some
- 21 pipeline cases that would be decided by lower
- 22 courts on a harmless error.
- Obviously, once you establish this
- rule, I don't think that's going to be much of
- 25 an issue even going forward.

1	JUSTICE JACKSON: Can I ask
2	JUSTICE GORSUCH: No, please go ahead.
3	JUSTICE JACKSON: Yes. I just wanted
4	to know, if there is a history and tradition of
5	fact finding by the jury with respect to
6	recidivism, which I understood your answer to
7	Justice Barrett to be that that's the case, how
8	what is the basis then for the
9	Almendarez-Torres carveout? Like, why do we
LO	have that?
L1	MR. FISHER: I think for two reasons
L2	as I understand the Court's jurisprudence. One
L3	is, in Almendarez-Torres, the Court did talk
L4	about a tradition of judicial fact finding when
L5	it came to prior convictions. The problem, I
L6	think, is that it's a more recent tradition.
L7	It's not the kind of tradition the Court
L8	typically looks to nowadays, but there was a
L9	recent tradition of judicial fact finding.
20	And, secondly, the Court explained in
21	Apprendi that at least when it comes to the fact
22	of a prior conviction, which is to say the
23	elements and nothing more, you have prior
24	procedural protections in the form of a jury
25	right in that prior adjudication that are

- 1 that -- that are different from any other fact
- 2 like the one here.
- 3 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Thank you,
- 4 counsel.
- 5 Justice Thomas?
- 6 Justice Alito?
- 7 JUSTICE ALITO: I have a few questions
- 8 about how trials would be conducted if you
- 9 prevail here. So what -- how would the
- 10 government be able to go about proving that an
- 11 offense -- that -- that a series of offenses
- 12 occurred on the same conviction? I -- I assume
- they can introduce the judgment of conviction in
- 14 all of those offenses, right?
- MR. FISHER: Yes.
- 16 JUSTICE ALITO: Can they introduce the
- charging documents, which would typically say,
- on or about March 27, 2024, so-and-so broke into
- 19 a house and burglarized it?
- 20 MR. FISHER: I think the charging
- 21 documents are harder, Justice Alito, because
- they might be hearsay or the like. I mean, they
- 23 might -- so, for the truth of the matter
- asserted in those charging documents, I think
- 25 the government might have a problem, but --

```
1
               JUSTICE ALITO: Well, what if they're
 2
 3
               MR. FISHER: -- most of these cases --
 4
      sorry.
 5
                JUSTICE ALITO: What if they're not
      introduced for the truth of the matter asserted,
 6
7
      they are introduced for the truth of the fact
8
      that this is what the person was charged with?
9
                MR. FISHER: I -- I think perhaps.
10
      That's something I've tried to research and just
11
     haven't found much law on. Something else I
12
     would add, though, is plea colloquies is going
13
      to be -- is going to be --
14
               JUSTICE ALITO: Plea colloquy --
15
               MR. FISHER: -- obviously, most of
16
      these cases are pleas --
17
               JUSTICE ALITO: Plea colloquies would
18
19
               MR. FISHER: -- and the defendant's
20
      own admissions in plea colloquies.
21
                JUSTICE ALITO: -- they would be
2.2
     admissible?
23
               MR. FISHER: Yes.
24
                JUSTICE ALITO: And jury instructions
25
     would be admissible, so if the jury is
```

- instructed on Count I you must find that on or
- 2 about March 27, blah, blah, blah --
- 3 MR. FISHER: I think jury --
- 4 JUSTICE ALITO: -- that would be
- 5 admissible?
- 6 MR. FISHER: I think the jury
- 7 instructions might be admissible.
- JUSTICE ALITO: It's a court document?
- 9 MR. FISHER: I -- I -- I think -- I
- 10 think -- and, basically, what I would tell the
- 11 Court is, you know, the Federal Rules of
- 12 Evidence have many provisions about official
- 13 records and court records and prior testimony
- and the like, and so, you know, those rules and
- 15 precedent are readily -- readily available to
- 16 administer this rule.
- 17 JUSTICE ALITO: Okay. What about the
- 18 question of how the jury would be instructed on
- 19 the question of whether prior offenses occurred
- 20 on the same occasion? That was a -- a vexing
- 21 issue in Wooden and I think the Court's opinion
- 22 was well-crafted and nuanced, but it -- I would
- 23 be hard-pressed to reduce it to an instruction
- 24 that would be easily intelligible to a jury.
- 25 It's a multi-factor question.

1	MR. FISHER: I think the jury
2	instruction
3	JUSTICE ALITO: Have you given any
4	could you give us a model jury instruction on
5	this or do you have some idea how how a jury
6	could grapple with this question?
7	MR. FISHER: I think those exist,
8	Justice Alito, and they just mostly track the
9	language in the Court's opinion. So the
10	question for the jury overall, of course, is
11	whether these prior offenses were committed on
12	different occasions, which, as the Court put it
13	in that case, turns on whether it was a single
14	criminal episode or not, and then there are the
15	factors, temporal proximity, geographic
16	proximity, and the nature and relationship to
17	the offense.
18	I think it's similar to other kinds of
19	qualitative elements that juries sometimes find
20	Mens rea can sometimes be highly qualitative.
21	Materiality in a fraud case can be can be
22	multi-factored in certain ways. So
23	JUSTICE ALITO: But those are not
24	multi that's not a multi-factor
25	determination. Mens rea, you're you're

2.2

- 1 asking the jury to determine what is in the
- 2 defendant's mind. People make judgments about
- 3 what is in the mind of other people all the
- 4 time. That's a -- that's a common experience.
- 5 MR. FISHER: I -- I think what you had
- 6 --
- JUSTICE ALITO: Materiality -- I can't
- 8 think of something offhand -- maybe you can --
- 9 that's -- that's quite as multi-dimensional and
- 10 nuanced as this.
- 11 MR. FISHER: Well, I think maybe one
- 12 way to think about it, Justice Alito, is you
- 13 have -- you have a top-line finding that needs
- 14 to be made, which is different occasions or a
- 15 single criminal episode, and then you have
- 16 subsidiary facts that feed into that ultimate
- 17 finding.
- 18 And that's just -- you know, that's
- 19 like most of the things, I think, we were just
- 20 talking about, which is a top-line finding and
- 21 then subsidiary facts. And just so you have an
- 22 opinion in Wooden itself that makes -- you know,
- 23 kind of lays out those various facts, and so the
- jury could be instructed to consider those
- 25 things.

1 JUSTICE ALITO: So the judge says the 2 temporal factor, I don't want to dwell too much 3 on this, but it -- it would -- it will turn out to be important if you prevail. Temporal 4 proximity is important. And so then the jury 5 6 says: Well, what does that mean? They were --7 they had to occur on different days, different weeks? And what's the judge supposed to say? 8 9 MR. FISHER: I don't think --10 JUSTICE ALITO: Well, that's up to 11 you? 12 MR. FISHER: I think that's right. 13 And I think the judge would say --14 JUSTICE ALITO: It's up to you? 15 MR. FISHER: -- in that situation 16 something like, the ultimate question you're 17 asking is whether this is a single criminal 18 episode or not when you come -- when you 19 consider these three prior offenses. 20 JUSTICE ALITO: So then they say, well, what is assumed -- what is a -- a criminal 21 22 episode? How do you define a criminal episode? 23 DIG that? MR. FISHER: I think we're doing the 24 25 Wooden argument again.

```
1
                JUSTICE ALITO: I know. That's the
 2
     problem.
 3
                (Laughter.)
               MR. FISHER: Well, I think an -- I
 4
 5
      think an episode involves sort of a -- a -- a --
      a single coherent, you know, plan or experience
 6
7
      or event.
                JUSTICE ALITO: Like a whole RICO
 8
9
      enterprise. That's a single criminal episode?
10
               MR. FISHER: I don't think so. I
     think there's, you know, temporal -- I think
11
12
      there are limits temporally, but I don't think
      -- as the Court itself went back and forth at
13
14
      the oral argument in Wooden, I don't think it's
15
     necessarily a single day or a single -- single
16
     place. I think the qualitative nature of a
17
      single episode allows for a little bit more than
18
      that.
19
                JUSTICE ALITO: Thank you.
20
               CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Justice
21
      Sotomayor?
2.2
                JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: Mr. Fisher, do you
23
     have -- the SG is suggesting, as you are, that
     we remand for the lower court to do the harmless
24
```

error analysis. That's what we generally do.

- 1 MR. FISHER: Right.
- 2 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: But amici wants us
- 3 to address it. Do you have a viable argument
- 4 below?
- 5 MR. FISHER: Oh, yes, we do. We have
- 6 -- what's at issue in this case are three
- 7 convictions over eight days allegedly in the
- 8 same place, allegedly over eight days in the
- 9 same place, all for -- for --
- 10 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: Same city, not the
- 11 same place. It wasn't the same. One was a
- 12 pizzeria. Another --
- MR. FISHER: Yes. Forgive me. That's
- 14 what I meant to say. Yes, that's what's
- 15 alleged. And so, just as I was describing to
- 16 Justice Alito, I think you could have a
- 17 situation where imagine somebody, you know, had
- 18 to pay a debt and so, to -- to -- to get money
- 19 to pay that gambling debt, they conducted a
- 20 string of burglaries over a few days of various
- 21 commercial establishments.
- I think a jury could -- a rational
- jury could find that's a single criminal
- 24 episode, especially against the backdrop of what
- 25 ACCA is trying to accomplish with the different

- 1 occasions clause.
- 2 Remember, what you're trying to
- 3 accomplish is identifying career offenders,
- 4 people who have a long practice of offending.
- 5 And so somebody who goes on a single bender or
- 6 executes a single plan is not the kind of person
- 7 that ACCA seems to be trying to identify.
- JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: Thank you.
- 9 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Justice Kagan?
- 10 JUSTICE KAGAN: There's been some talk
- in the briefs about the exact scope of the
- 12 Almendarez-Torres exception. Do those questions
- get litigated, or are they entirely academic,
- and does it matter, the exact scope for this
- 15 case?
- MR. FISHER: It doesn't matter, the
- 17 exact scope for this case, because all the Court
- has to do is apply the rule that's announced in
- 19 Descamps and Mathis, which is any
- offense-related conduct that goes beyond the
- 21 elements is covered by Apprendi, not
- 22 Almendarez-Torres. That's enough to decide this
- 23 case.
- 24 So, Justice Kagan, there are a few
- other facts. Candidly, there are not many cases

- 1 about them because there aren't very many
- 2 recidivist statutes that deal with something
- 3 like the date of the offense or other kinds of
- 4 facts that are about -- I'm not going to say
- 5 never, but there is very little case law on it.
- 6 And something like, you know, these
- 7 other kind of facts are -- are, again, rarely
- 8 going to be litigated because the defendant may
- 9 not have any legitimate argument when it comes
- 10 to, you know, these other kind of facts.
- 11 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Justice
- 12 Gorsuch?
- JUSTICE GORSUCH: I just want to
- 14 explore a little bit about what happens on
- remand, not that we need to address it but just
- 16 to pick your brain for a minute.
- 17 MR. FISHER: Yeah.
- 18 JUSTICE GORSUCH: Our line between
- 19 what is susceptible to harmless error review and
- 20 what is structural error, I confess, sometimes
- 21 defies me. On the one hand, it's structural
- 22 error if you don't have a reasonable doubt
- instruction or if you've been denied your choice
- of counsel. On the other hand, it's susceptible
- to harmless error review if you didn't instruct

2.8

- 1 the jury with respect to an element of the crime
- 2 or if there's a variance.
- 3 MR. FISHER: Right.
- 4 JUSTICE GORSUCH: Here, we have the
- 5 plea bargaining context, so we don't even have a
- 6 trial record to analyze for harmless error
- 7 review. So I'm -- I'm a bit uncertain how one
- 8 would do harmless error review, other than look
- 9 at the very records that you want to be able to
- 10 challenge before a jury, right?
- 11 You -- you may be taking
- judicial notice that he did it on such and such
- a date and he did this in -- in a certain place.
- MR. FISHER: Right.
- 15 JUSTICE GORSUCH: How does that work?
- 16 How do you do harmless error review when you
- don't have a trial record? And -- let me add
- one more thing in there, a lot, I know -- here,
- 19 your client pleaded to an information that
- 20 listed as the ACCA predicate offense different
- 21 crimes, so he didn't even have notice that the
- 22 government was going to reach back to when he
- 23 was 18 or thereabouts for this string of
- 24 burglaries to enhance his sentence by 15 years.
- 25 And he's now in his mid 40s so that he'll never

- 1 -- he won't get out of prison until he's in his
- 2 -- maybe 60 or so.
- And how do we analyze, oh, it was
- 4 harmless that he didn't even know what he was
- 5 pleading guilty to?
- 6 MR. FISHER: I think you're right
- 7 there are challenges even with conducting a
- 8 Neder-type harmless error analysis after a jury
- 9 verdict. Justice Scalia pointed out in dissent
- in that case that becomes a very difficult
- 11 speculative enterprise. Of course, the majority
- of the Court disagreed. And the Court has also
- disagreed when it comes to indictments.
- So I don't want to butt myself up too
- 15 hard against the Court's precedent, but I do
- think you make a good point that when it comes
- 17 to cases where you have plea bargains, the
- 18 question whether a jury might have found
- 19 something or not requires, you know, a very
- 20 unusual showing on the government's part that
- 21 it's absolutely so clear based on the kind of
- documents that we all agree a court can look at
- 23 under the Almendarez-Torres exception itself.
- 24 So you're going to have some cases
- 25 where the dates of conviction are so far apart

- or other things like that I think, you
- 2 know, are going to be harmless, but I -- I think
- 3 that just bolsters my answer to Justice
- 4 Sotomayor as to why we have a serious harmless
- 5 error -- or not harmless error argument on
- 6 remand.
- 7 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Justice
- 8 Kavanaugh?
- 9 JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: On both Justice
- 10 Alito's questions about instructions and Justice
- 11 Gorsuch's question there, Wooden said courts
- 12 have nearly always treated offenses as occurring
- on separate occasions if a person committed them
- 14 a day or more apart or a significant distance.
- 15 That's still good law, correct?
- 16 MR. FISHER: Of course. Yeah.
- 17 JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: And --
- 18 MR. FISHER: "Nearly always," I think,
- is the -- is the phrase there.
- JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: Okay. Then,
- 21 second question, Descamps and Mathis, obviously,
- 22 didn't affect the states' criminal justice
- 23 systems. Our holding here will cause states to
- 24 have to revamp their recidivism practices, so
- 25 that strikes me as something we didn't even

- 1 contemplate in Mathis and Descamps.
- You're saying, I think, they're fueled
- 3 by constitutional concerns. But they didn't
- 4 actually -- amicus makes this point -- address
- 5 the constitutional question, correct?
- 6 MR. FISHER: Well, I think they did
- 7 address the constitutional question. I grant
- 8 you they also, you know, grounded the case in
- 9 statutory analysis. But, as to the effect on
- 10 the states, there are a handful of states only
- 11 that have anything like a different occasions
- 12 kind of finding. Obviously, if you overruled
- 13 Almendarez-Torres, that would have a bigger
- 14 effect on the states.
- But you have only a hand -- a small
- 16 handful of states that have a finding anything
- 17 like this, Justice Kavanaugh, and that's, I -- I
- would just submit, quite small potatoes compared
- 19 to what the Court has done in other Apprendi
- 20 cases, you know, and required the states to do
- in reaction. And I think it's probably telling
- that you don't even have a state's amicus brief
- in this case, and it's because it would be so
- 24 easy for states to just engraft the jury
- 25 procedure onto the existing structures you

- 1 already have.
- JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: And last question.
- 3 What about the concern raised by Judge Bibas in
- 4 his article that amicus cites that because of
- 5 the prevalence of plea bargaining that goes on,
- 6 that having this as an element of the offense
- 7 will actually be problematic for criminal
- 8 defendants?
- I know you have the amicus briefs on
- 10 the other side, but I just want you, since it's
- 11 --
- MR. FISHER: Yeah.
- JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: -- raised by
- amicus here, to respond to that.
- MR. FISHER: Right. I think the NAFD
- brief actually deals with the plea bargaining
- 17 dynamics that follow from a holding in our favor
- here, and they're actually good, because the
- 19 problem with felon-in-possession cases where
- 20 ACCA is a -- is a -- is a kicker on the
- 21 back end is that there's nothing to plead to
- 22 because the -- before Wooden and hopefully this
- 23 case, you know, the -- the probation officer
- 24 could just tell the judge you have to increase
- 25 the sentence, the defendant had no fair notice

- 1 and -- and -- and no way to defend, no -- no --
- 2 nothing to bargain with, is -- is what I mean to
- 3 say.
- 4 And so, if you look at actually
- 5 statistics, 14 percent of felon-in-possession
- 6 cases go to trial. That's a very high number
- 7 for the federal system. Here, if you were to
- 8 say that the different occasions clause is an
- 9 element, that then puts prosecutorial discretion
- in the government's hands and gives the
- 11 defendant something to bargain with the
- 12 government with. So you can have in the future
- defendants who plead guilty to the underlying
- 922(g) charge who would not have done so in the
- past in exchange for taking the ACCA enhancement
- 16 off the table.
- 17 And one last thing about that.
- 18 Remember, at the time this case was litigated,
- the maximum punishment for 922(q) was 10 years.
- Now it's 15 years. So those -- that actual
- 21 change in law and the dynamics that would follow
- from a decision in our favor actually, you know,
- 23 bolster the plea bargaining process.
- JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: Thank you.
- 25 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Justice

- 1 Barrett?
- 2 JUSTICE BARRETT: No.
- 3 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Justice
- 4 Jackson?
- 5 JUSTICE JACKSON: So is there any
- 6 distinction between your position and the SG's
- 7 position, and, if so, can you just zero in on
- 8 it?
- 9 MR. FISHER: There's no difference in
- 10 this case.
- JUSTICE JACKSON: Okay.
- 12 MR. FISHER: There's no difference as
- to what the rule that you should apply in this
- 14 case is, which is any offense-related conduct
- beyond the elements of the crime are subject to
- 16 Apprendi and not Almendarez-Torres.
- 17 The only differences that I can
- discern in the briefing between our position and
- 19 the SG are a few borderline in-between question
- 20 -- questions about how you apply that test to
- 21 particular facts.
- 22 So there's offense -- the date of the
- 23 offense, I think, is something the Solicitor
- 24 General suggests might be within the prior
- 25 conviction exception. We don't think it is

- 1 because the date of the offense is not an
- 2 element of the crime. It's not something a
- 3 prior jury would have had to find.
- 4 JUSTICE JACKSON: Does that suggest
- 5 that the -- the sort of future work of this
- 6 Court and other courts is going to be to have to
- 7 identify which facts go to the judge and go to
- 8 the jury? I mean, are -- are we at that level?
- 9 It seems at least the other side has a sort of
- simpler conception of this, which is recidivism,
- 11 put it in the bucket of Almendarez-Torres.
- 12 MR. FISHER: Well, it might be simpler
- to say any fact about a prior conviction, using
- 14 a gun, vulnerable victim, whatever you could
- imagine, would be called within recidivism. I
- 16 just think that's so at odds with the Court's
- 17 Apprendi jurisprudence that that option is just
- not on the table as a matter of stare decisis.
- JUSTICE JACKSON: Well, let me ask you
- 20 another question about that option --
- MR. FISHER: Yeah.
- JUSTICE JACKSON: -- which is it seems
- 23 very complex. This is going back to Justice
- 24 Alito's line of questions. I totally understand
- your point, I understand the precedents, but we

- 1 do have this Almendarez-Torres carveout, and
- 2 part of this case is -- is understanding its
- 3 scope and whether or not this kind of thing
- 4 should fit -- does fit in it as a matter of
- 5 precedent or should fit in it given all of the
- 6 various ways in which this could go.
- 7 And one concern I have is that I
- 8 think, when we're talking about two different
- 9 sets of facts with respect to the jury, there
- is, like, added complexity. What I mean by that
- 11 is we have the facts that relate to the charged
- crime, today's charged crime in this case, it's
- the 924(g), but we also have facts that relate
- 14 to past crimes that this defendant was convict
- 15 -- convicted of committing, and I guess I'm just
- trying to understand how today's jury
- 17 adjudicates past crime facts.
- 18 So are they limited to the record that
- 19 was presented to the original jury on those
- 20 facts? Can new evidence come in related to
- 21 crimes that happened 20 years ago as we try to
- 22 figure out whether they happened on a single
- occasion, or how does this work?
- MR. FISHER: So, remember, if you
- 25 bifurcate, the jury's not doing the two things

- 1 at the same time. They're doing the -- they're
- 2 doing the 922(g).
- JUSTICE JACKSON: Yes.
- 4 MR. FISHER: And then -- and then
- 5 they're having a separate proceeding.
- 6 JUSTICE JACKSON: Right.
- 7 MR. FISHER: In that separate
- 8 proceeding, I do think other evidence could come
- 9 in beyond the -- beyond the record that was
- 10 established in the initial conviction because
- 11 the way I think Congress drafted this, was
- 12 committed on separate occasions, is an
- 13 open-ended fact finding.
- 14 JUSTICE JACKSON: So we're -- how do
- we keep this from being just like many retrials
- of the whole -- are you saying we have to have
- 17 the evidence with respect --
- MR. FISHER: Well, remember, Justice
- 19 Jackson --
- JUSTICE JACKSON: Yeah.
- 21 MR. FISHER: -- you're having that
- inquiry regardless. It's just whether or not
- 23 the judge or the jury is going to make the
- 24 finding.
- JUSTICE JACKSON: Hmm.

1 MR. FISHER: Now, if the jury's making 2 the finding, the Rule of Evidence applies in 3 ways it doesn't to the judge. But all the litigation is going to happen regardless. It's 4 just who's making the fact finding. 5 6 And I think you -- I want to come back 7 to your other question quickly. JUSTICE JACKSON: Yes. 8 MR. FISHER: You asked about are we 9 going to have these borderline Almendarez-Torres 10 11 cases coming back to you. I don't think that's 12 necessarily the case. I won't say it's 13 impossible, but this is my answer to Justice 14 Kagan. There are very few states that have or 15 -- or in the federal code that have facts beyond 16 the prior conviction itself that trigger 17 enhancements that are -- that are currently in 18 the law found by judges. So I think it's very 19 uncommon. 20 And, of course, there will be further 21 guidance presumably in this opinion for -- for 2.2 -- for federal and state judges, so I think it's 23 very unlikely you're going to see additional 24 cases just because those laws are so uncommon. 25 JUSTICE JACKSON: Thank you.

1	CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Thank you,
2	counsel.
3	Mr. Feigin.
4	ORAL ARGUMENT OF ERIC J. FEIGIN ON
5	BEHALF OF THE RESPONDENT,
6	SUPPORTING THE PETITIONER
7	MR. FEIGIN: Thank you, Mr. Chief
8	Justice, and may it please the Court:
9	As I think the colloquy so far this
10	morning has demonstrated, as we see it, this
11	case boils down to an unavoidable syllogism,
12	which is that under Wooden, the different
13	occasions finding under the ACCA requires a
14	multi-factored inquiry involving the timing, the
15	proximity of location, and the character and
16	relationship of prior offenses, whereas the
17	Sixth Amendment prohibits, to use the words in
18	Mathis, exploring the manner in which a prior
19	conviction's offense occurred.
20	And we therefore think that because a
21	district judge is disempowered from doing it,
22	the only option left is that the jury has to do
23	it, and so we have acknowledged that a a jury
24	would need to do that.
25	I'm happy to take the Court's

- 1 questions, but I don't think the Court needs to
- or, frankly, should say much more than that to
- 3 resolve this case.
- 4 JUSTICE THOMAS: Well, wouldn't it be
- 5 cleaner, though, to just simply overrule
- 6 Almendarez-Torres?
- 7 MR. FEIGIN: I had a suspicion you
- 8 might ask me that question, Justice Thomas.
- 9 (Laughter.)
- 10 MR. FEIGIN: And as you might
- 11 anticipate, your suspicion might have been my
- 12 answer is no, and the reason why is that we
- don't -- we think Almendarez-Torres is correct,
- but it's also a precedent this Court has adhered
- to for 25 years post-Apprendi, always
- 16 acknowledging this.
- Nobody's asked the Court to overrule
- it in this case. There's no need for the Court
- 19 to overrule it in this case. And we therefore
- 20 just leave it the way it is.
- 21 To address some of the questioning
- from Justice Jackson and I think maybe Justice
- 23 Kagan, we don't think very many
- 24 Almendarez-Torres questions are really going to
- come up in practice. We do think that it means

- 1 a bit more than I think my friend thinks it
- 2 means, but our principal interest here is
- 3 actually in the type of cases that are currently
- 4 before the Court in the Brown and Jackson cases,
- 5 which involve the comparison of state predicates
- 6 to federal predicates and some timing questions
- 7 that come up with those.
- 8 And that situation's already covered
- 9 by McNeill. It's clear that a court can find
- 10 what version of the statute was applied to the
- 11 defendant at the time of the prior conviction,
- 12 so --
- JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: Do you want to say
- 14 why you think Almendarez-Torres is correct?
- MR. FEIGIN: Well, Your Honor, I -- I
- 16 don't really want to turn this into relitigation
- of Almendarez-Torres, which, again, even
- 18 Petitioner has not asked for, but we think the
- 19 Court was correct. There are more states that I
- 20 think support that than my friend was -- would
- 21 acknowledge.
- 22 There are -- there's some clear
- 23 precedent from Alabama, Louisiana, South
- 24 Carolina, and Kansas. There are the superseding
- 25 indictment statutes out of Virginia, West

- 1 Virginia, Maine, and Massachusetts.
- 2 And although some of those statutes
- 3 allow for jury trials on the back end, that was
- 4 all historical evidence that was in front of the
- 5 Court in Almendarez-Torres, and the Court found
- 6 that -- and this goes to some of your earlier
- 7 questioning, Justice Kavanaugh -- that there was
- 8 at least enough non-uniformity on the issue to
- 9 allow legislatures some wiggle room on this
- 10 topic, which, again, Almendarez --
- JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: Who do you think
- 12 has the burden on the historical practice?
- MR. FEIGIN: Well, Your Honor, it's a
- 14 little bit of do you want to see two faces or a
- 15 vase. I think, as we view it --
- 16 JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: I'm going to need
- more than that.
- 18 (Laughter.)
- 19 MR. FEIGIN: Yeah. I -- I -- I
- thought you might. I think, as we view it, the
- 21 Court made a move in Apprendi that I think your
- 22 colloquy with Mr. Fisher illustrated, the Court
- 23 made a move in Apprendi to extend the Sixth
- 24 Amendment's treatment of things as an element to
- 25 various features of criminal statutes that the

- 1 legislature intended as sentencing factors.
- 2 And I think we would take the view
- 3 that that -- viewing that as somewhat of an
- 4 extension of what the Sixth Amendment literally
- 5 demands, that there wouldn't be any burden on us
- 6 to show unanimous or near unanimous practice.
- 7 So long as, as we think the history indicates,
- 8 this was left to the legislature to describe, we
- 9 think the legislature would retain that room
- 10 today.
- But, again, the Court doesn't need to
- 12 get into any of this today. It is clear from
- the historical practice that there's really
- 14 nothing like this. At most, the amicus marshals
- some decisions that show beyond simply
- 16 reaffirming the correctness of
- 17 Almendarez-Torres, that show that district
- 18 courts or trial courts could conduct some sort
- 19 of sequencing determination, which we think a
- 20 court can do because it can find the time of the
- 21 prior offense, but, at the very least, can find
- the time of the prior conviction.
- 23 And even those cases are relatively
- 24 modern. There is -- only South Carolina so far
- as we can tell under a 1955 statute and a 1972

- 1 decision has allowed for litigation in front of
- 2 a judge of the type of thing that the different
- 3 occasions inquiry of ACCA might encompass.
- 4 And we're talking about, you know,
- 5 precise timing questions. So a court, we think,
- 6 on its own could determine that on or -- the
- 7 jury necessarily found that an event occurred on
- 8 or about April 7th, for example. But the kind
- 9 of timing questions that are involved under the
- 10 ACCA's different occasions inquiry are going to
- 11 be more fine-grained than that.
- 12 You could have acts occurring across a
- 13 single day that are separate occasions. Sells
- drugs in the morning. In the afternoon, robs a
- 15 store. In the evening, comes home and beats his
- 16 spouse. Like, those would be three separate
- occasions. There's clearly a chance to have a
- 18 break in between those.
- 19 JUSTICE BARRETT: What about this one
- 20 across --
- 21 MR. FEIGIN: This one, we think, is
- 22 crystal-clear. We -- we think it should clearly
- 23 be found harmless on remand. You have --
- 24 JUSTICE BARRETT: Not -- not we
- 25 shouldn't do it?

1 MR. FEIGIN: Oh, Your Honor, we're 2 fine with you simply affirming on harmlessness 3 grounds if that's what the Court chooses to do. The Court's usual practice is to remand these 4 things. We -- we think we've got a 5 6 crystal-clear case on remand, and we will in 7 most of these cases. It'll be a vanishingly small number where -- where we don't. But, 8 9 here, you have separate robberies that occurred 10 on April 4th, April 8th, and April 11th --11 JUSTICE BARRETT: And would there be 12 some value -- I mean, I guess, a value if you 13 think -- I'm not saying I agree with you -- but, 14 if -- if we agreed with you that this was a 15 crystal-clear case, would there be some value to lower courts in saying, like, this is the kind 16 17 of thing that, you know, under Wooden would 18 still be different occasions? 19 MR. FEIGIN: Sure. I mean, we think 20 that's already clear to some degree from Wooden, 21 which I take to generally say that if you've got 2.2 offenses spaced as far apart as these are, that 23 it's almost invariably going to be the case that 24 they are on separate occasions. 25 But, if the Court wishes to explain

- 1 that, that -- that would be great for us. In
- 2 particular -- or great by us. For us as well.
- 3 (Laughter.)
- 4 MR. FEIGIN: In particular, to -- just
- 5 to address the harmless error argument that Mr.
- 6 Fisher posited a few minutes ago, we don't think
- 7 simply "I was in debt" is enough to make things
- 8 the same occasion. The -- the kinds of
- 9 circumstances where possibly a jury could -- you
- 10 know, we -- we think, you know, it would be fair
- 11 to find -- obviously, this always goes to the
- jury, but we think would really be realistically
- found to be the same occasion if they occur
- 14 across the course of several days might be what
- the Court posited in Wooden itself, like they're
- 16 part of a common criminal scheme.
- So, for example, you burglarize a
- 18 store to steal what you need to commit a
- 19 kidnapping. You commit an assault during the
- 20 course of the kidnapping, and later you murder
- 21 the victim. It's possible that, you know, a
- jury could find that those were all the same
- 23 occasions --
- JUSTICE GORSUCH: Mr. --
- 25 MR. FEIGIN: -- even if it occurred

- 1 over the course of a few days.
- JUSTICE GORSUCH: So, Mr. Feigin, on
- 3 that, first of all, I commend the government for
- 4 acknowledging the error below in this case.
- 5 That's an admirable step of candor.
- 6 But, on -- on -- on this harmless
- 7 error question, let me ask you first, how is a
- 8 court supposed to conduct that when there hasn't
- 9 been a trial and in a world in which almost
- 10 everybody pleads guilty these days? A really
- 11 novel development during the course of our
- 12 lifetimes.
- So, here, the defendant was told that
- 14 the three predicate ACCA crimes were different
- than these three crimes that you're now asking
- 16 us to -- for a court to say are clearly separate
- occasions and -- and, therefore, harmless error.
- 18 How is it harmless when he didn't know
- 19 what the charges would be against him when he
- 20 pled guilty?
- 21 MR. FEIGIN: Well, Your Honor, I think
- 22 he --
- JUSTICE GORSUCH: Wouldn't that have
- informed his bargain? Perhaps he would have
- 25 chosen not to plead guilty if you were going to

- drag back up convictions from when he was 18
- 2 that have nothing to do with his possession of a
- 3 firearm today as a 40-something-year-old man.
- 4 MR. FEIGIN: Well, Your Honor, first
- of all, I don't think he was under any
- 6 assurances that he would not receive an ACCA
- 7 sentence. In fact, he was --
- 8 JUSTICE GORSUCH: No, but in the
- 9 information, the government specifically listed
- 10 three other predicate offenses, not these.
- MR. FEIGIN: Well, Your Honor, to the
- 12 extent you're suggesting that the availability
- of an ACCA sentence might have informed his
- decision to plead, he was perfectly on notice
- 15 that he could receive an ACCA sentence.
- 16 It turns out that it's for three -- or
- 17 I think only two of the crimes are different
- than the original ones because of intervening
- decisional law that made some of the original
- 20 charged predicates no longer valid.
- To be clear, we don't think that in
- the indictment we actually need to charge what
- 23 the specific predicates are.
- 24 JUSTICE GORSUCH: No, but you did in
- 25 this information.

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1
                MR. FEIGIN: We -- we did in this
 2
      information, but I don't think that --
 3
                JUSTICE GORSUCH: And wouldn't the --
               MR. FEIGIN: -- given that he had --
 4
     he has a fairly long rap sheet --
 5
               JUSTICE GORSUCH: No, I understand
 6
7
      that.
               MR. FEIGIN: -- I don't --
8
 9
                JUSTICE GORSUCH: But do you think a
     defendant might make a reasonably different
10
11
      choice if he knows what -- what the -- I may be
12
      able to have a good occasions clause argument
13
     with respect to these crimes but not those
14
     crimes. And -- and the ones you chose are
15
     different than the ones you're now seeking to
16
     pursue.
17
               MR. FEIGIN: Well, to be clear, Your
18
     Honor, we charged them, as I read the
19
      information, as -- I mean, it put him on notice
     of the ACCA because it cited --
20
21
                JUSTICE GORSUCH: You did.
2.2
                MR. FEIGIN: It put him on notice of
23
      the ACCA, but it was also in support of the
     basic underlying 922(g) offense. In addition, I
24
25
      think he is fairly charged with knowing --
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1 JUSTICE GORSUCH: Okay. 2 MR. FEIGIN: -- his own prior 3 conviction history. JUSTICE GORSUCH: And then, on that, 4 in response to Justice Barrett, you -- you --5 6 you admitted, I think, that there are some 7 situations in which a jury could reasonably find that a -- a series of crimes happened on the 8 9 same occasion even though they happened over the 10 span of some days. 11 At least in a jury trial, you've got 12 all the facts before you. Here, we have just 13 the pleading documents from those prior cases. 14 How is a judge -- how are we supposed to have a 15 hundred percent confidence that it's harmless 16 that these were, in fact, on separate occasions 17 when there's been no trial and all we have before us are these pleading documents? 18 19 MR. FEIGIN: Well, first of all, Your 20 Honor, I -- I don't think we look at it quite as that there has been no trial. It's that the --21 2.2 JUSTICE GORSUCH: Well, there's been 23 no trial. MR. FEIGIN: -- the entire record here 24 25 would encompass the sentencing proceedings.

- 1 This is the same error the Court considered in
- 2 Neder, where an element was erroneously
- 3 presented to a judge but not a jury.
- And, here, you have the record. We
- 5 have the documents.
- 6 JUSTICE GORSUCH: But we don't know
- 7 what the defendant would say. He might say it
- 8 was all part -- I -- I did this crime to commit
- 9 that crime, to commit the third crime, just as
- 10 you posited in response to Justice Barrett. We
- 11 don't know what he would say in -- with respect
- 12 to whether these three crimes that you wound up
- using are part of a single occasion or different
- ones.
- MR. FEIGIN: Well, Your Honor, now
- that we've expanded the different occasions
- inquiry into a fundamentally factual one --
- 18 that's the holding of -- of Wooden -- I think
- 19 looking at what the defendant precisely did, it
- doesn't remotely support an argument of that
- 21 sort.
- 22 And also, the idea that I -- I -- I --
- 23 I would resist the idea that it's part of a
- 24 common scheme or plan simply just to undertake a
- 25 string of robberies within a week. Like,

- 1 clearly, he had the means to do the first one,
- 2 to do the second one, and to do the third one.
- 3 He had several days in between to cool off. He
- 4 did not -- and on the last day, he robbed two
- 5 stores, Druthers and Schnitzelbank. The -- if
- 6 you want to look at the sentencing memorandum,
- 7 the government's sentencing memorandum, at page
- 8 6, those are fairly far apart from one another.
- 9 I don't really think he has any viable
- 10 argument, and I don't take debt, simply a debt,
- 11 to be an argument. Otherwise, a gambling addict
- 12 could constantly be on the same occasion.
- JUSTICE GORSUCH: It seems to me
- 14 probably right, but we have to decide whether
- it's harmless beyond a reasonable doubt, and we
- 16 don't have anything from the defendant here with
- 17 respect to his views about why this might be a
- 18 single occasion, and I'm just wondering how
- 19 we're supposed to do that, but --
- MR. FEIGIN: Well, Your -- Your Honor,
- 21 I think we do because this issue was litigated
- 22 before the judge, notwithstanding his objection.
- 23 And I really don't think he has anything there.
- 24 If he did --
- JUSTICE GORSUCH: Okay.

- 1 MR. FEIGIN: -- I think you would have
- 2 heard it earlier this morning.
- JUSTICE GORSUCH: Thank you, Mr.
- 4 Feigin.
- 5 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Thank you,
- 6 counsel.
- 7 Justice Thomas?
- 8 Justice Alito?
- 9 JUSTICE ALITO: Well, I wanted to ask
- 10 you some of the same questions I asked Mr.
- 11 Fisher about how these cases will be tried if
- 12 your view of the law prevails.
- So I asked him about the admissibility
- of the judgment of conviction, the charging
- document, the jury instructions, plea colloquy.
- 16 You think all of that is admissible?
- 17 MR. FEIGIN: Yes, Your Honor. I mean,
- 18 there are -- for example, in addition to the
- 19 hearsay exceptions that might cover those, I
- think, to the extent you're submitting documents
- 21 that were just shown to the jury that are being
- 22 used for the purpose of showing what the jury
- was instructed as opposed to for the truth of
- the matter asserted, there isn't a hearsay
- 25 problem with those.

1	JUSTICE ALITO: Now suppose the rule
2	is I mean, the what what was said in
3	Wooden was that judges have usually regarded
4	things that are separated by more than a day as
5	having occurred on separate occasions. I don't
6	know whether you can instruct a jury about what
7	judges previously did, but put that aside.
8	Suppose there's a rule that says that,
9	in general, offenses that are separated by a day
LO	or more are occur on different occasions.
L1	And suppose the documents that I mention don't
L2	nail down the exact day on which the offense
L3	occurred. So you have, let's say, the charging
L4	document for one says on or about March 27th.
L5	The other one says on or about March the 30th.
L6	Is that sufficient to prove beyond a
L7	reasonable doubt that they occurred within a
L8	day? If it's not, then what are you going to
L9	do? You're going to have to call the witnesses
20	from those prior trials, if they can be found,
21	and nail down the exact day on which this
22	occurred?
23	MR. FEIGIN: Well, to answer your
24	first question, Your Honor, I do think the jury
2.5	could that would be enough to support a

- 1 jury's inference beyond a reasonable doubt that
- 2 they are on different occasions, particularly if
- 3 there are other aspects of the crimes that are
- 4 different.
- But, number two, if we can't otherwise
- 6 establish that -- and, again, this is an inquiry
- 7 that judges used to undertake from the Shepard
- 8 documents as to which they didn't really differ
- 9 and were reaching by and large common-sense
- 10 conclusions. So it will be even easier for a
- 11 jury to do that if --
- JUSTICE ALITO: Well, were they doing
- 13 it beyond a reasonable doubt, based on the
- 14 beyond-a-reasonable-doubt standard?
- 15 MR. FEIGIN: Yes, Your Honor. I -- I
- think this is the kind of thing where the jury
- 17 could infer that, for example, a robbery on or
- 18 about March 28th and an assault on or about
- 19 March 30th would be different occasions,
- 20 particularly if there is really no contrary
- 21 argument that connects them.
- 22 And, you know, if necessary -- and one
- 23 -- one reason we don't really think that
- 24 Almendarez-Torres should be overruled as a
- 25 practical matter is we don't really want to have

- 1 to get the victims back into court to testify
- 2 about what happened or the exact day on which it
- 3 happened.
- But I -- I -- I don't take this to be
- 5 a particularly complicated inquiry. It's a
- 6 common-sense one. Wooden expressly explained it
- 7 as such. And we've had, due to the uniformity
- 8 of the circuits against the position we're
- 9 conceding now, very few actual jury trials, but
- 10 we've had four of them, and it hasn't proven to
- 11 really be a problem for us.
- 12 JUSTICE ALITO: Now what about the
- 13 question about differences in the nature of the
- offenses? So, if the offenses are sufficiently
- 15 different, that may support the conclusion that
- 16 they were not part of -- they were not committed
- on the same occasion, they're not part of the
- same scheme. What's the judge supposed to tell
- 19 the jury about that?
- 20 Suppose you have a case where the
- 21 defendant committed a robbery in the morning on
- one day by grabbing a woman's purse and running
- away with it. Then, in the evening, a defendant
- 24 committed another mugging using a knife and then
- 25 the following morning went into some retail

- 1 establishment and just grabbed \$500 worth of
- 2 merchandise and ran away.
- 3 Are they sufficiently different?
- 4 MR. FEIGIN: Yes, I -- I think they
- 5 are.
- JUSTICE ALITO: And on what theory?
- 7 What would you tell the -- what would the judge
- 8 tell the jury?
- 9 MR. FEIGIN: Well, Your Honor, I -- I
- 10 take separate occasions essentially where --
- 11 to -- to take this a couple -- in a couple of
- 12 pieces.
- 13 It's clear, and the Court was
- explaining this in Wooden, that what Congress
- was trying to do was to address the situation in
- the Petty case out of the Eighth Circuit where
- the government and the solicitor general had
- 18 confessed error where essentially he got all of
- 19 the occasions out of one act.
- 20 Where you have the three kinds of acts
- 21 even over a -- a short span of time such as
- you've described, Justice Alito, I think that's
- 23 presumptively going to be separate occasions,
- 24 not that you'd instruct the jury with such a
- 25 presumption, but that it would be presumption in

- 1 the sense that the jury would -- I would expect
- 2 the jury to find those to be separate occasions,
- 3 unless the defendant produced some substantial
- 4 evidence to convince the jury otherwise.
- 5 JUSTICE ALITO: All right. Thank you.
- 6 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Justice
- 7 Sotomayor?
- 8 Justice Kagan?
- 9 JUSTICE KAGAN: Did I hear you say to
- 10 Justice Alito that you've had four of these
- 11 types of trials?
- 12 MR. FEIGIN: You did.
- JUSTICE KAGAN: What -- what did those
- 14 look like? What were they about? How did they
- 15 go?
- MR. FEIGIN: They were --
- 17 JUSTICE KAGAN: Did you -- did you
- 18 bifurcate?
- 19 MR. FEIGIN: -- they were bifurcated
- 20 trials, Your Honor, and --
- JUSTICE KAGAN: Well, do you always
- 22 expect to bifurcate?
- 23 MR. FEIGIN: I think in the -- unless
- there's some reason that we, frankly, haven't
- been able to anticipate as to why you wouldn't

- 1 bifurcate, we generally agree to bifurcation,
- 2 although I think, as Mr. Fisher said, in a lot
- 3 of cases, the defendant's going to choose to
- 4 plead to this or else just will enter into a
- 5 stipulation and can handle it that way.
- 6 JUSTICE KAGAN: And what do those --
- 7 those trials look like?
- 8 MR. FEIGIN: I mean, I think they look
- 9 like normal bifurcated proceedings, where you
- 10 would prove -- we prove the 922(g) offense and
- 11 then there was, after that, separate jury
- 12 consideration of the enhancement, where we
- introduce evidence about the prior crimes, had
- 14 argument about the prior crimes, and the jury --
- 15 the -- those questions were submitted to the
- 16 jury.
- 17 JUSTICE KAGAN: I -- I quess what I'm
- 18 asking is there's been some talk about how
- 19 difficult this is going to be for everybody.
- 20 Was it?
- 21 MR. FEIGIN: Well, let me say two
- 22 things about that, Your Honor. I mean, one is
- 23 this obviously was not our first-choice
- 24 position. We have been arguing to the contrary
- for a long time. Our position in Wooden was

- 1 largely informed by the fact that if it was a
- 2 judge inquiry, that it needed to be a much
- 3 simpler inquiry. And this is not -- this is
- 4 imposing some burden on us.
- 5 But number two is that it -- it's
- 6 manageable, and we believe it will be
- 7 manageable. Obviously, because of the
- 8 uniformity of the circuits, it's a little bit
- 9 hard to predict that. But this is -- ACCA cases
- 10 are less than 1 percent of the federal criminal
- 11 docket, and in those cases, with the
- 12 availability of pleas, stipulations, and
- 13 bifurcations, we are reasonably confident that
- 14 we can manage this.
- 15 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Justice
- 16 Gorsuch?
- 17 Justice Kavanaugh?
- JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: I have a few
- 19 questions. Sorry.
- 20 On the facts here, this defendant had
- 21 nine prior felonies over a 13-year period. Is
- that accurate?
- MR. FEIGIN: Your Honor, I couldn't --
- 24 standing here, I -- I don't remember the precise
- 25 number, but he -- he has more than the three

1 that --2 JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: Right. 3 MR. FEIGIN: -- comprise the -- that, sorry, made up the ACCA determination. 4 5 JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: Right. You're on 6 notice after even one not to possess firearms, 7 and he had 16 long guns and four other guns in 8 his garage, correct? 9 MR. FEIGIN: That's right, Your Honor. 10 JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: Okay. On the 11 confession of error, I guess I thought of it a 12 little differently than Justice Gorsuch did, 13 because not one way or the other, but all the 14 courts of appeals have rejected the confession 15 of error, right, and ruled still for the 16 government's original position? 17 MR. FEIGIN: That's true, Your Honor, 18 but we don't think that those holdings are 19 viable. I mean, some -- in some cases, they've 20 just been waiting for this Court to itself 21 announce that the syllogism I mentioned at the 2.2 beginning is correct, because the Court 23 expressly reserved the question in Wooden. 24 In some cases, we think they're just 25 reading the Almendarez-Torres exception too far,

- 1 and in other cases, they're talking about
- 2 prejudice to the defendant, which, first of all,
- 3 we don't -- we think is itself a manageable
- 4 problem, but also, as Mr. Fisher said, if -- if
- 5 you don't believe me, you -- you can believe the
- 6 defense bar, which is coming in on the
- 7 Petitioner's side here.
- 8 JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: All right. Thank
- 9 you.
- 10 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Justice
- 11 Barrett?
- 12 JUSTICE BARRETT: Mr. Feigin, just a
- 13 quick clarifying question. When you were going
- 14 back and forth with Justice Alito about how this
- would actually be done as a practical matter, he
- 16 was asking you about burden of proof, and I
- don't think you ever went back to it.
- I mean, in the old system, when judges
- 19 were doing this, it was by a preponderance, I
- 20 assume?
- 21 MR. FEIGIN: Correct.
- JUSTICE BARRETT: The sentencing? So
- do you anticipate, which I took to be the thrust
- of some of Justice Alito's questions, that when
- 25 juries are doing this beyond a reasonable doubt,

- do you think that the problems of proof would
- 2 make it much more difficult to prove the
- 3 predicates?
- 4 MR. FEIGIN: I think that it will do
- 5 two things. It may well do two things. And,
- 6 again, for reasons I've stated, this is kind of
- 7 predictive.
- 8 I -- I do think it may incentivize
- 9 defendants to submit this to a jury whereas they
- 10 might not have before, and I don't know that
- 11 that's necessarily a particularly beneficial
- thing as a practical matter because I think very
- rarely would it actually be the case that these
- 14 were not -- that a defendant's three prior
- offenses were not committed on separate
- 16 occasions.
- 17 And, second, going before the jury, we
- 18 might need to introduce different types of proof
- or it may be harder to acquire everything that
- 20 we might need. We'd prefer, as I said, not to
- 21 have to bring the victim back in to say --
- JUSTICE BARRETT: Sure.
- 23 MR. FEIGIN: -- yes, I -- I can
- 24 remember, the -- the date is stamped in my
- 25 brain, you know, October 26th, that's a day I'll

- 1 never forget because that's the day that that
- 2 man robbed me, particularly if it's 10 years in
- 3 the past and memories may have faded.
- 4 In fact, this kind of inquiry or --
- 5 and much more overruling Almendarez-Torres would
- 6 be a windfall for defendants who have a long rap
- 7 sheet, as Mr. Erlinger does here, but who
- 8 several of their crimes have been knocked out by
- 9 various of this Court's or the court of appeals'
- decisions, and so we have to rely on some of the
- older crimes as to which it may be harder to
- 12 produce this evidence or even to find every
- single state record that we might need, where
- 14 there would otherwise be no dispute about it
- 15 because the defendant knows quite well that he
- 16 actually committed those offenses and what they
- 17 were about.
- JUSTICE BARRETT: One other question.
- 19 So Justice Kagan asked you about the four trials
- the government has already conducted that were
- 21 bifurcated. The same jury or did you -- was it
- 22 a different jury?
- MR. FEIGIN: I believe it was the same
- jury, Your Honor. I -- I -- I'm not -- I'm
- 25 not certain, but I don't see any reason why

- 1 you'd need to swear in an entirely new jury and
- 2 say, hello, here's the defendant, you know,
- 3 here's what we've already determined.
- 4 JUSTICE BARRETT: Sure. Thanks.
- 5 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Justice
- 6 Jackson?
- 7 JUSTICE JACKSON: So I just want to
- 8 clarify one thing because I've seen cases in
- 9 which the indictment has many counts talking
- 10 about different acts of the defendant and uses
- 11 the kind of language that Judge Alito points to,
- "on or about" X date. In some of them, those
- 13 counts even have overlapping dates and, you
- 14 know, time frames. And so I guess I would
- 15 expect that it would be those kinds of cases in
- 16 which the defendant would have a colorable
- 17 argument that these things happened on the same
- occasion, and those would be the ones that would
- 19 be more likely to go to trial, right?
- I mean, it's -- I quess I'm -- I'm
- 21 suggesting that the trial scenario seems to me
- to be precisely the one where you would have to
- 23 bring in all the evidence related to the past
- 24 crime because, if it was just as easy as, you
- know, these things are on separate dates, the

1 person probably wouldn't go to trial, right? 2 MR. FEIGIN: Well, Your Honor, I -- I 3 do think that -- again, we don't have a ton of experience with this. 4 JUSTICE JACKSON: 5 Yes. MR. FEIGIN: But I do think that to 6 7 the extent that the indictments for the prior crimes or the information for the prior crimes, 8 9 the charging documents, show that they occurred 10 on different days or at least allow a jury to 11 infer as much, I'm not sure that the defendant, 12 in the absence of some plausible argument --13 and, again, I think that's going to be the rare 14 case, and I take Wooden to say it's the rare 15 case -- in the absence of a plausible argument 16 that they're part of a common scheme, not just a 17 common motivation like I'm an inveterate gambler 18 and I need to rob stores to make my money but an 19 actual part of a common scheme, that the 20 defendant's actually going to want to go to 21 trial on that, because, you know, among other 2.2 things like lots of cases plead, the defendant 23 may not, for -- for -- may not wish to kind of 24 try the district court's patience with holding 25 separate proceedings on something --

1 JUSTICE JACKSON: Yeah. 2 MR. FEIGIN: -- that's not going to benefit him. 3 JUSTICE JACKSON: All right. Let me 4 ask you another question that comes from a 5 6 colloquy that you had with Justice Barrett about 7 harmless error. So any ruling that this Court made, 8 9 let's say we decided to address harmlessness in 10 this context, you would anticipate that that 11 rule would then be incorporated into jury 12 instructions if these cases should happen in the 13 future? 14 MR. FEIGIN: It would depend what the 15 Court said, Your Honor. Our -- our current 16 proposed model jury instruction, which, again, 17 we haven't really had to use very often because 18 the courts of appeals --19 JUSTICE JACKSON: Yeah. 20 MR. FEIGIN: -- haven't gone in our favor, largely tracks what Mr. Fisher said 21 2.2 earlier this morning. 23 JUSTICE JACKSON: No, I know. But any 24 future thing that courts say about harmlessness

in a situation, right, if we look at the facts

- 1 here and we say this is harmless because, fill
- in the blank, that would then become a rule that
- 3 I would assume would have to be incorporated
- 4 into future jury instructions in order to make
- 5 sure we have some sort of uniformity coming out
- 6 of this, right?
- 7 MR. FEIGIN: It would depend what --
- 8 it would depend what the Court said. I -- I
- 9 don't know that we would invariably, even under
- 10 the current Wooden decision as we have it,
- insist that the jury be instructed that, for
- 12 example, different days almost always means
- separate occasions. I think we're comfortable
- enough with kind of a description of the general
- 15 inquiry --
- 16 JUSTICE JACKSON: But it doesn't
- 17 bother the government that you could have a jury
- 18 that is -- that you could have different
- defendants who basically got the same rap sheets
- 20 coming out differently, unless we have a rule
- 21 about when it's going to be treated as a
- 22 different occasion?
- MR. FEIGIN: That does bother us, Your
- 24 Honor. We always want like offendants to be
- 25 treated alike. That's a basic -- a basic

- 1 animating principle of the Sentencing Reform Act
- 2 and sentencing in general. And to the extent we
- 3 can, we would want jury instructions that would
- 4 tend to reach that conclusion.
- 5 However, as this Court has noted, you
- 6 know, for example, in United States against
- 7 Williams, like, different juries even instructed
- 8 the exact same way --
- 9 JUSTICE JACKSON: Yeah.
- 10 MR. FEIGIN: -- can come out different
- 11 ways on similar facts. That's just --
- 12 JUSTICE JACKSON: Thank you.
- 13 MR. FEIGIN: -- the nature of the
- 14 system.
- 15 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Thank you,
- 16 counsel.
- 17 MR. FEIGIN: Thank you.
- 18 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Mr. Harper.
- 19 ORAL ARGUMENT OF D. NICK HARPER,
- 20 COURT-APPOINTED AMICUS CURIAE IN SUPPORT OF
- 21 THE JUDGMENT BELOW
- MR. HARPER: Thank you, Mr. Chief
- 23 Justice, and may it please the Court:
- 24 ACCA's occasions clause requires
- 25 judges to make a classic recidivism

- determination, a finding about the separateness
- of prior offenses. Under this Court's
- 3 precedents, that legislative choice is
- 4 consistent with the Constitution. This Court
- 5 held in Almendarez-Torres, based on
- 6 centuries-old sentencing practices, that judges
- 7 can impose sentencing enhancements based on
- 8 recidivism.
- 9 For decades, the federal courts of
- 10 appeals have unanimously applied
- 11 Almendarez-Torres to uphold judicial fact
- 12 finding under the occasions clause, and states
- 13 also have relied on Almendarez-Torres to enact
- 14 and enforce similar state recidivism schemes.
- 15 Petitioner and the government seek to
- 16 upend this practice, but they don't offer a
- 17 principled basis for doing so. Their front-line
- 18 position is that judges can find only the
- 19 elements of prior offenses. But they concede
- 20 that Almendarez-Torres authorizes judges to find
- various non-elemental facts as well. So they're
- forced to make exception after exception to
- their elements-only principle, and they
- 24 ultimately land on standards that are
- 25 inconsistent with one another and divorced from

- 1 any constitutional principle or precedent of
- 2 this Court.
- I think what this Court's precedents
- 4 show is that judges can find facts about prior
- 5 offenses under Almendarez-Torres, whereas juries
- 6 must find facts about present offenses under
- 7 Apprendi.
- 8 But, even if the other side's
- 9 approaches were correct, the Court should still
- 10 affirm because at least the government agrees
- 11 that judges applying ACCA's predicate felony
- 12 clause can find facts about the dates and
- locations of prior offenses, and those very same
- 14 facts are going to resolve most occasions
- 15 questions, as this case illustrates. It would
- 16 make no sense to allow judges to find those
- 17 facts under one clause of ACCA but not the
- 18 other.
- 19 This Court should not set aside
- 20 decades of consensus and impose on all federal
- 21 and state courts an untested recidivism regime
- that would gravely prejudice defendants.
- I welcome the Court's questions.
- JUSTICE THOMAS: Counsel, the --
- 25 what's your best historical evidence that judges

- 1 have performed inquiries like the occasions --
- 2 the different occasions inquiry here?
- MR. HARPER: Sure, Justice Thomas. I
- 4 -- I want to flag up front that I don't think
- 5 the -- the right question is to ask whether
- 6 there are sort of direct historical analogues.
- 7 But, to answer your question directly first, I
- 8 do think that the statutes that Mr. Feigin
- 9 mentioned about sequencing that go back to the
- 10 early 1800s, finding that an offense occurred
- 11 after a prior conviction, that an offense
- 12 occurred after a defendant escaped or was
- 13 released from prison, I think those are quite
- 14 analogous to the occasions clause.
- I think, at bottom, in most cases, the
- 16 occasions clause is essentially asking judges to
- 17 make a question about -- to make a decision
- 18 about sequencing, about how prior offenses
- 19 occurred, whether they occurred one after
- 20 another. And I do think these statutes that,
- 21 again, go back to the early 1800s are quite
- 22 similar in that regard.
- I do want to say, though, I don't
- think that that's the right historical question.
- 25 I think the way the Court should think about the

- 1 historical inquiry here is to ask, at the time
- of the founding, was there a settled practice
- 3 that legislatures had to treat recidivism as an
- 4 element of the offense? And I think the answer
- 5 to that question is no, as Almendarez-Torres
- 6 recognized.
- 7 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Why -- why
- 8 doesn't bifurcation take care of all the
- 9 problems from your perspective?
- 10 MR. HARPER: So I think for a couple
- 11 things, Your Honor. I think, first, bifurcation
- is -- is extremely rare in criminal cases. I
- 13 think the other side has cited only two contexts
- in which it occurs regularly. One is the death
- penalty context, where it's required by statute.
- 16 The other is the criminal forfeiture context,
- 17 where it's required by rule.
- 18 And I think, here, it's going to be
- 19 discretionary. And I don't think they've cited
- 20 you a case in -- or a context in which
- 21 discretionary bifurcation happens as a matter of
- 22 course. And I do think that the -- because it's
- discretionary, the government is, I think, going
- to have good arguments against bifurcation in at
- 25 least some cases. I would think if I were the

- 1 government I would argue that the government has 2 a right to present all of its evidence on all of 3 the elements of the crime to a single jury so that that jury can make a moral judgment about 4 whether this defendant has committed the crime 5 as defined by Congress, and the defendant 6 7 doesn't have the right to sort of hide an element from the jury on the first go-round and 8 9 then show it to the jury in a bifurcated 10 proceeding. 11 And I think there already is some 12 evidence of this. So we cite the Harrell case at page 46 of our brief. That's a case in which 13 14 the government -- the prosecutor opposed 15 bifurcation post-Wooden. The judge denied 16 bifurcation. And then the -- the defendant was 17 forced to stipulate to the occasions question. 18 And the jury was told, this is a three-time convicted felon, and then the 19 prosecutor at closing told the jury this is a 20
- 22 felon. So I think that shows that when

21

prosecutors decide they don't want to bifurcate,

drug-slinging, gun-toting, three-time convicted

- judges may well agree with that and that when
- 25 they don't bifurcate, it's going to be seriously

- 1 prejudicial to defendants.
- 2 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Well, of
- 3 course, part of their answer is that this will
- 4 be an incentive for the defendants to plead.
- 5 MR. HARPER: So I think that's right,
- 6 but I think that goes to my point, which is that
- 7 this is -- this is prejudicial whether it's --
- 8 it's -- it forces defendants to plead to worse
- 9 deals or it forces them to go through
- 10 non-bifurcated proceedings in which these prior
- 11 convictions are paraded before the jury.
- 12 JUSTICE ALITO: There are a lot of
- occasions in which a defendant might love to
- 14 have a bifurcated proceeding because jurors
- don't usually think like lawyers, who are open
- 16 to arguments in the alternative, so if the --
- 17 you know, if the defense is going to be I didn't
- do it, but if I did it, I didn't have the intent
- 19 that is necessary under the statute, it might be
- 20 really beneficial to have a trial first on the
- 21 actus reus and then have a separate trial later
- 22 on the mens rea.
- MR. HARPER: So I think there's no
- doubt that defendants are going to want to have
- 25 bifurcated trials. I think the question is

- 1 whether the government is going to want to. And
- 2 Mr. Feigin said that at least the federal
- 3 government is going to be willing to do that in
- 4 most cases, apparently not all cases, but most
- 5 cases.
- 6 But I don't think there's any
- 7 guarantee that -- this is going to apply to the
- 8 states. Whatever this Court says in this case
- 9 is going to apply to the states too, and I don't
- 10 think there's any guarantee that state
- 11 prosecutors are going to feel the same way.
- 12 In fact, I would think -- I mean, I
- would think that this is going to be a pretty
- 14 significant piece of leverage that prosecutors
- 15 can use against defendants to say either plead
- to a worse deal or we're going to try to get
- this in front of a jury, and that's -- and it's
- 18 seriously prejudicial.
- 19 JUSTICE ALITO: Do you think it's the
- 20 right historical question to ask whether there
- 21 was an established precedent on the narrow
- 22 question, whether recidivism questions, whether
- the question whether the defendant had committed
- other offenses in the past, was recognized as an
- 25 exception at the time of the adoption of the

- 1 Sixth Amendment, or would the broader question
- 2 be more appropriate, which was whether it was
- 3 well understood at the time of the adoption of
- 4 the Sixth Amendment that judges could make
- 5 discretionary sentencing decisions, which would
- 6 take into account prior criminal convictions?
- 7 And if it's the broader question, the
- 8 historical evidence is extremely strong, as --
- 9 as distinguished scholars have pointed out. At
- 10 the time of the adoption of the Sixth Amendment,
- 11 the -- the first Congress, which sent the Sixth
- 12 Amendment to the states, also adopted the first
- 13 criminal -- federal criminal proceedings.
- 14 And contrary to the suggestion in
- 15 Apprendi, they didn't say, if you commit -- if
- 16 you commit burglary, you get five years'
- 17 imprisonment. No, they said, if you commit such
- and such an offense, you shall be sentenced to
- 19 no more than a certain sentence, which gave the
- 20 trial judge discretion.
- MR. HARPER: So, to be candid, Your
- 22 Honor, I think there are two lines of history
- 23 here. One is the history you just referenced,
- 24 which is that judges have enormous -- an
- 25 enormous amount of discretion to, you know,

1 change sentences within a sentencing range. 2 The other is the Apprendi line of 3 history, which is that generally speaking, sentence enhancing facts about present crimes 4 were treated as elements that had to go to a 5 jury. And so I think the relevant historical 6 7 question is, was there a uniform understanding about sort of which box these recidivism-related 8 facts fell into? 9 10 And I think the answer is no. I think 11 the answer is that there were at least eight 12 states that we've identified going back to the early 1800s that -- where legislatures had 13 discretion to treat recidivism as an element of 14 15 the offense or not, and that's because 16 recidivism was different than facts about 17 present crimes. It went to punishment only, not guilt. And putting that recidivism -- those 18 recidivism facts before a jury would seriously 19 prejudice the defendant. 20 21 So I think that --2.2 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: Counsel --23 JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: Mr. --24 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: -- when we start 25 talking about history, I -- I get very annoyed

- 1 because, in every history, there are exceptions.
- 2 The question then becomes how many of an
- 3 exception defeats the general rule. I'm not
- 4 going to argue whether it was eight or four. I
- 5 think it was four. And so I don't think that
- 6 that defeats the general rule. That's the
- 7 point.
- 8 As to your earlier question on what
- 9 prejudices a defendant or not, it's really only
- 10 a defendant that has a viable single occasion
- argument who's ever going to think about raising
- it because both with perjury enhancements to
- sentencing that judges possess, as well as
- 14 annoying a judge enough so that a lighter
- sentence is unlikely because, when the sentence
- 16 comes about, you're going to add the 15 years to
- 17 a base that the judge can have from a low to a
- high, so it really is a question at the end, in
- 19 my mind, of a viable argument on a single --
- 20 about a single occasion or not, will it hurt the
- 21 defendant.
- 22 And as others here have said, I don't
- know why we take your judgment as opposed to the
- 24 judgment of the bar.
- MR. HARPER: So --

_	OUSTICE SOTOMATOR. And every criminal
2	defense bar.
3	MR. HARPER: it is certainly a fair
4	point, Your Honor, that the criminal defenders
5	are on the other side. I think they've clearly
6	made a judgment that this rule that Petitioner
7	and the government are urging is a net benefit
8	for criminal defendants, and I I don't think
9	you should take my word over theirs on that.
LO	What I think my submission, though,
L1	is that I think it's indisputable that in some
L2	cases, like Your Honor said, the cases where
L3	this is a close question and the government
L4	refuses to bifurcate, I think it's going to
L5	prejudice defendants. I think that's what the
L6	Harrell case that we cite at page 46 shows.
L7	In some cases, this is going to
L8	prejudice defendants, and I think that
L9	JUSTICE KAGAN: Well, isn't that true
20	of Apprendi generally? I mean, Apprendi was not
21	justified on the basis of this is always going
22	to help defendants. There are any number of
23	elements that a particular defendant might prove
24	and might decide in a particular set of
25	circumstances he would rather argue to a judge.

1 I mean, you know, it just doesn't seem 2 to me that that's a reason for denying the force 3 of Apprendi in this situation. MR. HARPER: So I agree that the same 4 could be said of the prejudice point in 5 Apprendi. But I think this is not just 6 7 something that I'm making up. This is what courts have said going back hundreds of years, 8 there's a reason to treat recidivism 9 differently. 10 11 And so I think Apprendi recognized a 12 tradition as to present crimes, and Apprendi 13 made that very clear at pages 488 and 496 of the 14 opinion in distinguishing Almendarez-Torres. 15 What the Court said there was that 16 Almendarez-Torres was about prior crimes. 17 was about -- it was about issues that didn't go 18 to the defendant's guilt. They went to 19 punishment only. 20 This tradition that we're recognizing 21 here is about present crimes. And I think 2.2 courts recognized that it was both the prejudice 23 point and the fact that this was sort of a collateral issue, it was more like a sentencing 24

issue, was why there was a different tradition

1 as to recidivism. JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: So your point is it wasn't a historical accident necessarily, it 3 was justified by a principle of not prejudicing 4 -- prejudicing defendants? 5 6 MR. HARPER: That's right. And I 7 think a good place to look for this is the Bishop treatise, one of the leading criminal law 8 9 treatise writers of the 19th Century said just that. He said that recidivism is treated 10 11 differently because putting it before a jury is 12 seriously prejudicial to defendants and because this is an issue that's more like a sentencing 13 14 issue, which, as Justice Alito noted, has a 15 tradition for hundreds of years as being not 16 subject to Sixth Amendment constraints. 17 JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: On Justice -- on 18 Justice Sotomayor's question, because I think 19 the methodological question if we get deep into 20 this is pretty important here, how to think about all this, so start with the text. 21 2.2 text itself of the Constitution does not tell us 23 the answer, just the bare words, correct?

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MR. HARPER: Correct.

JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: Okay. So then we

24

- 1 usually look to history. We might not like it,
- 2 but I don't --
- 3 MR. HARPER: Agreed.
- 4 JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: -- unless we're
- 5 just making it up, I don't know where else we're
- 6 going to look. And the question Mr. Fisher
- 7 raised was who has the burden on that, and I
- 8 think I'd like you to speak to who has the
- 9 burden.
- 10 Do you have the burden to show a
- 11 consistent, uniform practice or does he have the
- burden to show a consistent, uniform practice
- going the other way in which recidivism always
- 14 went to the jury?
- 15 MR. HARPER: So I think that is the
- 16 critical question because, if the government has
- the burden, then I see no way in which
- 18 Almendarez-Torres is correctly decided.
- But I think that the government in
- 20 these cases does not have the burden because I
- 21 think, as a default principle, when somebody is
- 22 coming into this Court or a court saying the
- 23 Constitution violates or invalidates my sentence
- or invalidates a statute, typically, it is upon
- 25 that person to show that there is some

- 1 well-established understanding that that's what
- 2 the Constitution means.
- And sometimes, when the text is clear,
- 4 like in the Gaudin case that Mr. Fisher cited,
- 5 then the burden flips to the government to show
- 6 some -- some historical practice that
- 7 contradicts the text.
- But, as Your Honor noted, the text
- 9 here doesn't answer the question, and so we're
- 10 looking to history. And I would say we're not
- only just looking -- we're not looking to
- 12 history directly interpreting the text of the
- 13 Sixth Amendment. We're looking to history --
- we're looking to state common law principles.
- 15 And I think, when the Court is that
- 16 far removed from something actually interpreting
- 17 the Sixth Amendment, the Court should demand a
- 18 level of uniformity in those state common law
- 19 principles before making the leap that the
- 20 Constitution necessarily incorporated those
- 21 common law principles.
- JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: Is the right year
- to look at 1791 or 1868? Obviously, this is a
- 24 federal case, but --
- MR. HARPER: So I think there's

- 1 certainly academic debate about that. I think,
- 2 for purposes of this case, the right -- the time
- 3 of the founding is obviously the most relevant
- 4 time.
- 5 And I guess what I would say is I
- 6 think, if anything, what the history shows here
- 7 is that there was a almost uniform practice that
- 8 legislatures had discretion in this area. So it
- 9 wasn't only the four states where judges were
- 10 allowed to make findings about recidivism. It
- 11 was also four -- four states -- we have
- 12 Virginia, Massachusetts, and Maine, significant
- 13 states, between 1818 and 1824 enacting
- 14 supplemental information statutes that allowed
- 15 the government to withhold recidivism
- 16 allegations from an indictment, despite that --
- generally requiring all elements of an offense
- 18 to be in an indictment. So we have at least
- 19 eight -- and then West Virginia added on a
- 20 similar statute in 1868. So we have eight
- 21 states.
- 22 And then I think the government -- on
- the other side, the government and Petitioner
- 24 haven't cited a single case in any relevant time
- 25 period where a court struck down a statute on

- 1 the ground that it assigned recidivism findings
- 2 to -- to judges or allowed the government to
- 3 withhold these allegations from -- from the
- 4 indictment.
- 5 And so I think, as far as I can see,
- 6 there's an unrebutted tradition here of
- 7 legislatures having discretion when it comes to
- 8 recidivism, and I think there were good reasons
- 9 for that, as we discussed.
- 10 JUSTICE BARRETT: Did all of those
- 11 states -- I mean, you know, the Sixth Amendment
- 12 didn't apply to the states back then. So in --
- when you're saying, well, you can't point to a
- single one in which a court struck it down, were
- there state analogues to the Sixth Amendment
- 16 that would be relevant?
- 17 MR. HARPER: So I think states did
- 18 have comparable jury trial rights, and also
- 19 states in which the supplemental information
- 20 statutes were enacted, they had grand jury
- 21 requirements that required all elements to be in
- 22 an indictment.
- 23 And so -- and these were challenged on
- 24 constitutional grounds, and courts uniformly
- 25 upheld them. This goes all the way back to 1824

- 1 and the Massachusetts Ross case that we cite in
- our brief, all the way through to this Court's
- decision in Graham. There's no decision that
- 4 I'm aware of to the contrary.
- 5 So I do think there is a -- even if it
- 6 was -- even if it were our burden to show a
- 7 uniform tradition here, I think the uniform
- 8 tradition was one of legislative discretion when
- 9 it comes to recidivism.
- 10 JUSTICE BARRETT: What about Mathis
- 11 and Descamps? You know, it's true they're
- 12 statutory cases, but, you know, there is some
- avoidance language in them, which you recognize
- in your brief. Do you want to talk about that a
- 15 little about it?
- 16 MR. HARPER: Sure. So the language in
- 17 Mathis and Descamps, admittedly, not great for
- 18 my position here. I -- I think -- I do think
- 19 that the Court --
- 20 JUSTICE BARRETT: We appreciate your
- 21 candor.
- 22 (Laughter.)
- MR. HARPER: I do think that the Court
- 24 just didn't resolve the constitutional question
- in those cases. They -- they were -- as you

- 1 said, they were avoidance cases. I think most
- of what the Court held in those cases was that
- 3 there is a serious constitutional question about
- 4 the scope of Almendarez-Torres. And I think
- 5 that's what this case is about.
- 6 But I don't think that those cases
- 7 resolved that question, and I don't think any
- 8 other decision of this Court has either.
- 9 JUSTICE JACKSON: Can you turn to the
- 10 theory for a second? You said in your opening
- 11 that you find the other side's position to be
- 12 unprincipled. So why is that?
- MR. HARPER: So for a few reasons. I
- 14 think, first of all, they -- their principle in
- this case, which I think Mr. Fisher reiterated
- in his opening, was that -- this elements-only
- 17 principle, this principle that judges can only
- 18 find facts that juries previously found beyond a
- 19 reasonable doubt.
- 20 And I just don't think that their
- 21 theory, their -- their test that they end up
- 22 articulating line up with that principle because
- 23 they recognize that if the Court were to
- double-down on that elements-only principle, it
- 25 would blow up the categorical -- categorical

- 1 approach because judges, in doing predicate
- 2 felony determinations, often find facts that are
- 3 not elements of prior offenses, like identity,
- 4 like the date of the offense, like the
- 5 sequencing issue in Almendarez-Torres itself.
- 6 So they articulate -- they have to
- 7 fall back from their elements-only principle,
- 8 and they end up articulating standards like the
- 9 government's standard, for example, facts
- 10 encapsulated in judicial records that are
- 11 components of prior convictions. I think that's
- 12 what the government says. That test is in no
- decision of this Court. I don't think it's in a
- 14 decision of any court as far as I can tell.
- 15 And so I think, because they are
- departing from their principle, they are
- articulating novel tests that really don't have
- 18 any grounding in this Court.
- 19 And then the last thing I would say is
- 20 that I think their test, at -- at least the
- 21 government's test, is not descriptively
- 22 accurate, even to -- because the -- the test,
- 23 facts encapsulated in judicial records, that --
- identity is not encapsulated in judicial
- 25 records. The date of the offense is not a

- 1 component of the prior conviction.
- 2 So I think the government's test and I
- 3 think Petitioner's test too, although I'm a
- 4 little less clear on what Petitioner's test
- 5 actually is, I think none of them have a
- 6 principle that actually explains where they end
- 7 up landing.
- 8 JUSTICE KAGAN: I mean, as I
- 9 understand that argument, it's really just to
- 10 say that Almendarez-Torres and Apprendi are in a
- 11 little bit of tension with each other. And who
- would deny that really? I mean, even Apprendi
- 13 understood that.
- 14 But there's nothing about that bit of
- tension that has made the system fail to work.
- 16 And, you know, why would we allow that bit of
- tension, which has existed for decades now, to
- 18 suggest an answer to this question that does not
- 19 seem the one that all our past precedents point
- 20 to?
- 21 MR. HARPER: So I -- I guess I would
- 22 say I don't think there needs to be tension
- 23 between Apprendi and Almendarez-Torres. I
- think, certainly, under the government and
- 25 Petitioner's view, there is tension. But I

- 1 think under -- my reading of Apprendi and
- 2 Almendarez-Torres is that they're -- they drew a
- 3 pretty clear line between facts about prior
- 4 crimes, facts about present crimes. I think,
- 5 again, Apprendi said that multiple times.
- 6 And so I think, if you interpret it
- 7 that way, it's -- the -- the tension sort of
- 8 resolves itself. And I think the fact that the
- 9 Court has -- or courts have found non-elemental
- 10 facts in doing the predicate felony inquiry
- 11 suggests that that's really what the line is, is
- 12 I think my fundamental point.
- JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: Your -- on the
- tension, I think your point is that the history
- 15 has two different rules.
- 16 MR. HARPER: That's right. And I
- 17 think --
- 18 JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: And -- and --
- 19 MR. HARPER: -- Almendarez-Torres
- 20 recognized that.
- 21 JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: -- and it's rooted
- in concern about prejudicing defendants.
- MR. HARPER: That's right. And I
- think, in Apprendi itself, the Court demanded a
- 25 uniform standard as to sentence-enhancing facts

- 1 about present crimes. And so I think it would
- 2 be somewhat anomalous not to require an
- 3 extension of that uniformity down to the
- 4 different tradition of recidivism facts. And I
- 5 think that's exactly what Almendarez-Torres
- 6 recognized, admittedly, before Apprendi, but
- 7 that there was no such uniform tradition in this
- 8 different context. And so, in this context,
- 9 facts about present crimes, those don't need --
- 10 there's no constitutional prescription there.
- 11 JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: Can I ask -- go
- 12 ahead.
- JUSTICE GORSUCH: No, please.
- JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: Go ahead.
- JUSTICE GORSUCH: No, finish up.
- JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: No.
- 17 JUSTICE GORSUCH: Just looking to
- 18 history, I know South Carolina you have in your
- 19 corner. Do you have any other antebellum cases
- 20 from the states?
- MR. HARPER: So we have the Louisiana
- 22 Hudson decision, which I think even Petitioner
- 23 agrees is in our camp. And I think Petitioner
- 24 agrees all of these are in our camp. We have
- 25 the --

- 1 JUSTICE GORSUCH: Well, I know you
- 2 have some later decisions.
- 3 MR. HARPER: Well, that's it. I think
- 4 Hudson is -- I think it's in the 1850s. I could
- 5 be wrong about that. We have an -- we have an
- 6 Alabama decision that's -- I think decisions
- 7 from the early 1900s, but what they were lacking
- 8 is --
- JUSTICE GORSUCH: Yeah. No, no, I'm
- 10 -- I'm -- if we're interpreting the original
- 11 meaning of the Sixth Amendment, I would have
- 12 thought closer-in-time contemporaneous evidence
- 13 would be better. Would you agree with that?
- MR. HARPER: I think that's right, but
- 15 I think what the Alabama cases --
- 16 JUSTICE GORSUCH: And so South
- 17 Carolina is your best one, I think.
- 18 MR. HARPER: That's right. I think --
- JUSTICE GORSUCH: And they've admitted
- that they're an outlier. What do we do about
- 21 that?
- MR. HARPER: So I guess a couple of
- 23 points. First, I think it is true that the four
- 24 states that I think were on the other side of
- 25 this judge -- whether judges or juries had to

- 1 make these recidivism findings, they were an --
- 2 they were an outlier as to the default common
- 3 law rule in this context.
- 4 I concede that the majority of states
- 5 had a default common law rule that these
- 6 recidivism findings or these recidivism facts
- 7 had to be in an indictment and proved to a jury
- 8 beyond a reasonable doubt. I think -- so I
- 9 think South Carolina, Alabama, Louisiana,
- 10 Kansas, they were outliers with respect to that
- 11 tradition.
- But what I don't think they were --
- 13 JUSTICE GORSUCH: And some of them
- 14 weren't even members of -- of the original
- 15 states that formed the compact that led to the
- 16 Sixth Amendment.
- MR. HARPER: That's true, Your Honor,
- 18 but I think the -- and as -- as to your second
- 19 point, the later cases, Alabama, Kansas, they --
- 20 although they come later, they recognize that
- 21 there had been a settled tradition in those
- 22 states. And I think Petitioner and the
- 23 government have shown nothing to -- to
- 24 contradict that. So I think that is a fair
- 25 assumption.

1	And I do think that that so the
2	the fact that there is this different common
3	law tradition in the majority of states, it
4	doesn't I don't think that's enough to
5	establish that this was a fundamental principle
6	that was incorporated into the Constitution
7	because because we have these these states
8	within that majority, Virginia, Massachusetts,
9	Maine, these are significant states that were a
LO	part of the initial compact and that allowed
L1	legislatures to deviate from the common law
L2	rule. And then, when those supplemental
L3	information statutes were challenged in court or
L 4	constitutional grounds, courts rejected those
L5	challenges all the way through to this Court's
L6	decision in 1910 endorsing the Massachusetts
L7	Ross decision from 1824.
L8	So I think there's just a uniform
L9	string of precedents saying this majority commor
20	law rule that recidivism has to be in the
21	indictment and proved to a jury is something the
22	legislature can alter.
23	JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: Can I ask you
24	about bifurcation? Do you think bifurcation is
2.5	completely in the discretion of the trial judge?

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1
                MR. HARPER: I -- I think it's in the
 2
      discretion of the trial judge --
 3
                JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: If you lose here
      and have --
 4
                MR. HARPER: That's right.
 5
                                            I think,
      in the federal system, it is -- under Rule 14, I
 6
7
      think it's subject to the discretion of the
      trial judge, subject to abuse of discretion
 8
     review.
 9
10
                JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: Would there be any
11
      constitutional overlay on that? In other words,
12
      it was impermissible to deny bifurcation under
     these circumstances?
13
14
                MR. HARPER: I don't think so.
15
      think the Court has refused to require
16
     bifurcation as a constitutional matter, and I
17
      don't think the Court should do so in this case.
18
                And I also don't think the Court
19
      should sort of place a thumb on the scale even
      if the Court sides with Petitioner and the
20
21
      government here to say that bifurcation should
22
      ordinarily be required in these cases because I
23
     do think there is something to -- to the -- to
24
      the idea that the government really does have, I
25
      think, a right to present to a single jury all
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- of the -- all of its evidence on all of the
- 2 elements of the crime.
- 3 And if you rule for Petitioner and the
- 4 government here, I think what you are saying is
- 5 that this occasions fact is sort of an element
- 6 of the crime.
- 7 And then -- and then, on
- 8 bifurcation -- I think bifurcation, the other
- 9 problem which I mentioned earlier is that states
- 10 have varying procedures on bifurcation, and so
- some of them make it discretionary, and I think
- 12 -- so it's going to have -- it's hard to say
- 13 exactly how this is going to play out in the
- 14 states.
- 15 JUSTICE BARRETT: That's true with
- 16 respect to Old Chief too?
- 17 MR. HARPER: Correct. I think Old
- 18 Chief -- I think Old Chief doesn't really solve
- 19 the prejudice problem because, as you see from
- the Harrell case we cite, that case involved an
- 21 Old Chief stipulation, so bifurcation was
- 22 denied. The defendant was then forced to
- 23 stipulate or he chose to stipulate, I guess,
- 24 under Old Chief.
- 25 And that stipulation has to be read to

- 1 the jury, and that jury has to be told this is a
- 2 three-time convicted felon. That's a big
- difference from being told this is, you know, a
- 4 one-time convicted felon.
- 5 JUSTICE BARRETT: Justice Alito asked
- 6 questions of your friends on the other side
- 7 about -- and Justice Jackson too -- about what
- 8 kind of proof would be used to prove this up to
- 9 a jury. Do you have anything to say about that?
- 10 MR. HARPER: So I think, if it's going
- 11 before a jury, subject to the rules of evidence,
- which, admittedly, I'm not an expert on, I think
- anything that's admissible and relevant I would
- think would be able to be used to prove this
- 15 question to a jury.
- 16 JUSTICE BARRETT: But it would make it
- harder since they don't apply to a judge and a
- 18 judge has to find these things by a
- 19 preponderance if you're right?
- 20 MR. HARPER: I think that it
- 21 probably -- I'm sure the standard would make it
- 22 harder for them to prove these issues.
- 23 Again, I don't think it -- I agree
- 24 with the government that I don't think this is
- 25 going to matter in all that many cases because I

- 1 think most of these cases are going to be pretty
- 2 clear that the crimes were on separate
- 3 occasions. This case, for example, I think it's
- 4 clear beyond a doubt, as the government said,
- 5 that this is -- these crimes occurred multiple
- 6 days apart. They were on separate occasions.
- 7 And I think most juries -- I guess the
- 8 one point I would make is there is a potential
- 9 nullification risk, I think, in some of these
- 10 cases because of the severe mandatory minimums
- 11 at issue. And I think the Petitioner cited one
- 12 case in his cert petition where a Georgia jury
- 13 refused to find different occasions despite
- 14 the -- the -- the convictions being or
- the offenses being months and years apart.
- So I do think that might happen in
- 17 some cases, but for the most part, I think these
- are going to be pretty straightforward.
- 19 JUSTICE BARRETT: Thank you.
- 20 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Thank -- thank
- 21 you, counsel.
- 22 Justice Thomas, any -- anything
- 23 further?
- 24 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: There is a lot of
- 25 debate on whether historically jury

- 1 nullification was an okay thing.
- 2 MR. HARPER: That's right, Your Honor.
- 3 I don't want to wade into that debate.
- 4 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: No, I'm not
- 5 suggesting we do. But it is an open question.
- 6 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Anything
- 7 further? No?
- 8 Thank you, counsel.
- 9 Rebuttal, Mr. Fisher.
- 10 REBUTTAL ARGUMENT OF JEFFREY L. FISHER
- 11 ON BEHALF OF THE PETITIONER
- 12 MR. FISHER: Thank you. I'd like to
- cover two topics. First, a couple more words
- 14 about bifurcation.
- There was some talk about state
- practices. Even in 1967, when the Court looked
- 17 at this issue in Spencer, it noted that the
- 18 majority of the states require bifurcation by
- 19 statute. It's not even a prosecutorial
- 20 discretion, discretionary decision.
- 21 And I think that trend has continued
- for all the common-sense reasons laid out in
- 23 the -- in the briefs you have. So, Justice
- 24 Kavanaugh, it's not even a constitutional
- 25 question necessarily. It's just already been

- 1 decided by the states.
- 2 If you had -- you know, this is a
- 3 federal case where you have your own supervisory
- 4 powers and you can, I think, you know, make
- 5 whatever suggestions you like in the opinion,
- 6 and we think it would be appropriate for the
- 7 Court to say that bifurcation is the accepted
- 8 solution here that seems to be the right one.
- 9 I'd also like to say a couple words
- 10 about the harmless error conversation that's
- 11 taken place today.
- We haven't briefed that issue
- 13 precisely because the Court's common practice
- 14 and -- and overwhelming practice is to leave
- 15 decisions -- leave questions like that that were
- 16 not addressed by the lower courts for the lower
- 17 courts to decide in the first instance.
- 18 And that's what we'd ask for the Court
- 19 to do here. And -- and forgive me, I may have
- 20 even misunderstood the way the amicus
- 21 appointment works in this case. You know,
- 22 of course, we are -- we are not in line with the
- 23 government on harmless error in this case, but
- the government's top-side brief said the case
- 25 should be remanded for harmless error.

1	And so, on the issue on which we are
2	adverse to the government, you know, I don't
3	know that amicus can come in and tell this Court
4	to go ahead and address it.
5	But leaving you know, leaving that
6	perhaps thorny issue of the Court's practice
7	aside, in all events, we think the safest thing
8	is to leave that for remand.
9	But but I'll just add a couple of
LO	things about the factual conversation that took
L1	place today. Remember, when they when you
L2	ask whether these crimes that are alleged to be
L3	committed on eight days, you know, on an
L4	eight-day stretch, three different crimes on an
L5	eight-day stretch could possibly be the same
L6	occasion, you are yourselves relying on these
L7	kinds of documents that you have noted in Mathis
L8	and Descamps are highly unreliable. And, in
L9	fact, these documents themselves, the plea
20	documents themselves here say that Mr. Erlinger
21	agrees to cooperate against all of his
22	co-defendants.
23	There were no co-defendants in these
24	cases. And so, Justice Jackson, you noted that
25	an indictment might say on or about certain

1	days. And when you get into an eight-day
2	stretch, on or about matters quite a lot.
3	So what we would say on remand in part
4	and this goes to Justice Gorsuch's questions
5	about how harmless error would work here is
6	that the government may not have been able to
7	prove beyond a reasonable doubt to a jury that
8	these crimes were committed on separate
9	occasions, and that's enough to allow you
10	know, to allow a retrial or just at least
11	renegotiations on that point.
12	If the Court has no further questions,
13	I'll submit.
14	CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Thank you,
15	counsel.
16	Mr. Harper, this Court appointed you
17	to brief and argue this case as an amicus curiae
18	in support of the judgment below. You have ably
19	discharged that responsibility, for which we are
20	grateful.
21	The case is submitted.
22	(Whereupon, at 11:40 a.m., the case
23	was submitted.)
24	

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