SUPREME COURT OF THE UNITED STATES

IN THE SUPREME COURT	OF THE	UNITED	STATES
HAMID MOHAMED AHMED ALI REHAIF	',)		
Petitioner,)		
v.)	No. 17-	-9560
UNITED STATES,)		
Respondent.)		

Pages: 1 through 64

Place: Washington, D.C.

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5	v.) No. 17-9560
6	UNITED STATES,)
7	Respondent.)
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LO	Washington, D.C.
11	Tuesday, April 23, 2019
12	
13	The above-entitled matter came on for oral
L4	argument before the Supreme Court of the United
15	States at 2:02 p.m.
L6	
L7	APPEARANCES:
18	ROSEMARY T. CAKMIS, ESQ., Orlando, Florida;
L9	on behalf of the Petitioner.
20	ALLON KEDEM, Assistant to the Solicitor General;
21	Department of Justice, Washington, D.C.;
22	on behalf of the Respondent.
23	
24	
25	

1	C O N T E N T S	
2	ORAL ARGUMENT OF:	PAGE
3	ROSEMARY T. CAKMIS, ESQ.	
4	On behalf of the Petitioner	3
5	ORAL ARGUMENT OF:	
6	ALLON KEDEM, ESQ.	
7	On behalf of the Respondent	25
8	REBUTTAL ARGUMENT OF:	
9	ROSEMARY T. CAKMIS, ESQ.	
10	On behalf of the Petitioner	62
11		
12		
13		
14		
15		
16		
17		
18		
19		
20		
21		
22		
23		
24		
25		

1	PROCEEDINGS
2	(2:02 p.m.)
3	CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: We'll hear
4	argument next in Case 17-9560, Rehaif versus
5	United States.
6	Ms. Cakmis.
7	ORAL ARGUMENT OF ROSEMARY T. CAKMIS
8	ON BEHALF OF THE PETITIONER
9	MS. CAKMIS: Thank you, Mr. Chief
10	Justice, and may it please the Court:
11	To knowingly violate 922(g), one must
12	know the crucial fact that transforms his
13	otherwise innocent firearm possession into a
14	10-year felony. That fact is his status.
15	Applying a knowledge requirement to that fact
16	makes sense because, ordinarily, firearm
17	possession is lawful and, in fact, in most
18	cases, constitutionally protected.
19	So it only makes sense that a person
20	should be required to know he fits within that
21	status before his firearm possession becomes
22	illegal.
23	JUSTICE GINSBURG: What do you do with
24	this in this very same statute, there are
25	crimes where the legislature has said

- explicitly -- well, let's take 922(q), says 1 2 selling firearms to one that the defendant 3 knows or has reasonable cause to believe is a 4 felon, so that makes -- there's a case where 5 the status, felon, has to be known to the defendant, but in the, what is it, 922(q), we 6 7 don't have that knowing requirement. 8 So why should we insert it when it's not there? 9 10 MS. CAKMIS: Because 924(a)(2) states 11 that the person must knowingly violate 922(g). "Knowingly" modifies the verb "violate" and the 12 direct object, "922(g)." 13 14 Several of the provisions that are 15 listed in 924(a)(2) do have other types of 16 knowledge requirements, but the "knowingly" still forms the default or the baseline 17 18 knowledge if there is not an otherwise inserted 19 knowledge. 20 Additionally, this Court's precedent 21 -- and that makes sense in light of this Court's precedent, which attaches a mens rea to 22
- every element that criminalizes otherwise innocent conduct. In fact, this Court does so
- even when "knowingly" is not in the statute.

5

The Court reads it in. Here, Congress wasn't silent. It put 2 3 "knowingly" in the statute for a purpose. JUSTICE KAGAN: Ms. Cakmis, do -- do 5 you agree that there is no mens rea element 6 attached to the jurisdictional element? 7 MS. CAKMIS: Yes, Your Honor. JUSTICE KAGAN: And so what is the 8 difference between the two? 9 10 MS. CAKMIS: This Court has carved out 11 a very narrow exception for jurisdiction, 12 because that relates only to the power of the Congress to legislate, whereas, in our 13 14 instance, we're talking about a substantive 15 fact, something that criminalizes otherwise 16 innocent conduct, something that goes to the 17 defendant's culpability. JUSTICE ALITO: But isn't the -- the 18 19 theory behind the conclusion that there's no mens rea element for a jurisdict- -- no mens 20 21 requirement for a jurisdictional element, the -- the inference that this is not the kind of 22 23 element for which Congress wanted to have a -a -- a mental element? It's an inference about 24 25 congressional intent. Would you agree to that?

1	MS. CAKMIS: No, Your Honor, I would
2	respectfully submit it is an exception carved
3	out by the Court.
4	JUSTICE ALITO: Yeah, and
5	MS. CAKMIS: Because
6	JUSTICE ALITO: and what's the
7	basis for the exception? Why have we carved
8	out that exception?
9	MS. CAKMIS: In the Commerce Clause,
10	for example, the defendant's conduct is not
11	related to that interstate transportation.
12	There's no requirement that the defendant
13	himself must transport the firearms in
14	interstate commerce.
15	JUSTICE ALITO: Well, Congress could
16	attach a mental element to that, could it not?
17	MS. CAKMIS: Yes, it could. And
18	JUSTICE ALITO: All right. And so why
19	do we infer that it didn't?
20	MS. CAKMIS: Because that goes to
21	Congress's power to legislate and not to the
22	defendant's conduct, whereas the status
23	JUSTICE ALITO: No, no. Congress
24	could attach a mental element to the
25	iurisdictional element

1	MS. CAKMIS: Right.
2	JUSTICE ALITO: It could, right?
3	MS. CAKMIS: Yes, sir.
4	JUSTICE ALITO: We infer we we
5	say but it didn't. Right?
6	MS. CAKMIS: Yes, sir.
7	JUSTICE ALITO: And why do we say
8	that?
9	MS. CAKMIS: Again, because of the
10	difference that's being targeted. The
11	defendant's conduct is not being targeted by
12	that element. It's something
13	JUSTICE ALITO: But why? Why do we
14	say that it's I'll try one final time.
15	MS. CAKMIS: I'm sorry.
16	JUSTICE ALITO: What what is the
17	theory behind the conclusion that Congress did
18	not want the mental element to apply to the
19	jurisdiction the mental requirement to apply
20	to the jurisdictional element?
21	MS. CAKMIS: And, again, from what
22	I've gleaned from this Court's cases, it's that
23	the defendant's culpability is not at issue.
24	JUSTICE KAGAN: Well, this
25	JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: The

1	blameworthiness of the defendant is not
2	MS. CAKMIS: Yes, sir.
3	JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: right
4	MS. CAKMIS: Yes, sir.
5	JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: in those
6	elements, because whether you knew about the
7	jurisdictional hook doesn't really go, we've
8	assumed, to your blameworthiness, whereas
9	whether you knew the elements of the offense,
10	the other elements of the offense do, right?
11	MS. CAKMIS: Yes, Your Honor, thank
12	you.
13	JUSTICE ALITO: But it's an inference
14	about what Congress intended. That's what it
15	we we infer Congress didn't want this.
16	It could have done it, but it didn't do it. It
17	didn't say it didn't do it directly, but we
18	infer that it didn't do it.
19	MS. CAKMIS: Yes, Your Honor.
20	JUSTICE ALITO: And the reason we
21	we infer that because we think this is just not
22	the kind of element that Congress wants to have
23	a mental requirement attach to, unless it says
24	so expressly.
25	MS. CAKMIS: Yes, Your Honor. We do

1 infer that a mental element would attach to it 2 if it's not simply jurisdictional, if it's not 3 solely concerning Congress's power to legislate but has a substantive hook. JUSTICE ALITO: Okay. So what is the 5 6 -- what reason would there be to infer that 7 Congress wanted the mental requirement to apply to the -- the defendant's own status? 8 9 MS. CAKMIS: First of all, there is 10 the language and structure of the statute. 11 They put "knowingly" directly into 922 --12 924(a)(2) in front of "violate 922(q)." 13 If they had only wanted it to skip and 14 to apply to the jurisdictional element --15 excuse me -- to the possession element, they 16 logically would have put it immediately in front of the possession element, after the nine 17 18 categories of people. 19 JUSTICE ALITO: What if there were no mental -- what if the statute itself made no 20 21 mention of any mens rea? 22 MS. CAKMIS: Even when the statute is 23 silent, this Court has inferred a mens rea for each substantive element, each element that 24 25 relates to blameworthiness and to the -- it

1 criminalizes otherwise innocent conduct. 2 JUSTICE ALITO: So then your argument 3 really doesn't depend on the text of the statute? 5 MS. CAKMIS: Correct, Your Honor. The 6 text supports us, but, also, this Court's 7 inferences applying a mens rea to each 8 substantive element supports us. Also, the purpose of FOPA in inserting "knowingly" in the 9 10 first place, in order to ensure gun owners are not caught up in a broad net for honest or 11 12 innocent mistakes. 13 JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: I thought your 14 argument did depend on the text of the statute, 15 but you were saying in the alternative, even if 16 there were no mens rea element, our cases 17 require us to still require mens rea. 18 MS. CAKMIS: Our argument is --19 JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: Right? 20 MS. CAKMIS: -- supported by the 21 statute's text and structure, and we would 22 respectfully submit the text and structure are 23 plain, and so we don't need to go to the presumptions or legislative history. 24

But, in the event that the Court feels

1 it's not plain, the next step is to look at the 2 presumptions. And this Court's presumptions, 3 even if "knowingly" is not there, is -- this Court presumes "knowingly" is read in. 4 5 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: Would this be --6 JUSTICE GINSBURG: I have a --7 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: -- different --8 JUSTICE GINSBURG: -- question about the consequences of -- of your position, and 9 the constitutional -- answer the -- to the 10 11 constitutional question shouldn't turn on it, 12 but, as a practical matter, I think I'm right that most of these possession cases are 13 14 felon-in-possession cases. 15 MS. CAKMIS: Yes, Your Honor. 16 JUSTICE GINSBURG: And if that's right 17 and you prevail, then how many people who have 18 been convicted under felon-in-possession 19 charges could now say, well, the Supreme Court has said what has happened to me, I can't be 20 21 convicted of a crime I was convicted of, so I 22 want -- I want to get out. I want habeas. 23 If we say that the -- read the requirement to go to the status, as well as the 24

conduct, the possession, then wouldn't people

- 1 who have been convicted have a habeas avenue to
- 2 pursue?
- 3 MS. CAKMIS: There would be a habeas
- 4 avenue to pursue, Your Honor. However, habeas
- 5 is not nearly as simple to navigate as a
- 6 criminal proceeding. And once you reach the
- 7 land of habeas, you have cause and prejudice
- 8 that have to be shown for procedural default.
- 9 It's even harsher than harmless error
- 10 when you get into the habeas world. And so the
- 11 number of people who might want to ask for
- relief might be more, but there is only a small
- but significant number of people out there who
- 14 actually had a genuine dispute --
- 15 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Well --
- 16 MS. CAKMIS: -- about their knowledge
- 17 of their status.
- 18 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Well, I
- 19 suppose it would get to whether or not a jury
- 20 was instructed on the element of the offense
- 21 that had to be -- that it had to be knowing.
- 22 So it may be broader than -- than that.
- 23 And, in my experience,
- 24 felon-in-possession is almost always what
- 25 people are charged with in -- at this level

- 1 because it's the easiest thing to prove. You
- 2 can prove whether they're a felon or not and
- 3 you can prove whether they had a gun. You
- 4 don't have to get into all the messy stuff
- 5 about what they were up to.
- 6 So I would think it would be a very,
- 7 very substantial number of convictions.
- 8 MS. CAKMIS: But then there's the
- 9 practical and the legal answer. The practical
- answer, in all honesty, is that not that many
- 11 people are going to be able to overcome all the
- 12 huge procedural hurdles that are placed in
- 13 front of habeas relief.
- 14 And unless they had a genuine issue of
- 15 fact or a genuine issue regarding their
- 16 knowledge of their status, the chances of
- 17 prevailing in habeas are slim to no, if that
- 18 helps.
- JUSTICE GORSUCH: What percentage of
- those guilty verdicts are by way of plea versus
- 21 trial?
- 22 MS. CAKMIS: There -- for a Section
- 922(g), approximately 95 percent are guilty
- 24 pleas. And there's no reason to believe that
- that's going to change significantly one way or

1 another. 2 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: Could -- could you 3 tell me exactly what do you think the -- what 4 are the facts he would need to know to be 5 guilty? Because you can't have a mistake of 6 law. 7 MS. CAKMIS: Correct. 8 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: And you can't -and you can't be ignorant of the law. So what 9 10 are the facts the government would have to prove? That he knew his visa was conditioned 11 12 13 MS. CAKMIS: Yes. 14 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: -- on -- on his 15 being a student? 16 MS. CAKMIS: Yes, Your Honor, that he knew he was admitted into this country lawfully 17 on a student non-immigrant visa, that the visa 18 had specific requirements, and that he failed 19 20 to comply with or violated those requirements. 21 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: All right. Does

he need to know that -- I thought I read

somewhere that he thought an immigration

officer or judge had to revoke his visa. Did I

read that wrong? Did I --

22

23

24

1 MS. CAKMIS: No, Your Honor. In the 2 trial court, that was another defense that was 3 posited, that he wasn't lawfully and illegally 4 in the country until an immigration judge had 5 adjudged him to be so. But that's not the 6 issue now before the Court. 7 It's the second aspect that the 8 government --9 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: So your -- the 10 condition is that he knew he came in on a -- on a student visa that said he had to remain a 11 12 student? 13 MS. CAKMIS: Yes, ma'am, Your Honor. 14 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: And if they show 15 that he was told that at the time of admission 16 and he stopped being a student, that's enough? 17 MS. CAKMIS: Yes, Your Honor. 18 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: So how do we not 19 go to harmless error here? I mean, at some 20 point --21 MS. CAKMIS: I'm sorry? JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: -- he knows he 22 23 stopped going to school. 24 MS. CAKMIS: I -- I apologize. 25 didn't hear.

1	JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: How how don't
2	we have harmless error here? At some point, he
3	knows he stopped going to school.
4	MS. CAKMIS: We only have
5	JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: He knows that he
6	came in on a student visa because that's the
7	only kind of visa he had.
8	So what's his why isn't this
9	harmless error, even if we reach this issue in
10	your favor?
11	MS. CAKMIS: In our situation, we only
12	have one side of the story because, before
13	trial, the government moved in limine to keep
14	out the defense, and the court agreed with the
15	government on the jury instruction that the
16	jury was specifically instructed the government
17	does not have to prove Mr. Rehaif knew his
18	status.
19	JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: That doesn't
20	answer my question. What could be otherwise
21	be his defense?
22	MS. CAKMIS: That he was unaware that
23	he had been academically dismissed and was now
24	out of school.
25	JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: That he didn't

- 1 know he had been -- I mean -- I mean, every 2 student knows whether he goes to school or not.
- 3 MS. CAKMIS: There is an opportunity
- 4 for reasonable mistake here, Your Honor, just
- 5 like with the other categories.
- 6 JUSTICE GINSBURG: Even though he was
- 7 -- he was out on a -- a firing range, and he
- 8 should have been at school if he hadn't been
- 9 dismissed?
- 10 (Laughter.)
- 11 MS. CAKMIS: He also had a hunting
- license, for example, that the defense wanted
- 13 to introduce into evidence. And that's --
- 14 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: He was taking
- 15 a course on firearms.
- MS. CAKMIS: He could have been.
- 17 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: But, I mean,
- does the evidence suggest that there was a lot
- 19 of confusion about his status as a student?
- MS. CAKMIS: The government's evidence
- 21 is all that we have because the defense didn't
- 22 introduce it. But, if the defense had been
- 23 allowed to introduce the hunting license, there
- 24 -- the court said there would be confusion
- 25 because he didn't have to have knowledge.

1	But a hunting license was relevant
2	because, if he thought he was a student still,
3	if you're on an F1 visa, you're allowed to
4	possess a firearm anywhere at any time if you
5	have a hunting license.
6	So the fact that he went out and got
7	one and then went to the firing range and shot
8	the firearms indicated would have indicated
9	or supported his defense.
10	Additionally, he was stopped for a
11	traffic infraction, and no one told him at that
12	point that he had a warrant out for him or that
13	he was illegally here, which the court kept
14	that out of evidence because it would have
15	caused confusion as to knowledge and as to
16	status.
17	But, again, it would have been
18	relevant to his knowledge if that was allowed
19	to be a defense.
20	JUSTICE ALITO: Suppose someone who is
21	admitted on a student visa doesn't go to
22	school, has every reason to know, understands
23	that he has to continue in school if for his
24	visa to be valid, and he has every reason to
25	know that he's not any longer considered to be

- a student by the school, hasn't been there for
- 2 months and months and months, hasn't done one
- 3 single thing, but doesn't actually know for
- 4 sure that they have expelled him.
- 5 Your position is that that person
- 6 would not fall within the statute?
- 7 MS. CAKMIS: Our position is that that
- 8 would be a jury question.
- 9 JUSTICE ALITO: No. The question is
- 10 what in the end -- in -- in his heart of -- in
- 11 his mind, he does not know that he is not a
- 12 student, but he has every reason to know that
- 13 he is no longer a student.
- 14 MS. CAKMIS: Again, with respect, if
- someone has every reason to know, it can be
- inferred that the person does know.
- 17 Intent and knowledge are --
- 18 JUSTICE ALITO: All right. What if
- 19 the jury or the judge, whoever is the
- 20 fact-finder, comes to the conclusion he didn't
- 21 really know, but he had every reason to know?
- 22 Is that person guilty or not guilty?
- MS. CAKMIS: If the fact-finder finds
- that he truly did not know, then he would not
- 25 be guilty, Your Honor.

1	JUSTICE ALITO: And do you do you
2	think that's really what Congress meant here?
3	MS. CAKMIS: Yes, Your Honor, but I
4	don't think that will happen in that type of a
5	situation. I think that take, for example,
6	the dreamers, children who come into this
7	country with their parents illegally, live here
8	all their lives and think they're law-abiding
9	citizens, only to find out later in adulthood
10	that they never were law-abiding citizens.
11	They're not citizens at all.
12	But, if that person who had no idea he
13	was here illegally or unlawfully possessed a
14	gun, he would be subject to 10 years in prison
15	under the way the case the law has been
16	interpreted by the court below.
17	We're asking the Court to apply its
18	mens rea presumptions, as the Court has done in
19	the past, in every case when confronted by
20	them, and to look at the and to apply mens
21	rea to the knowledge to the status element.
22	That way, at least
23	JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: It does seem
24	fairly easy for the government to prove status
25	like you're a felon-in-possession because

- 1 there's a whole series of ways you should know 2 you're a felon, a transcript of you pleading 3 guilty could be one of them, or a judgment of 4 conviction, you have to be there to get that. 5 MS. CAKMIS: Exactly. 6 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: But how about 7 922(q)(3), who says, where the status element is being addicted to a controlled substance, 8 why would Congress want to punish someone who 9 10 is aware of being addicted because they sought 11 help but not when someone -- but not someone 12 who is in denial, meaning my parents, yeah, put me in a program, but they put me in against my 13 14 will. 15 MS. CAKMIS: And if the person knew 16 the facts underlying the legal definition of "addicted," they knew that they were dependent 17 18 on those drugs, they knew that when they 19 weren't taking them, they started having withdrawals or whatever the legal definition, 20 21 the facts --22 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: But how would the
- government be able to prove that? Meaning -
 MS. CAKMIS: In the bulk of the cases,
- 25 practically speaking, it's going to be proved

2.2

1 by the same evidence that the government uses 2 to show the person was addicted. And in -- as in all the other statutes 3 4 that require knowledge, the jury will have to 5 infer knowledge through reasonable inferences or find that those reasonable inferences don't 6 7 support the knowledge. What about 8 JUSTICE ALITO: subparagraph 8, which applies to a very -- to 9 -- to a set of individuals who are defined in a 10 11 very complicated way? So there has to be a restraining order that includes a finding that 12 the person represents a credible threat to the 13 14 physical safety of an intimate partner or a 15 child, and then the order by its terms must 16 explicitly prohibit the use, attempted use, or threatened use of physical force against such 17 18 intimate partner or child that would reasonably be expected to cause bodily injury. 19 20 So it has to be proven that the defendant knew all of those things? 21 MS. CAKMIS: The defendant knew the 22 fact that he had been to court or he had been 23 given notice of court because of a restraining 24 25 order that was related to his violent conduct.

1	JUSTICE ALITO: And he but he has
2	to know all the all those characteristics of
3	the restraining order?
4	MS. CAKMIS: Yes, Your Honor, which
5	would be demonstrated by the restraining order
6	that he received a copy of in the bulk of the
7	cases. That hasn't been prosecuted nearly as
8	much as, of course, the felon-in-possession,
9	but the felon-in-possession is illustrative
10	because it shows, if you have a judgment, for
11	the most part, you're going to know why this
12	judgment came about that you were facing 10
13	years in prison or 50 years in prison. It's
14	JUSTICE ALITO: If someone is charged
15	with being a felon-in-possession, and it the
16	prosecution has to prove that the person knew
17	that this offense was a felony, can the
18	prosecution be prohibited from can the
19	defendant, by offering to stipulate, prohibit
20	the prosecution from proving the nature of the
21	felony?
22	Because, if all the jury knows is that
23	there was a conviction for a felony, then, you
24	know, the jury doesn't know how serious this
25	crime was. The more serious it is, the more

2.4

1 likely it is the person was aware of it. 2 Normally, you can't force a party to 3 agree to stipulate a fact that the party is 4 entitled to prove. 5 MS. CAKMIS: Which would make Old 6 Chief an even stronger tool in the prosecutor's 7 hands because the prosecutor would not have to stipulate if the defendant is challenging his 8 knowledge of status. He cannot force the 9 10 prosecutor to stipulate because it would then become probative. The nature of the offense 11 would be probative to a fact, and the probative 12 13 value would outweigh the prejudice. 14 JUSTICE ALITO: Well, if that's true, 15 then you -- you are perhaps not going to win a 16 great victory for people charged with being a felon-in-possession. So then the prosecution 17 18 can prove -- even if there's an offer to 19 stipulate, can prove, well, this person was previously convicted of rape and bank robbery 20 21 and -- and assault. 22 MS. CAKMIS: If --23 JUSTICE ALITO: That's true? MS. CAKMIS: If the defendant is 24

challenging his knowledge that it was a

- 1 felony -- if he's just challenging his
- 2 knowledge that he ever was convicted, that
- 3 might be different.
- 4 But, if he's challenging his knowledge
- 5 that he knew this was a felony or that he knew
- 6 it was a serious offense punishable by more
- 7 than one year, and he claims, I didn't know
- 8 that, then he's made that probative, the type
- 9 of offense, the nature of it, and the name.
- 10 And we believe -- if the Court has no
- 11 further questions, I would like to reserve the
- 12 rest of the time.
- 13 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Thank you,
- 14 counsel.
- MS. CAKMIS: Thank you.
- 16 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Mr. Kedem.
- 17 ORAL ARGUMENT OF ALLON KEDEM
- ON BEHALF OF THE RESPONDENT
- MR. KEDEM: Mr. Chief Justice, and may
- 20 it please the Court:
- 21 The Firearm Owners' Protection Act
- does not take the unusual step of requiring
- 23 proof that the defendant had subjective
- 24 awareness of his own legal status, nor does it
- 25 create a safe harbor for aliens or felons who

- 1 remain ignorant, even recklessly ignorant, of
- 2 their own circumstances.
- 3 Instead, FOPA reflects the
- 4 long-standing nationwide consensus that a
- 5 defendant knowingly violates the statute if he,
- 6 despite his prohibited status, knowingly
- 7 possesses a gun.
- 8 I think it's --
- 9 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: What do you do
- 10 with that dreamer?
- 11 MR. KEDEM: Pardon?
- JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: What do you do
- 13 with that dreamer -- with that dreamer example
- or a student who got a visa from a certified
- institution and all of a sudden, unbeknownst to
- 16 him or her, the school is decertified? And so
- they're no longer in status.
- 18 What -- I -- I agree with you, in the
- vast majority of cases, the status is pretty
- 20 self-evident, but -- or lack thereof is
- 21 self-evident. But do you think Congress
- intended to include those innocent people as
- 23 well?
- MR. KEDEM: So I --
- 25 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: Innocent of

2.7

- 1 knowing their illegality.
- 2 MR. KEDEM: Sure. I acknowledge that
- 3 application of the government's test in certain
- 4 hypothetical examples that we could come up
- 5 with would produce harsh results. And perhaps
- 6 you're not comforted by the fact that this
- 7 provision is applied many thousands of times
- 8 every year, and no one has been able to
- 9 identify an example like the type you've raised
- 10 or anything close to it.
- 11 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: Well, I quess my
- 12 question becomes, what do we do with the
- 13 Staples presumption?
- 14 MR. KEDEM: Sure.
- 15 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: That you -- we're
- 16 not going -- we're going to not read in a or
- 17 read out a mental element for the conduct or
- 18 the part of an element that makes you guilty of
- 19 something that's otherwise not guilty.
- 20 Possessing a gun is not in and of itself a
- 21 blameworthy conduct.
- MR. KEDEM: That's correct.
- JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: And the only
- 24 blameworthy conduct is if you're an illegal
- 25 alien.

2.8

1 MR. KEDEM: That's correct, but our 2 argument here is not that possessing a gun is 3 blameworthy or inherently dangerous and, 4 therefore, you're charged with knowing the law. 5 Our argument is that there are certain people 6 who, by virtue of their circumstances and 7 status, are charged with knowing or at least 8 being on notice of whether they have a certain 9 status. 10 So someone who is an alien has a -has an obligation, if they're here in the 11 12 United States, to know whether they're here 13 lawfully or unlawfully. 14 JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: But what if 15 they're mistaken? So it's a mistake of fact. 16 Mistake of fact has always been recognized as a 17 defense, or, put conversely, knowledge has 18 always been required -- going back to Justice Jackson in Morissette and all through the 19 cases, as required for all the elements of the 20 21 offense. 22 MR. KEDEM: The court of appeals 23 acknowledged that --24 JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: So what if there's 25 a -- what if there's a mistake of fact?

1	MR. KEDEM: Sure. The court of
2	appeals recognized that, in a case of a genuine
3	mistake of fact, it might be willing to
4	acknowledge that.
5	JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: Well
6	MR. KEDEM: But that would not be
7	JUSTICE GORSUCH: Well, once but
8	then the camel's nose is under the tent, isn't
9	it, counsel? Intent matters except for when it
10	doesn't? Knowledge matters except for when it
11	doesn't?
12	MR. KEDEM: No, Your Honor, mistake of
13	fact is an affirmative defense that has to be
14	raised
15	JUSTICE GORSUCH: No, I'm I'm
16	MR. KEDEM: and proven beyond a
17	preponderance of the evidence.
18	JUSTICE GORSUCH: Oh, okay, so you're
19	just saying there's an affirmative defense.
20	MR. KEDEM: There there
21	might
22	JUSTICE GORSUCH: So we're just going
23	to recreate this as an affirmative defense
24	throughout? So so what's the what's the
25	delta between the defendant's position and the

30

government's position then? 2 MR. KEDEM: It's whether it has to be 3 proven in every single trial, just as --JUSTICE GORSUCH: Well, let -- let me 5 -- let me ask you, just to -- just to follow up on Rob -- since Robert Jackson's name's been 6 7 invoked here, Morissette, "the contention that an injury can amount to a crime only when 8 inflicted by intention is no provincial or 9 transient notion. It is as universal and 10 11 persistent in mature systems of law as belief 12 in freedom of the human will and a consequent ability and duty of the normal individual to 13 14 choose between good and evil." What do we do with that? And this --15 16 this Court's presumption that some mens rea is necessary --17 18 MR. KEDEM: And it is. 19 JUSTICE GORSUCH: -- and here we're talking about the only thing that separates not 20 21 just innocent conduct but constitutionally 22 protected conduct potentially is --23 MR. KEDEM: So that is --JUSTICE GORSUCH: -- is knowledge of 24 25 the status, knowledge that I am a felon. I --

- 1 as you well know, I had a case where the fellow
- 2 was told by the judge that he was not a felon
- 3 when he was convicted. And yet he was put in
- 4 jail for 10 years afterwards because the
- 5 government didn't have to prove that he knew
- 6 his status.
- 7 What do we do about Justice Jackson's
- 8 admonition to us?
- 9 MR. KEDEM: His admonition was about
- 10 creating strict liability offenses, which this
- 11 is not. If you start with the presumption that
- 12 the defendant is going to possess the gun --
- JUSTICE GORSUCH: No, it wasn't just
- 14 about that. It was about mens rea.
- MR. KEDEM: So --
- 16 JUSTICE GORSUCH: And -- and we've got
- 17 X-Citement Video as well. So if, you know --
- 18 MR. KEDEM: So all of those cases are
- ones in which there was a list of elements,
- 20 usually followed by some state -- some word
- 21 like "knowingly," and the presumption is that
- it applies to all of the other elements.
- We don't have that here. We have a
- 24 separate provision, 920 --
- JUSTICE GORSUCH: Well, with respect,

- we've got maybe even worse here. "Knowingly"
- 2 precedes certain elements.
- 3 MR. KEDEM: It precedes --
- 4 JUSTICE GORSUCH: And this is the very
- 5 first element that follows after the word
- 6 "knowingly violates." This is the very first
- 7 element.
- 8 MR. KEDEM: So, Your Honor --
- 9 JUSTICE GORSUCH: Substantive element.
- 10 MR. KEDEM: -- it -- it is not. There
- 11 is a sub --
- 12 JUSTICE GORSUCH: And the other
- 13 element -- if I can just finish my question.
- 14 You can tell me I'm wrong for -- for as long as
- 15 you want.
- 16 But the -- the next -- the element --
- 17 the elements that follow, you -- you would
- admit that "knowingly" applies to, but just not
- 19 this one. How does -- how does that work? I'm
- 20 -- it's a --
- MR. KEDEM: Sure.
- JUSTICE GORSUCH: -- it's a bit of a
- 23 grammatical gravity I'm not familiar with.
- MR. KEDEM: So the phrase "knowingly
- violates" in 924(a)(2) we interpret to mean

- 1 knowledge of conduct, the same way that this
- 2 Court did in the International Minerals and
- 3 Chemical Corporation case. At issue there was
- 4 a statute that applied to someone who knowingly
- 5 violates any such regulation.
- 6 What this Court said is that requires
- 7 knowledge of the "specific acts or omissions"
- 8 that underlie the separate regulatory offense.
- 9 "Specific acts or omissions" is a direct quote.
- 10 And this Court relied on the same
- 11 understanding more recently in the Bryan case,
- 12 which construed a different subsection of
- 13 924(a).
- 14 JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: How -- how is the
- 15 defendant blameworthy if he or she truly
- 16 thought -- truly thought that the status was
- 17 lawful and then possesses the gun? Just focus
- 18 on that question. How is that person
- 19 blameworthy?
- MR. KEDEM: So I'm not sure that they
- 21 are, but I think the more --
- JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: Well, then okay.
- 23 Let me stop you there. Then why should that
- 24 person be subject to 10 years in prison?
- 25 MR. KEDEM: Because the more relevant

- 1 question is whether the Congress that enacted
- 2 FOPA in 1986 had any reason, given its 50-year
- 3 history with the federal firearm laws, to think
- 4 that cases of that type would be a problem.
- 5 Congress normally legislates --
- 6 JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: But suppose --
- 7 suppose -- and I think you're right in the
- 8 sense that 99 percent of the time or 90 percent
- 9 of the time this is going to be so easy to
- 10 prove, but there are going to be those cases,
- 11 the delta of cases where the defendant truly
- was mistaken about his or her status, and you
- just said is not blameworthy in that
- 14 circumstance, I think I have that right, and
- 15 yet you would put that person in prison for up
- 16 to 10 years.
- 17 MR. KEDEM: In the vast majority of
- 18 those cases -- first of all, almost all of
- 19 these cases --
- JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: Well, what was
- 21 wrong about my summary of your position?
- MR. KEDEM: Sure. In -- in the vast
- 23 majority of cases, the type of mistake that the
- 24 defendant will have made will be a mistake of
- 25 law. They will have misunderstood --

1	JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: Possibly I'm
2	sorry to interrupt possibly true. And in
3	those cases, you won't have a problem. But
4	there are going to be some that are mistake of
5	fact, and yet and you've said the person's
6	not blameworthy.
7	MR. KEDEM: So it is notoriously
8	difficult to figure out what is a mistake of
9	law versus fact. And let me give you an
10	example.
11	Petitioner says he was mistaken about
12	whether, if he had a hunting license, that
13	allowed him to possess a gun. It doesn't.
14	There is no legal right to possess a gun for an
15	alien unlawfully in the country just because
16	you have a hunting license.
17	But, of course, that is the type of
18	mistake the defendants are liable to raise.
19	And given that 10,000 out of the 11,000
20	prosecutions last year for 922(g) for were
21	for being a felon-in-possession, you're going
22	to risk fundamentally changing the entire
23	JUSTICE GORSUCH: Really?
24	JUSTICE BREYER: So what?
25	JUSTICE GORSUCH: Ninety-five percent

- 1 are -- I -- I'm sorry, please go ahead.
- JUSTICE BREYER: Why is everybody
- 3 assuming there has to be a mistake of fact? I
- 4 mean, law sometimes can be a fact.
- I mean, a person overstays his visa.
- 6 MR. KEDEM: Right. So --
- 7 JUSTICE BREYER: He doesn't know he's
- 8 overstayed it. He isn't quite sure what the
- 9 law is.
- 10 There's a law that says it is a -- it
- is a serious crime, 20 years in prison, to stay
- in a federal building illegally after there's a
- 13 rule which says you have to leave. Nobody
- 14 knows about it. In fact, I just made it up, so
- 15 I doubt that --
- 16 (Laughter.)
- 17 JUSTICE BREYER: But -- but -- but,
- look, there could be many situations where you
- just don't expect that person to -- to -- to
- 20 know not necessarily the law that forbids the
- 21 thing, but where the thing itself is composed,
- in part, of a law, many cases where they don't
- 23 know what it is.
- MR. KEDEM: Sure.
- 25 JUSTICE BREYER: So where in the

- 1 Supreme Court has this ever said, even in such
- 2 a case, always, under all circumstances, right
- 3 to jail?
- 4 MR. KEDEM: So I agree with you
- 5 morally speaking that someone who makes a
- 6 mistake of law --
- 7 JUSTICE BREYER: If you agree with me
- 8 morally speaking --
- 9 MR. KEDEM: But -- but --
- 10 JUSTICE BREYER: -- I have a naive
- 11 view that criminal law by and large should
- 12 charge -- should follow morals. And if it
- doesn't, maybe we should look pretty hard.
- MR. KEDEM: Or require --
- 15 JUSTICE BREYER: I think that's what
- 16 Justice Black -- Justice Jackson.
- 17 JUSTICE GORSUCH: Jackson.
- 18 JUSTICE BREYER: So if you agree with
- 19 that too. So go ahead. Where does it -- go
- ahead.
- 21 MR. KEDEM: Knowledge that you have to
- 22 be violating the law is a willfulness
- 23 requirement. Congress made explicit that it
- was distinguishing between types of offenses
- 25 for which willfulness was required, the

- 1 relatively minor offenses, things like
- 2 recordkeeping violations, and it was leaving in
- 3 place the normal knowledge requirement --
- 4 JUSTICE BREYER: That isn't -- you've
- 5 missed the question then. I agree with you
- 6 that it is a willfulness requirement where we
- 7 are looking at the statute that makes the thing
- 8 unlawful. All right? So don't look at that.
- 9 I agree with that.
- 10 But now let's look at that which it
- 11 makes unlawful. Now, when we --
- MR. KEDEM: Sure.
- 13 JUSTICE BREYER: -- look at that which
- it makes unlawful, sometimes the that which it
- makes unlawful could, in part, be composed of
- 16 rules or laws.
- 17 MR. KEDEM: Sure.
- JUSTICE BREYER: And it's that part
- 19 that I am uncertain -- though you may know --
- MR. KEDEM: Right.
- JUSTICE BREYER: -- you know, that --
- 22 that this Court has always said you have to
- 23 know the legal status there.
- MR. KEDEM: Sure. So I think --
- 25 JUSTICE BREYER: Is it -- does it --

1 has it said that? Have we said that? So I think that this Court 2 MR. KEDEM: 3 has consistently said that, unless a 4 willfulness requirement is imposed, you do not, 5 in fact, have to show that the defendant had 6 any awareness that they were violating any law, 7 much less the specific law. But -- but --8 JUSTICE BREYER: Even including the -the instance where you have a criminal statute 9 10 that has within it a -- a -- a thing? MR. KEDEM: Sure. 11 12 JUSTICE BREYER: And the thing is in 13 part composed of laws. Suppose they're 14 Armenian laws. Suppose they're -- suppose 15 they're so technical. 16 MR. KEDEM: So -- so maybe I could 17 step back and answer your question this way: 18 Even assuming that Congress thought there was 19 some mens rea necessary with respect to status, would Congress have chosen knowingly? And I 20 21 think we know the answer is no, because we have subsection (d), the firearm dealer provision, 22 23 which applies where the defendant knows or has reasonable cause to believe that the person 24 25 who's purchasing the gun has a prohibited

1 status. 2 So why would Congress presume that the firearm dealer has more information about the 3 4 person purchasing the gun than the person who 5 purchases the gun has about themselves? JUSTICE ALITO: Well, that's a --6 7 that's a very good point. And unless -- so unless the text tells us definitively what the 8 mens rea element is for every element of a 9 10 criminal statute, and is there anything to 11 prevent us from inferring that the mental element required for a -- for -- one -- one 12 13 element is different from the mental element 14 required for another element? 15 MR. KEDEM: No. Presumably, 16 924(a)(2), the knowingly violates, has to work the same way for all subsections, not just (g) 17 but (d) as well. 18 19 Except Petitioners have a problem, which is that you cannot knowingly violate a 20 21 requirement --22 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: Wait a minute. 23 MR. KEDEM: -- to reasonably believe 24 something.

Congress --

JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR:

- 1 Congress can legislate exceptions to every
- 2 general rule.
- If the baseline is knowing for every
- 4 element and, all of a sudden, Congress has
- 5 another definition that changes it, which it
- 6 does in -- in the dealer definition --
- 7 MR. KEDEM: So it --
- 8 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: -- the specific
- 9 governs the general.
- 10 MR. KEDEM: So it's -- it's not clear
- 11 how you get there textually, but it also
- doesn't explain why, for instance, in
- subsection (h) or (a)(6) Congress has specified
- 14 a knowledge requirement there.
- 15 In (h), for instance, you have to know
- that your employer has a prohibited status. So
- 17 why would Congress specify knowledge there if
- 18 you were already going to import a knowingly
- 19 requirement into every provision?
- 20 JUSTICE BREYER: I don't -- I don't
- 21 think I agree with you on the fact it has to be
- 22 read the same way in all. I mean, I've written
- opinions where you have long lists of things,
- 24 and this one's like that and this is like that
- and the other thing is like that, and we know

- for a fact that you don't have to prove
- 2 knowingly where you're talking about a
- 3 jurisdictional hook.
- 4 And so you could have some of these A,
- 5 B, C, D, E that have jurisdictional hooks and
- 6 others that don't --
- 7 MR. KEDEM: So let me --
- 8 JUSTICE BREYER: -- and we wouldn't
- 9 apply knowingly to the hook and we would apply
- 10 it to other things and so forth.
- 11 MR. KEDEM: So let me speak then
- 12 directly to the idea of knowledge of status,
- 13 because, to a certain extent, mens rea is
- 14 really about what facts a defendant is presumed
- 15 to know or at least be on notice of versus the
- 16 type that should be proven to a jury beyond a
- 17 reasonable doubt.
- 18 And there's a reason that we don't
- 19 require in a case of statutory rape the
- 20 government to prove that the defendant knew the
- victim was under the age of consent, because,
- even if he didn't know, he was on notice. It
- 23 was incumbent upon him to find out.
- And by the same token, if you're an
- 25 alien in the United States, it is incumbent

- 1 upon you to know whether you are here lawfully
- 2 or unlawfully.
- JUSTICE GORSUCH: Well, you'd agree,
- 4 first of all, I think, that the immigration
- 5 laws are kind of complex.
- 6 MR. KEDEM: They are.
- 7 JUSTICE GORSUCH: All right. And
- 8 people can make mistakes.
- 9 MR. KEDEM: Absolutely.
- 10 JUSTICE GORSUCH: No doubt. Like the
- 11 dreamers we've talked about --
- MR. KEDEM: Yeah.
- JUSTICE GORSUCH: -- for example, DACA
- 14 recipients, whatever.
- 15 You'd also, I think, agree in (d) that
- there's language before you get to the new mens
- 17 rea, before the reasonable cause, that -- that
- 18 the "knowingly" from 924 could attach to.
- 19 MR. KEDEM: There is.
- 20 JUSTICE GORSUCH: Okay. All right.
- 21 So why -- why shouldn't "knowingly"
- 22 attach to the first substantive element that it
- comes across in (g)?
- 24 MR. KEDEM: Because it's contained in
- 25 a separate provision, which means that you

- don't have the same distributive language
- 2 presumption that you would have if it were
- 3 "knowingly" followed --
- 4 JUSTICE GORSUCH: Not distribute, but
- 5 the very first substantive element.
- 6 MR. KEDEM: So I don't think anything
- 7 about Petitioner's argument would change if it
- 8 said anyone possessing a gun that traveled in
- 9 interstate commerce who is an alien unlawfully
- in the United States, I don't think the order
- 11 matters for that argument.
- 12 JUSTICE GORSUCH: But it matters to
- 13 you because you admit it attaches to the second
- 14 substantive element.
- 15 MR. KEDEM: Because it's conduct, not
- 16 because it's the second one.
- 17 JUSTICE GORSUCH: Well, the status is
- 18 a product of conduct, isn't it?
- 19 MR. KEDEM: I don't --
- 20 JUSTICE GORSUCH: One is an illegal
- 21 alien because of one's conduct. One is a felon
- 22 because of one's conduct. These are not
- 23 immutable characteristics.
- 24 MR. KEDEM: That is true. But I don't
- 25 think it means that having been convicted of a

- 1 crime punishable by more than one year
- 2 necessarily means that being punishable by more
- 3 than one year is your status, something of
- 4 which naturally you would normally be -- be
- 5 aware.
- JUSTICE GORSUCH: You'd agree that,
- 7 you know, most of these cases you're going to
- 8 be able to resolve by plea agreement?
- 9 MR. KEDEM: I think that's right.
- 10 JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: You made a point
- 11 about Congress and statutes use different kinds
- of mens rea in different sections.
- MR. KEDEM: Sure.
- 14 JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: That's the whole
- point, right? Congress is all over the place
- in terms of mens rea.
- 17 MR. KEDEM: That's right.
- 18 JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: Old statutes, new
- 19 statutes. And that's why this Court, for a
- long time, has started with a presumption of
- 21 mens rea for every element of the offense.
- 22 Congress could override that, but the
- 23 presumption exists for all the elements.
- 24 Whether Congress put in a -- a mens rea for one
- 25 element and there are three others, or whether

1 Congress put in no mens rea at all, we apply 2 the mens rea. 3 Is that a correct statement of the 4 law? 5 MR. KEDEM: That is. And let me give you another example, a textual clue that 6 7 Congress didn't want to require knowledge of 8 status here. 9 There are two instances, only two that 10 we're aware of, where someone actually might 11 not reasonably know or Congress might worry 12 that they wouldn't reasonably know their own status, and Congress was explicit for both of 13 14 them in its treatment. 15 The first one is subsection (g)(8), 16 which applies to someone who's subject to a restraining order, which you might not know 17 18 because some restraining orders are issued ex

23 had an opportunity to participate."

19

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22

- The other example is someone who's
- 25 subject to an indictment. One court pointed

parte. And so Congress specified in (q)(8)

that the restraining order has to have been

issued "after a hearing of which such person

received actual notice and at which such person

- 1 out that a lot of indictments are under seal,
- and so you wouldn't necessarily know that.
- 3 So Congress took the indictment
- 4 language, put it into its own subsection,
- 5 subsection (n), and imposed a willfulness
- 6 requirement.
- 7 JUSTICE BREYER: Then a person who
- 8 overstays his visa --
- 9 MR. KEDEM: So you have to know.
- 10 JUSTICE BREYER: -- a person who
- 11 overstays his visa, just inadvertently, is --
- 12 always knows that. A person who is brought to
- this country by two years old by his parents,
- and now he's 21 years old, and they've never
- told him anything about being brought here when
- 16 he was two years old, he's lived in Austin,
- 17 Texas. He knows that. Now do you see?
- 18 MR. KEDEM: I understand, but by the
- 19 same --
- 20 JUSTICE BREYER: I can fairly easily
- 21 think of many other examples --
- MR. KEDEM: Sure.
- JUSTICE BREYER: -- besides that
- 24 indictment.
- MR. KEDEM: And absolutely we can,

- 1 but, you know, Congress normally legislates
- with the haystack in mind, not the needle.
- JUSTICE BREYER: But that's why,
- 4 perhaps --
- 5 MR. KEDEM: Especially not --
- 6 JUSTICE BREYER: That's perhaps why
- 7 courts tend to read into silent language mens
- 8 rea requirements, such as: our statute -- I'm
- 9 making up, but I -- I think it does illustrate
- 10 the example.
- 11 Anyone who robs a veteran of a medal
- that is in categories X, Y, Z, and C, the
- 13 greatest honors and the lesser honors and so
- 14 forth, goes to jail for 15 years. I just
- 15 thought of that because it seems to be
- incredible that a person who had no idea what
- 17 category this medal was in would suddenly be
- 18 charged with knowledge of that legal fact.
- 19 MR. KEDEM: Right.
- JUSTICE BREYER: So it's not hard, I
- 21 think, if you have more time --
- MR. KEDEM: Right.
- JUSTICE BREYER: -- to think of
- 24 tremendous unfairness that can exist.
- MR. KEDEM: We can come up with

1 hypotheticals, but, again, the question is 2 whether Congress had any reason to redesign the 3 way that firearm prosecutions had always worked 4 in every court of appeals around the country 5 out of concern for a category of cases that, if 6 it exists at all --7 JUSTICE GORSUCH: Counsel --8 MR. KEDEM: -- is vanishingly small. JUSTICE GORSUCH: -- counsel, you talk 9 10 about this -- this prior history as if it were handed to us on tablets, but the -- the only 11 12 prior history I'm aware of really is that Fourth Circuit opinion, Capps, and it -- it 13 14 seems to rely on a very convoluted parsing of the legislative history of a predecessor 15 16 statute. That's what the holdings of the courts 17 of appeals on your side all rest on at the end 18 19 of the day, and that's a mode of interpretation that's not exactly preeminent today. 20 21 MR. KEDEM: That's correct. JUSTICE GORSUCH: And even for those 22 23 of us who do attend carefully to legislative history, it's the legislative history of a 24 25 prior statute that's been superseded.

1	And I don't know many of us who think
2	that is enough to overcome clear language of a
3	present statute. So what do we do about that?
4	MR. KEDEM: We have made a textual
5	argument that does not rely on the arguments
6	that appear in those Fourth Circuit references.
7	JUSTICE GORSUCH: Fair enough, but you
8	just told us that we should be careful about
9	undoing the careful work of the courts of
10	appeals for the last 50 years, but if it all
11	hinges on a terrible mistake, that argument
12	seems to me you may have other arguments,
13	but that one doesn't seem to be a very good
14	one.
15	MR. KEDEM: I'm sorry. I was making a
16	different point. I'm sorry if I was unclear
17	about it. My point was, in 1986, there had
18	been a national consensus. Every court of
19	appeals to consider the issue had held that
20	there was no knowledge of status required.
21	Presumably, if Congress wanted to
22	revolutionize the way that the one of the
23	most frequently prosecuted federal crimes
24	worked, it would have been a whole lot clearer.
25	As it was. Congress did something in FOPA that

1 every court of appeals interpreted as leaving 2 in place the underlying rule. 3 If we could turn briefly to the 4 practical consequences of this decision, the --5 JUSTICE KAGAN: Mr. Kedem, before you 6 do that, sorry, do you think that there's a difference between a jurisdictional element and 7 a status element like this one? 8 9 MR. KEDEM: I think it's not a 10 difference in kind. I think it goes to the 11 point that Justice Alito was making, namely, 12 that there are some things that we presume people either are aware of or are on notice of 13 14 or it's just not the type of thing that 15 Congress would want to have to prove to a jury. 16 And there are other things that Congress would assume that we would prove to a 17 18 jury. We -- our argument is that legal status is the type of thing, especially the 19 defendant's own legal status, that Congress 20 21 would not have wanted to require. 22 And that becomes even clearer when you

23

24

25

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see that every time in 922 that Congress wants

to require proof of some mental state with

respect to the legal status, it is explicit

- 1 about it. We've mentioned subsections (d),
- 2 subsections (h), (a)(6). We've talked about
- 3 subsection (n). We talked about (g)(8). Those
- 4 are all instances where Congress might have
- 5 worried that someone wouldn't know, for
- 6 instance, the status of the person you're
- 7 selling the gun to.
- 8 And that's why Congress included an
- 9 explicit mental state. It did not include the
- 10 same in subsection (q).
- 11 JUSTICE ALITO: The inference -- the
- 12 -- the rule about so-called jurisdictional
- 13 elements seems to me must rest on an inference
- about congressional intent. And the argument
- 15 against reaching a similar inference with
- 16 respect to a defendant's status is that, in a
- 17 case like this one, the -- the conduct in
- 18 question would often not be criminal were it
- 19 not for the person's status. And I think it's
- 20 an overstatement to say that it's -- it's
- 21 always lawful activity. That depends on the
- 22 jurisdiction.
- But, in any event, so can that -- can
- it be distinguished on that ground, or would we
- 25 run into problems in the situation where the

1 conduct in question is subject to prosecution 2 under state law and federal law, but what the 3 jurisdictional element does is to make it much 4 more serious, to impose a much more serious 5 penalty? 6 MR. KEDEM: So I'm -- I'm not sure it 7 can be distinguished on those grounds. 8 glad that you brought up state law, because we've been talking about federal law here, but 9 10 nearly every state has its own possession law. And as far as we're aware, not a single one of 11 12 them requires proof that the defendant had any mental state with respect to their status, 13 14 which I think is relevant in two ways. 15 First of all, it shows that this is 16 unlikely -- it is unlikely that states would have structured all of their laws this way if 17 18 it invited abuse or routinely ensnared the 19 innocent. But I think it also goes to, what is 20 the general expectation of what someone is on 21 notice of? And I think it shows that if all 22 23 states are making the same assumption, that a defendant is on notice of his own status, it's 24

not unreasonable to think that Congress was

- 1 resting on the same assumption.
- 2 Going now to the practical problem,
- 3 Justice Gorsuch, you are 100 percent correct
- 4 that, in the vast majority of cases, people
- 5 plead guilty. On the other hand, we're talking
- 6 about -- about 10,000 felon-in-possession
- 7 offenses. And what happens is, although it
- 8 will be extraordinarily rare that a defendant,
- 9 in fact, will not know that he is -- of his own
- 10 status, it is something that will have to be
- 11 proven at every trial, which means that the
- 12 focus of the trial --
- 13 JUSTICE GINSBURG: Well, in practice
- 14 -- practically, that won't be so because the
- 15 last thing in the world that the defendant will
- 16 want is for the jury to know that he committed
- 17 some heinous crime.
- 18 MR. KEDEM: So that will often be the
- 19 case. It won't always be the case. It's the
- 20 easiest thing in the world for a defendant to
- 21 say, I just didn't know, or even if I did know
- 22 at one point that my crime was punishable by
- 23 more than one year, I forgot.
- Imagine a defendant who received a
- 25 10-month sentence.

1	JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: But juries don't
2	
3	MR. KEDEM: Despite
4	JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: believe that.
5	MR. KEDEM: Sometimes they do;
6	sometimes they don't.
7	JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: Well, I mean, if
8	you've got a ridiculous defense, it's not going
9	to work.
10	MR. KEDEM: It's not ridiculous for a
11	defendant who, let's say, five years after his
12	prior offense, for which he received a 10-month
13	sentence, to say, at the time of my later gun
14	possession, it's just not something that I
15	remembered because I only got 10 months, so I
16	wasn't thinking about the potential penalty.
17	JUSTICE GORSUCH: All all right.
18	So so we're dealing with two classes of
19	cases then if I understand your argument. One
20	is it's going to be easy to prove in the mine
21	run of cases. It's not going to a big deal.
22	But there is a small but significant number of
23	cases where, gee, it's really going to be a
24	colorable question and, therefore, a burden on
25	the government.

1	MR. KEDEM: Our point
2	JUSTICE GORSUCH: It seems to me a
3	double-edged sword, isn't it?
4	MR. KEDEM: So so our argument is
5	not that it's a burden on the government.
6	Sometimes it will be, but usually it won't.
7	And, in any event, we're not asking for your
8	sympathy. Our point is that you risk shifting
9	the focus of all felon-in-possession trials out
10	of out of a concern for a category of cases
11	that, if they exist, is extraordinarily small.
12	JUSTICE GORSUCH: That does seem like
13	you're asking for our sympathy, with all
14	respect.
15	JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: You are referring
16	to burden too.
17	JUSTICE GORSUCH: Yeah.
18	JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: I mean, that's
19	your argument.
20	JUSTICE GORSUCH: You say you want to
21	turn to the practical consequences, the burden
22	on the government.
23	MR. KEDEM: It's not
24	JUSTICE GORSUCH: And then we
25	dismissed most of them as not burdensome at

- 1 all. And now we're left with these.
- 2 MR. KEDEM: So, again, the problem is
- 3 not the burden on the government. Imagine you
- 4 are a juror at a felon-in-possession --
- 5 JUSTICE GORSUCH: What is the --
- 6 MR. KEDEM: -- trial.
- JUSTICE GORSUCH: -- practical
- 8 consequence argument then if it isn't the
- 9 burden on the government?
- 10 MR. KEDEM: It's that it will be
- 11 deeply confusing to the jury. So imagine you
- 12 are a juror --
- 13 JUSTICE GORSUCH: So you are worried
- 14 about --
- 15 JUSTICE BREYER: You are considering a
- 16 person who didn't know he was brought here at
- 17 the age of two. Okay? I -- and that's the
- 18 case I'm imagining, because I imagine our
- 19 criminal justice system is aimed at proving the
- 20 guilt or innocence of each individual.
- 21 And it doesn't help to say there are a
- lot of other people who are guilty. This one
- 23 didn't know he under -- overstayed his visa.
- Now, what fairness --
- 25 MR. KEDEM: So --

1	JUSTICE BREYER: what purpose is it
2	served to send that person to prison for ten
3	years?
4	MR. KEDEM: Respectfully, Justice
5	Breyer, if you reinterpret the mens rea for
6	every 922(g) offense out of concern for that
7	hypothetical category of people, that is worse
8	than letting the tail wag the dog. That's
9	letting the tail wag the dog where the dog is
10	massive and the tail is tiny and largely
11	hypothetical.
12	JUSTICE GORSUCH: And the dog is that
13	we're concerned about juries not being able to
14	understand?
15	MR. KEDEM: And and the fact that
16	you were shifting the focus. Imagine you are a
17	juror and you are at a felon-in-possession
18	trial. And all of a sudden the judge, the
19	witnesses, the lawyers, all start talking about
20	a prior crime totally unrelated.
21	And under the best of circumstances
22	that sort of trial within a trial can be deeply
23	confusing.
24	JUSTICE GORSUCH: Deeply confusing for
25	a jury, and we just shouldn't trust juries.

- 1 even though it's enshrined in the Constitution
- 2 that -- that every person is entitled to have
- 3 their guilt or innocence -- then we need to
- 4 worry -- we need paternalistically to worry
- 5 about juries?
- 6 MR. KEDEM: No, Your Honor. But if
- 7 you are convinced that that is what Congress
- 8 had in mind when it enacted FOPA in 1986 then,
- 9 yes, that is the result that you would reach.
- 10 JUSTICE ALITO: How many people are
- 11 now serving time in federal prison under the
- 12 felon-in-possession statute?
- MR. KEDEM: Well, given that it's
- 14 about 8, 9, 10,000 a year, it's going to be a
- 15 very high number.
- 16 If I could, because my time is limited
- 17 --
- 18 JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: So Morissette
- 19 itself, the charge was converting government
- 20 property. And the defendant's argument was I
- 21 didn't think it was government property because
- 22 I thought it was abandoned.
- 23 MR. KEDEM: Right. Notice --
- JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: The government
- there argued who cares? It doesn't matter if

1 you thought it was abandoned. 2 MR. KEDEM: Right. 3 JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: And Justice 4 Jackson saw the problem. 5 MR. KEDEM: Right, because that --6 JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: And why is that different from this case? 7 They're the abandoned property here. 8 You're -- didn't know your status. 9 10 MR. KEDEM: Because here we're talking 11 not just about a legal status, but the 12 defendant's own legal status, something of which he presumably is aware or at least is 13 14 charged with being aware. 15 What a defendant can't do is say: I 16 don't remember when my visa was going to expire and, you know what, I'm not going to bother to 17 18 figure out, because as long as I remain 19 ignorant, even recklessly ignorant about my own status, that means that I can't face liability. 20 21 If I could just tie together the 22 various strands of our textual argument. It is 23 first that you are separating out knowingly violates from the regulatory prohibition, which 24

this Court has read to mean that it's a

- 1 reference to the specific acts or omissions 2 that violate the prohibition. 3 Two, the fact that you're dealing with 4 the defendant's own legal status. 5 Three, the fact that knowingly 6 violates, if you import the knowing 7 requirement, produces all sorts of double mental states or incompatible mental states 8 under subsections (d), (h), and (a)(6). 9 10 Four, the fact that Congress was always explicit in 922 when it wanted to 11 12 require a particular mental state with respect to background circumstances. 13 14 And, five, in the two instances where 15 Congress thought that maybe someone reasonably 16 wouldn't be on notice of their status, it made specific provision of those. 17 All of that, combined with the 50-year 18 19 history that Congress had at its fingertips when it enacted FOPA in 1986, moreover the fact 20 21 that if Congress had a problem with the way 22 every court of appeals in the country has
- 25 And yet even though 922 and 924 have

something about that in the last 30 years.

23

24

interpreted FOPA, presumably it would have done

1	been modified more than a dozen times, Congress
2	has not done so.
3	If there are no further questions.
4	JUSTICE GINSBURG: I would like to
5	know your your view of let's just say we
6	we would reverse the the collateral
7	review issue that I asked about.
8	MR. KEDEM: Sure. So the government's
9	view is that under Bousley, the defendant would
10	have to show on collateral review that he was
11	actually innocent, meaning he actually did not
12	know about his status.
13	But, of course, any defendant could
14	raise that argument and would have every
15	incentive to try and raise that argument.
16	CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Thank you,
17	counsel.
18	Six minutes, Ms. Cakmis.
19	REBUTTAL ARGUMENT OF ROSEMARY T. CAKMIS
20	ON BEHALF OF THE PETITIONER
21	MS. CAKMIS: Thank you, Your Honor.
22	First, I'd just like to point out I
23	think that 10,000 a year prosecutions under
24	this statute is somewhat overstated in that the

sentencing commission has indicated in the past

- 1 15 years there's only been 65,000.
- But, regardless, the bulk of them are
- 3 under the felon-in-possession. And we
- 4 acknowledge that the bulk of the time there's
- 5 not going to be a problem.
- 6 But that small but significant number
- 7 of cases there is a problem in, where there is
- 8 honest miss-advice by a judge, and the
- 9 defendant believes the judge, is he supposed to
- inquire further and say: Judge, you're wrong?
- 11 We would respectfully submit that's
- 12 not practical or fair.
- In essence, the government says it's
- 14 not adding or complaining of its burden, but,
- 15 rather, is concerned about the added burden on
- the jury and the jury confusion, but virtually
- 17 every statute has knowledge and the jury sorts
- 18 it out. That's what they do.
- The government is, in effect, asking
- this Court to create a whole new rule, a rule
- 21 that relieves it of its burden to prove the
- 22 only critical fact that makes firearm
- 23 possession in this country illegal, and that
- 24 fact is status.
- Our reading, applying it to the

Τ	status, is consistent with the plain language
2	of the statutes, with this Court's canons of
3	statutory construction, and with the purpose of
4	FOPA in inserting knowledge in the first place.
5	Congress did something different.
6	Prior to FOPA, knowledge was not in the
7	statute. It's there now.
8	The fact that other Congresses
9	afterwards have not changed it adds very little
10	weight in this very weak canon this Court has
11	described.
12	And for all those reasons, we'd ask
13	the Court to reverse. Thank you.
14	CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Thank you,
15	counsel. The case is submitted.
16	(Whereupon, at 2:58 p.m., the case was
17	submitted.)
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1
10 [6] 20 :14 23 :12 31 :4 33 :
24 34 :16 55 :15
10,000 [4] 35:19 54:6 59:
14 62 :23
100 [1] 54:3
10-month [2] 54:25 55:12
10-year [1] 3: 14 11,000 [1] 35: 19
15 [2] 48 :14 63 :1
17-9560 [1] 3:4
1986 [4] 34 :2 50 :17 59 :8
61: 20
2
2:02 [1] 3:2
2:58 [1] 64: 16
20 [1] 36 :11
21 [1] 47 :14
3
30 [1] 61 :24
5
50 [2] 23 :13 50 :10
50-year [2] 34: 2 61: 18
6
65,000 [1] 63 :1
8
8 [2] 22 :9 59 :14
9
9 [1] 59:14
90 [1] 34: 8
920 [1] 31 :24
922 [4] 9: 11 51: 23 61: 11,25
922(g [9] 3: 11 4: 1,6,11,13
9:12 13:23 35:20 58:6
922(g)(3 [1] 21:7 924 [2] 43:18 61:25
924(a [1] 33:13
924(a)(2 [5] 4:10,15 9:12
32 :25 40 :16
95 [1] 13: 23
99 [1] 34:8
A

a)(6 [3] 41:13 52:2 61:9 abandoned [3] 59:22 60: 1.8 ability [1] 30:13 able [5] **13**:11 **21**:23 **27**:8 **45:**8 **58:**13 about [52] 5:14,24 8:6,14 **11**:8 **12**:16 **13**:5 **17**:19 **21**:6 **22**:8 **23**:12 **30**:20 **31**:7,9,14, 14 **34**:12,21 **35**:11 **36**:14 **40:**3,5 **42:**2,14 **43:**11 **44:**7 **45:**11 **47:**15 **49:**10 **50:**3.8. 17 **52**:1,2,3,12,14 **53**:9 **54**:6, 6 **55**:16 **57**:14 **58**:13,19 **59**: 5,14 **60:**11,19 **61:**24 **62:**7, 12 **63:**15 absolutely [2] 43:9 47:25 abuse [1] **53**:18 academically [1] 16:23 acknowledge [3] 27:2 29: acknowledged [1] 28:23 across [1] 43:23 act [1] 25:21 activity [1] 52:21 acts [3] 33:7,9 61:1 actual [1] 46:22 actually [5] 12:14 19:3 46: 10 **62:**11,11 added [1] 63:15 addicted [4] 21:8,10,17 22: adding [1] 63:14 additionally [2] 4:20 18: adds [1] 64:9 adjudged [1] **15:**5 admission [1] 15:15 admit [2] 32:18 44:13 admitted [2] 14:17 18:21 admonition [2] **31**:8,9 adulthood [1] 20:9 affirmative [3] 29:13,19, after [5] 9:17 32:5 36:12 46: 21 55:11 afterwards [2] 31:4 64:9 **again** [6] **7**:9,21 **18**:17 **19**:

14 **49**:1 **57**:2 against [3] 21:13 22:17 52: age [2] 42:21 57:17 agree [13] 5:5,25 24:3 26: 18 **37:**4,7,18 **38:**5,9 **41:**21 **43**:3,15 **45**:6 agreed [1] 16:14 agreement [1] 45:8 ahead [3] 36:1 37:19,20 aimed [1] **57**:19 alien [6] 27:25 28:10 35:15 **42:**25 **44:**9.21 aliens [1] **25**:25 **alito** [29] **5**:18 **6**:4,6,15,18, 23 **7:**2,4,7,13,16 **8:**13,20 **9:** 5,19 **10:**2 **18:**20 **19:**9,18 **20:** 1 **22**:8 **23**:1,14 **24**:14,23 **40**: 6 **51**:11 **52**:11 **59**:10 **all** [50] **6:**18 **9:**9 **13:**4,10,11 **14:**21 **17:**21 **19:**18 **20:**8,11 19,20 **31**:18,22 **34**:18,18 **37**: 25 2 **38**:8 **40**:17 **41**:4,22 **43**:4, 7,20 **45**:15,23 **46**:1 **49**:6,18 **50**:10 **52**:4 **53**:15,17,22 **55**: 17,17 **56:**9,13 **57:**1 **58:**18, 19 **61:**7,18 **64:**12 allon [1] 25:17 allowed [4] 17:23 18:3,18 almost [2] 12:24 34:18 already [1] 41:18 also [6] 10:6,8 17:11 41:11 **43**:15 **53**:19 alternative [1] 10:15 although [1] 54:7 always [10] 12:24 28:16,18 **37**:2 **38**:22 **47**:12 **49**:3 **52**: 21 **54**:19 **61**:11 am [2] 30:25 38:19 amount [1] 30:8 an [30] 4:18 5:24 6:2 8:13 **14**:23 **15**:4 **17**:3 **18**:3 **22**:14 **24**:6,18 **27**:9,18,24 **28**:10, 11 **29:**13,19,23 **30:**8 **35:**9, 14 **42:**24 **44:**9,20 **46:**23,25 **52:**8,13,20

another [5] 14:1 15:2 40: 14 **41:**5 **46:**6 answer [6] 11:10 13:9,10 **16:**20 **39:**17,21 any [12] 9:21 18:4,25 33:5 **34**:2 **39**:6,6 **49**:2 **52**:23 **53**: 12 **56**:7 **62**:13 anyone [2] 44:8 48:11 anything [4] 27:10 40:10 **44:**6 **47:**15 anywhere [1] 18:4 apologize [1] 15:24 appeals [8] 28:22 29:2 49: 4,18 **50**:10,19 **51**:1 **61**:22 appear [1] **50**:6 application [1] 27:3 applied [2] 27:7 33:4 applies [5] 22:9 31:22 32: 18 **39**:23 **46**:16 apply [9] 7:18,19 9:7,14 20: 17,20 **42**:9,9 **46**:1 **22:**3,21 **23:**2,2,22 **26:**15 **28:** applying [3] **3:**15 **10:**7 **63:** approximately [1] 13:23 are [55] 3:24 4:14 10:10,22 **11:**13 **12:**25 **13:**11,12,17,20, 23 14:4,10 19:17 22:10 24: 15 **28**:5,7 **31**:18 **33**:21 **34**: 10 **35**:4,4,18 **36**:1 **38**:7 **43**: 1,5,6 **44:**22 **45:**25 **46:**9,18 **47:**1 **51:**12,13,13,16 **52:**4 **53:**23 **54:**3 **56:**15 **57:**4,12, 13,15,21,22 **58:**16,17 **59:**7, 10 **60:**23 **62:**3 **63:**2 argued [1] 59:25 argument [23] 3:4,7 10:2, 14,18 **25:**17 **28:**2,5 **44:**7,11 **50**:5,11 **51**:18 **52**:14 **55**:19 **56**:4,19 **57**:8 **59**:20 **60**:22 **62:**14,15,19 arguments [2] 50:5,12 armenian [1] 39:14 around [1] 49:4 **as** [33] **11:**12,24,24 **12:**5,5 **17:**19 **18:**15,15 **20:**18 **22:**3 **23:**7,8 **26:**22 **28:**16,20 **29:** 23 **30**:3,10,11 **31**:1,17 **32**: 14,14 **40:**18 **48:**8 **49:**10 **50:**

25 **51**:1 **53**:11,11 **56**:25 **60**: 18.18 ask [3] 12:11 30:5 64:12 asked [1] **62:**7 asking [4] 20:17 56:7,13 **63:**19 aspect [1] 15:7 assault [1] **24**:21 assume [1] **51**:17 assumed [1] 8:8 assuming [2] 36:3 39:18 assumption [2] 53:23 54: at [34] 7:23 11:1 12:25 15: 15,19 **16**:2 **17**:8 **18**:4,11 **20**: | becomes [3] **3**:21 **27**:12 11,20,22 **28:**7 **33:**3 **38:**7,8, 10,13 **42:**15 **46:**1,22 **49:**6, 18 **54**:11,22 **55**:13 **56**:25 **57**:4,16,19 **58**:17 **60**:13 **61**: 19 64:16 attach [6] 6:16,24 8:23 9:1 **43**:18.22 attached [1] 5:6 attaches [2] 4:22 44:13 **attempted** [1] **22**:16 attend [1] 49:23 austin [1] 47:16 avenue [2] 12:1.4 aware [9] 21:10 24:1 45:5 **46**:10 **49**:12 **51**:13 **53**:11 60:13.14 awareness [2] 25:24 39:6

В

b [1] **42:**5 back [2] 28:18 39:17 background [1] 61:13 bank [1] **24:**20 baseline [2] 4:17 41:3 **basis** [1] **6**:7 **be** [78] **3:**20 **4:**5 **9:**6 **11:**5,20 **12:**3,8,12,21,21,22 **13:**6,11 **14**:4,9 **15**:5 **16**:20,21 **17**:24 **18**:19,24,25 **19**:8,15,25 **20**: 14 **21:**3,4,23,25 **22:**11,19, 20 23:5,18 24:12 25:3 29:3, 6,13 **30:**2 **33:**24 **34:**4,9,10, 24 **35**:4 **36**:3,4,18 **37**:22 **38**: 15 **41:**21 **42:**15,16 **45:**4,4,8

48:15,17 **50:**8,13 **52:**18,24 **53:**7 **54:**8.10.14.18.19 **55:** 20,23 **56**:6 **57**:10 **58**:22 **59**: 14 **61**:16 **63**:5 because [46] 3:16 4:10 5: 12 **6**:5,20 **7**:9 **8**:6,21 **13**:1 **14:**5 **16:**6,12 **17:**21,25 **18:**2, 14 **20**:25 **21**:10 **22**:24 **23**: 10,22 **24**:7,10 **31**:4 **33**:25 **35:**15 **39:**21 **42:**13,21 **43:** 24 **44:**13,15,16,21,22 **46:**18 **48**:15 **53**:8 **54**:14 **55**:15 **57**: 18 **59:**16,21 **60:**5,10,18 become [1] 24:11 **51**:22 been [26] 11:18 12:1 16:23 **17**:1,8,8,16,22 **18**:17 **19**:1 **20:**15 **22:**23,23 **23:**7 **27:**8 **28:**16,18 **30:**6 **44:**25 **46:**20 **49:**25 **50:**18,24 **53:**9 **62:**1 **before** [6] **3**:21 **15**:6 **16**:12 **43:**16,17 **51:**5 behalf [3] 3:8 25:18 62:20 behind [2] 5:19 7:17 being [14] 7:10,11 14:15 **15:**16 **21:**8,10 **23:**15 **24:**16 **28**:8 **35**:21 **45**:2 **47**:15 **58**: 13 60:14 belief [1] 30:11 believe [6] 4:3 13:24 25:10 **39:**24 **40:**23 **55:**4 **believes** [1] **63**:9 **below** [1] **20**:16 **besides** [1] **47**:23 best [1] 58:21 between [5] 5:9 29:25 30: 14 **37**:24 **51**:7 beyond [2] 29:16 42:16 big [1] 55:21

bit [1] 32:22

1.8 9:25

black [1] 37:16

blameworthiness [3] 8:

blameworthy [7] **27:**21,

24 **28**:3 **33**:15,19 **34**:13 **35**:

bodily [1] **22**:19 both [1] 46:13 **bother** [1] **60**:17 bousley [1] 62:9 breyer [29] 35:24 36:2,7,17, 25 **37:**7,10,15,18 **38:**4,13, 18,21,25 **39:**8,12 **41:**20 **42:** 8 **47**:7,10,20,23 **48**:3,6,20, 23 **57:**15 **58:**1,5 briefly [1] **51**:3 broad [1] 10:11 broader [1] **12**:22 brought [4] 47:12,15 53:8 **57:**16 bryan [1] 33:11 **building** [1] **36**:12 bulk [4] 21:24 23:6 63:2.4 burden [9] 55:24 56:5,16, 21 **57:**3,9 **63:**14,15,21 **burdensome** [1] **56:**25 but [88] 4:6,16 5:18 7:5,13 **8:**13,16,17 **9:**4 **10:**6,15,25 **11:**12 **12:**12,13 **13:**8 **15:**5 **17:**17,22 **18:**1,17 **19:**3,12, 21 **20:**3,12 **21:**6,11,11,13, 22 **23:**1,9 **25:**4 **26:**20,21 **28:** 1,14 **29:**6,7 **30:**21 **32:**16,18 **33:**21 **34:**6,10 **35:**3,17 **36:** 17,17,17,21 **37:**9,9 **38:**10 **39:**7,7 **40:**18 **41:**11 **44:**4,12, 24 **45**:22 **47**:18 **48**:1,3,9 **49**: 1,11 **50:**7,10,13 **52:**23 **53:**2, 9,19 **55**:1,22,22 **56**:6 **59**:6 **60:**11 **62:**13 **63:**2,6,6,14,16 by [27] 6:3 7:11 10:20 13:20 **19:**1 **20:**16,19 **22:**1,15 **23:**5, 19 **25**:6 **27**:6 **28**:6 **30**:9 **31**: 2,20 **37:**11 **42:**24 **45:**1,2,8 **47:**13,13,18 **54:**22 **63:**8

C [3] 3:1 42:5 48:12 cakmis [64] 3:6,7,9 4:10 5: 4,7,10 **6:**1,5,9,17,20 **7:**1,3,6, 9,15,21 **8:**2,4,11,19,25 **9:**9, 22 **10:**5,18,20 **11:**15 **12:**3, 16 **13**:8,22 **14**:7,13,16 **15**:1, 13,17,21,24 **16:**4,11,22 **17:** 3,11,16,20 **19:**7,14,23 **20:**3

21:5,15,24 22:22 23:4 24:5, 22,24 **25:**15 **62:**18,19,21 came [3] **15**:10 **16**:6 **23**:12 camel's [1] 29:8 can [21] 13:2,3 19:15 23:17, 18 **24**:18,19 **30**:8 **32**:13,14 **36**:4 **41**:1 **43**:8 **47**:20,25 **48**: 24.25 **52:**23.23 **53:**7 **58:**22 cannot [2] 24:9 40:20 canon [1] 64:10 canons [1] 64:2 can't [7] 11:20 14:5.8.9 24: 2 60:15,20 capps [1] 49:13 careful [2] 50:8,9 carefully [1] 49:23 cares [1] 59:25 carved [3] 5:10 6:2.7 case [17] 3:4 4:4 20:15,19 **29**:2 **31**:1 **33**:3,11 **37**:2 **42**: 19 **52**:17 **54**:19,19 **57**:18 **60:**7 **64:**15.16 cases [26] 3:18 7:22 10:16 **11**:13,14 **21**:24 **23**:7 **26**:19 **28:**20 **31:**18 **34:**4,10,11,18, 19,23 **35**:3 **36**:22 **45**:7 **49**:5 **54**:4 **55**:19,21,23 **56**:10 **63**: categories [3] 9:18 17:5 48:12 category [4] 48:17 49:5 **56:**10 **58:**7 caught [1] 10:11 cause [5] 4:3 12:7 22:19 39:24 43:17 caused [1] 18:15 certain [5] 27:3 28:5,8 32: 2 42:13 **certified** [1] **26**:14 challenging [4] **24**:8,25 **25:**1,4 **chances** [1] **13**:16 change [2] 13:25 44:7 **changed** [1] **64**:9 **changes** [1] **41:**5 changing [1] 35:22 characteristics [2] 23:2 **44**:23

Official - Subject to Final Review

charge [2] **37**:12 **59**:19 charged [7] 12:25 23:14 **24:**16 **28:**4,7 **48:**18 **60:**14 charges [1] 11:19 chemical [1] **33**:3 chief [12] 3:3,9 12:15,18 17: 14,17 **24:**6 **25:**13,16,19 **62:** 16 **64:**14 child [2] 22:15,18 children [1] 20:6 choose [1] 30:14 chosen [1] 39:20 circuit [2] 49:13 50:6 circumstance [1] 34:14 circumstances [5] 26:2 **28**:6 **37**:2 **58**:21 **61**:13 citizens [3] 20:9,10,11 claims [1] 25:7 **classes** [1] **55**:18 clause [1] 6:9 clear [2] 41:10 50:2 clearer [2] 50:24 51:22 close [1] 27:10 clue [1] 46:6 collateral [2] 62:6,10 **colorable** [1] **55**:24 combined [1] 61:18 come [3] 20:6 27:4 48:25 comes [2] 19:20 43:23 comforted [1] 27:6 commerce [3] 6:9,14 44:9 commission [1] **62**:25 **committed** [1] **54**:16 complaining [1] 63:14 complex [1] 43:5 complicated [1] 22:11 comply [1] 14:20 composed [3] 36:21 38: 15 **39:**13 concern [3] 49:5 56:10 58: concerned [2] 58:13 63: 15 concerning [1] 9:3 conclusion [3] 5:19 7:17 19:20 condition [1] 15:10 conditioned [1] 14:11

conduct [20] 4:24 5:16 6: 10.22 **7**:11 **10**:1 **11**:25 **22**: 25 **27**:17,21,24 **30**:21,22 **33**: 1 **44:**15,18,21,22 **52:**17 **53: confronted** [1] **20**:19 confusing [3] 57:11 58:23, confusion [4] 17:19,24 18: 15 **63:**16 congress [52] 5:2,13,23 6: 15,23 **7**:17 **8**:14,15,22 **9**:7 **20**:2 **21**:9 **26**:21 **34**:1,5 **37**: 23 **39:**18,20 **40:**2,25 **41:**1,4, 13,17 **45:**11,15,22,24 **46:**1, 7,11,13,19 **47**:3 **48**:1 **49**:2 **50:**21,25 **51:**15,17,20,23 **52:** 4,8 **53:**25 **59:**7 **61:**10,15,19, 21 **62:1 64:**5 congresses [1] 64:8 congressional [2] 5:25 **52**:14 congress's [2] 6:21 9:3 consensus [2] 26:4 50:18 consent [1] 42:21 consequence [1] 57:8 consequences [3] 11:9 **51:4 56:**21 consequent [1] 30:12 consider [1] 50:19 **considered** [1] **18**:25 considering [1] 57:15 consistent [1] 64:1 consistently [1] 39:3 constitution [1] 59:1 constitutional [2] 11:10. 11 constitutionally [2] 3:18 construction [1] 64:3 **construed** [1] **33**:12 contained [1] 43:24 contention [1] 30:7 continue [1] 18:23 controlled [1] 21:8 **conversely** [1] **28**:17 **converting** [1] **59**:19

convicted [8] 11:18,21,21

12:1 24:20 25:2 31:3 44:25 conviction [2] 21:4 23:23 convictions [1] 13:7 convinced [1] 59:7 convoluted [1] 49:14 copy [1] 23:6 corporation [1] 33:3 correct [7] 10:5 14:7 27:22 **28:**1 **46:**3 **49:**21 **54:**3 **could** [23] **6**:15,16,17,24 **7**: 2 **8:**16 **11:**19 **14:**2,2 **16:**20 **17**:16 **21**:3 **27**:4 **36**:18 **38**: 15 **39**:16 **42**:4 **43**:18 **45**:22 **51:**3 **59:**16 **60:**21 **62:**13 counsel [6] 25:14 29:9 49: 7,9 **62:**17 **64:**15 country [8] 14:17 15:4 20: 7 **35**:15 **47**:13 **49**:4 **61**:22 63:23 course [4] 17:15 23:8 35: 17 **62:**13 court [39] 3:10 4:24 5:1.10 **6:**3 **9:**23 **10:**25 **11:**4,19 **15:** 2,6 **16**:14 **17**:24 **18**:13 **20**: 16,17,18 22:23,24 25:10,20 **28:**22 **29:**1 **33:**2,6,10 **37:**1 **38**:22 **39**:2 **45**:19 **46**:25 **49**: 4 **50**:18 **51**:1 **60**:25 **61**:22 **63:**20 **64:**10,13 courts [3] 48:7 49:17 50:9 court's [7] 4:20,22 7:22 10: 6 **11**:2 **30**:16 **64**:2 create [2] 25:25 63:20 creating [1] 31:10 credible [1] 22:13 crime [8] 11:21 23:25 30:8 **36:**11 **45:**1 **54:**17,22 **58:**20 crimes [2] 3:25 50:23 criminal [6] 12:6 37:11 39: 9 40:10 52:18 57:19 criminalizes [3] 4:23 5:15 10.1 critical [1] 63:22 crucial [1] 3:12 culpability [2] 5:17 7:23

d [7] **3:1 39:**22 **40:**18 **42:**5 **43:**15 **52:1 61:**9

daca [1] 43:13 dangerous [1] 28:3 day [1] 49:19 deal [1] 55:21 dealer [3] 39:22 40:3 41:6 dealing [2] 55:18 61:3 decertified [1] 26:16 decision [1] 51:4 deeply [3] 57:11 58:22,24 default [2] 4:17 12:8 defendant [30] 4:2,6 6:12 **8:1 22:**21.22 **23:**19 **24:**8.24 **25**:23 **26**:5 **31**:12 **33**:15 **34**: 11,24 **39**:5,23 **42**:14,20 **53**: 12,24 **54**:8,15,20,24 **55**:11 **60:**15 **62:**9,13 **63:**9 defendants [1] 35:18 defendant's [12] 5:17 6: 10,22 **7**:11,23 **9**:8 **29**:25 **51**: 20 52:16 59:20 60:12 61:4 defense [13] 15:2 16:14. 21 17:12,21,22 18:9,19 28: 17 **29:**13,19,23 **55:**8 defined [1] 22:10 definition [4] 21:16,20 41: definitively [1] 40:8 delta [2] 29:25 34:11 demonstrated [1] 23:5 denial [1] 21:12 depend [2] 10:3,14 **dependent** [1] **21:**17 depends [1] 52:21 described [1] 64:11 despite [2] 26:6 55:3 did [11] 7:17 10:14 14:24, 25 **19**:24 **33**:2 **50**:25 **52**:9 **54**:21 **62**:11 **64**:5 didn't [21] 6:19 7:5 8:15,16, 17,17,18 **15:**25 **16:**25 **17:**21, 25 **19**:20 **25**:7 **31**:5 **42**:22 **46:**7 **54:**21 **57:**16.23 **59:**21 60:9 difference [4] 5:9 7:10 51: different [9] 11:7 25:3 33: 12 **40:**13 **45:**11,12 **50:**16 **60:7 64:**5

difficult [1] 35:8 direct [2] 4:13 33:9 directly [3] 8:17 9:11 42: dismissed [3] 16:23 17:9 **56**:25 dispute [1] 12:14 distinguished [2] 52:24 distinguishing [1] 37:24 distribute [1] 44:4 distributive [1] 44:1 **do** [38] **3:**23,23 **4:**15 **5:**4,4 **6:** 19 **7:**7,13 **8:**10,16,17,18,25 **14:**3 **15:**18 **20:**1,1 **26:**9,9, 12,12,21 **27:**12,12 **30:**15,15 **31**:7,7 **39**:4 **47**:17 **49**:23 **50**: 3,3 **51**:6,6 **55**:5 **60**:15 **63**: does [18] 4:24 14:21 16:17 **17**:18 **19**:11,16 **20**:23 **25**: 22.24 32:19.19 37:19 38:25 **41**:6 **48**:9 **50**:5 **53**:3 **56**:12 doesn't [15] 8:7 10:3 16: 19 **18:**21 **19:**3 **23:**24 **29:**10. 11 **35**:13 **36**:7 **37**:13 **41**:12 **50:**13 **57:**21 **59:**25 **dog** [4] **58**:8,9,9,12 done [5] 8:16 19:2 20:18 **61**:23 **62**:2 don't [24] 4:7 10:23 13:4 **16:1 20:4 22:6 31:**23 **36:**19. 22 **38:**8 **41:**20,20 **42:**1,6,18 **44**:1,6,10,19,24 **50**:1 **55**:1,6 **60**:16 double [1] 61:7 double-edged [1] 56:3 doubt [3] 36:15 42:17 43: 10 dozen [1] 62:1 dreamer [3] 26:10,13,13 dreamers [2] 20:6 43:11 drugs [1] 21:18 duty [1] 30:13 Е

e [3] 3:1,1 42:5 each [4] 9:24,24 10:7 57: 20 official - Subject
easiest [2] 13:1 54:20
easily [1] 47:20
easy [3] 20:24 34:9 55:20
effect [1] 63:19
either [1] 51:13
element [47] 4:23 5:5,6,20,
21,23,24 6:16,24,25 7:12,
18,20 8:22 9:1,14,15,17,24,
24 10:8,16 12:20 20:21 21:
7 27:17,18 32:5,7,9,13,16
40:9,9,12,13,13,14 41:4 43:
22 44:5,14 45:21,25 51:7,8
53:3
elements [10] 8:6,9,10 28:
20 31:19,22 32:2,17 45:23
52:13
employer [1] 41:16

employer [1] 41:16 enacted [3] 34:1 59:8 61:

end [2] 19:10 49:18 enough [3] 15:16 50:2,7 enshrined [1] 59:1 ensnared [1] 53:18 ensure [1] 10:10 entire [1] 35:22 entitled [2] 24:4 59:2 error [4] 12:9 15:19 16:2,

error [4] 12:9 15:19 16:2,9 especially [2] 48:5 51:19 essence [1] 63:13 even [21] 4:25 9:22 10:15

11:3 **12:**9 **16:**9 **17:**6 **24:**6, 18 **26:**1 **32:**1 **37:**1 **39:**8,18 **42:**22 **49:**22 **51:**22 **54:**21 **59:**1 **60:**19 **61:**25

event [3] 10:25 52:23 56:7 ever [2] 25:2 37:1

every [26] 4:23 17:1 18:22, 24 19:12,15,21 20:19 27:8 30:3 40:9 41:1,3,19 45:21

49:4 **50**:18 **51**:1,23 **53**:10 **54**:11 **58**:6 **59**:2 **61**:22 **62**:

14 **63**:17 **everybody** [1] **36**:2

everybody (1) 36:2 evidence [6] 17:13,18,20 18:14 22:1 29:17

evil [1] 30:14 ex [1] 46:18

exactly [3] 14:3 21:5 49:20

example [10] **6**:10 **17**:12 **20:**5 **26:**13 **27:**9 **35:**10 **43:** 13 46:6.24 48:10 examples [2] 27:4 47:21 **except** [3] **29**:9,10 **40**:19 exception [4] 5:11 6:2,7,8 exceptions [1] 41:1 excuse [1] 9:15 exist [2] 48:24 56:11 exists [2] 45:23 49:6 **expect** [1] **36**:19 expectation [1] 53:20 **expected** [1] **22**:19 expelled [1] 19:4 **experience** [1] **12**:23 **expire** [1] **60**:16 **explain** [1] **41**:12 explicit [5] 37:23 46:13 51: 25 **52**:9 **61**:11 **explicitly** [2] **4**:1 **22**:16 expressly [1] 8:24 extent [1] 42:13 extraordinarily [2] 54:8

F

56:11

f1 [1] **18:**3 face [1] 60:20 facing [1] 23:12 fact [35] 3:12,14,15,17 4:24 **5:**15 **13:**15 **18:**6 **22:**23 **24:**3, 12 **27:**6 **28:**15,16,25 **29:**3, 13 **35:**5,9 **36:**3,4,14 **39:**5 **41**:21 **42**:1 **48**:18 **54**:9 **58**: 15 **61:**3,5,10,20 **63:**22,24 **64**:8 fact-finder [2] 19:20.23 facts [5] 14:4,10 21:16,21 **42**:14 failed [1] 14:19 fair [2] 50:7 63:12 fairly [2] **20**:24 **47**:20 fairness [1] 57:24 fall [1] 19:6 familiar [1] 32:23 far [1] 53:11 favor [1] 16:10 federal [6] 34:3 36:12 50: 23 **53:**2.9 **59:**11

feels [1] 10:25 fellow [1] 31:1 felon [7] 4:4,5 13:2 21:2 30: 25 31:2 44:21 felon-in-possession [15] **11:**14,18 **12:**24 **20:**25 **23:** 8,9,15 **24:**17 **35:**21 **54:**6 **56:** 9 57:4 58:17 59:12 63:3 **felons** [1] **25**:25 felony [6] 3:14 23:17,21,23 **25:**1,5 figure [2] **35**:8 **60**:18 final [1] 7:14 find [3] 20:9 22:6 42:23 finding [1] **22**:12 finds [1] 19:23 **fingertips** [1] **61**:19 finish [1] 32:13 firearm [10] **3**:13,16,21 **18**: 4 **25**:21 **34**:3 **39**:22 **40**:3 **49**: 3 **63:**22 firearms [4] 4:2 6:13 17: 15 **18:**8 firing [2] 17:7 18:7 first [13] 9:9 10:10 32:5,6 **34:**18 **43:**4,22 **44:**5 **46:**15 **53**:15 **60**:23 **62**:22 **64**:4 fits [1] 3:20 five [2] 55:11 61:14 focus [4] 33:17 54:12 56:9 **58**:16 follow [3] 30:5 32:17 37:12 followed [2] 31:20 44:3 follows [1] 32:5 fopa [9] 10:9 26:3 34:2 50: 25 59:8 61:20,23 64:4,6 for [72] **5**:3,11,20,21,23 **6**:7, 10 **9:**23 **10:**11 **12:**8,11 **13:** 22 **17**:4,12 **18**:10,12,23 **19**: 1,3 **20**:5,24 **23**:10,23 **24**:16 **25**:25 **27**:17 **28**:20 **29**:9,10 **31**:4 **32**:14,14 **34**:15 **35**:14, 20,20,21 37:25 40:9,12,12, 14,17 **41:**3,12,15 **42:**1 **43:** 13 **44:**11 **45:**19,21,23,24 **46:** 13 **48:**14 **49:**5,22 **50:**10 **52:** 5,19 **54**:16,20 **55**:10,12 **56**: 7,10,13 **58:**2,5,6,24 **64:**12

forbids [1] 36:20 force [3] 22:17 24:2.9 forgot [1] **54**:23 forms [1] 4:17 forth [2] 42:10 48:14 four [1] 61:10 fourth [2] 49:13 50:6 freedom [1] 30:12 frequently [1] **50**:23 from [10] **7**:21,22 **23**:18,20 **26:**14 **40:**11,13 **43:**18 **60:**7, front [3] 9:12,17 13:13 fundamentally [1] 35:22 further [3] 25:11 62:3 63: 10

G

g [4] 3:1 40:17 43:23 52:10 g)(8 [3] 46:15,19 52:3 qee [1] **55**:23 general [3] 41:2,9 53:20 genuine [4] 12:14 13:14, **qet** [7] **11:**22 **12:**10,19 **13:**4 **21**:4 **41**:11 **43**:16 ginsburg [7] 3:23 11:6,8, 16 **17**:6 **54**:13 **62**:4 give [2] 35:9 46:5 given [4] 22:24 34:2 35:19 **59**:13 glad [1] 53:8 gleaned [1] 7:22 go [8] 8:7 10:23 11:24 15: 19 **18:**21 **36:**1 **37:**19,19 goes [6] 5:16 6:20 17:2 48: 14 **51**:10 **53**:19 going [27] 13:11,25 15:23 **16:**3 **21:**25 **23:**11 **24:**15 **27:** 16,16 **28**:18 **29**:22 **31**:12 **34:**9,10 **35:**4,21 **41:**18 **45:**7 **54:**2 **55:**8,20,21,23 **59:**14 **60:**16,17 **63:**5 good [3] **30**:14 **40**:7 **50**:13 gorsuch [44] 13:19 29:7, 15,18,22 **30:**4,19,24 **31:**13, 16,25 **32:**4,9,12,22 **35:**23, 25 **37:**17 **43:**3,7,10,13,20 **44:**4,12,17,20 **45:**6 **49:**7,9,

22 **50**:7 **54**:3 **55**:17 **56**:2,12, 17,20,24 **57:**5,7,13 **58:**12, qot [6] 18:6 26:14 31:16 32: 1 **55:**8,15 **government** [20] **14**:10 **15**:8 **16**:13,15,16 **20**:24 **21**: 23 **22**:1 **31**:5 **42**:20 **55**:25 **56:**5,22 **57:**3,9 **59:**19,21,24 **63:**13.19 **government's** [4] **17**:20 **27:**3 **30:**1 **62:**8 governs [1] 41:9 grammatical [1] 32:23 gravity [1] 32:23 great [1] 24:16 greatest [1] 48:13 ground [1] 52:24 grounds [1] 53:7 guess [1] 27:11 guilt [2] 57:20 59:3 quilty [11] 13:20,23 14:5 **19:**22,22,25 **21:**3 **27:**18,19 **54**:5 **57**:22 gun [16] 10:10 13:3 20:14 **26**:7 **27**:20 **28**:2 **31**:12 **33**: 17 **35**:13,14 **39**:25 **40**:4,5 **44:**8 **52:**7 **55:**13

н

h [4] **41**:13,15 **52**:2 **61**:9 habeas [8] 11:22 12:1,3,4, 7,10 **13:**13,17 had [35] 9:13 12:14,21,21 **13**:3,14 **14**:19,24 **15**:4,11 **16:**7,23 **17:**1,11,22 **18:**12 **19:**21 **20:**12 **22:**23,23 **25:** 23 **31**:1 **34**:2 **35**:12 **39**:5 **46**: 23 **48:**16 **49:**2,3 **50:**17,19 **53**:12 **59**:8 **61**:19,21 hadn't [1] 17:8 hand [1] **54:**5 handed [1] 49:11 hands [1] 24:7 happen [1] 20:4 happened [1] **11:**20 happens [1] **54:**7 harbor [1] **25**:25 hard [2] **37**:13 **48**:20

harmless [4] 12:9 15:19 **16:**2.9 harsh [1] 27:5 harsher [1] 12:9 has [51] 3:25 4:3,5 5:10 9:4, 23 **11**:20,20 **18**:22,23,24 **19**: 1,16 **25:**10 **27:**8 **28:**10,11, 16,17 **29:**13 **30:**2 **36:**3 **37:**1 **38:**22 **39:**1,3,10,23,25 **40:**3, 5,16 **41:**4,13,16,21 **45:**20 **46:**20 **53:**10 **60:**25 **61:**22 **62:**2.25 **63:**17 **64:**10 hasn't [3] 19:1,2 23:7 have [77] **4**:7,15 **5**:23 **6**:7 **8**: 16,22 **9:**16 **11:**6,17 **12:**1,1,7, 8 **13:**4 **14:**5,10 **16:**2,4,12,17 **17:**8,16,21,25,25 **18:**5,8,14, 17 **19**:4 **21**:4 **22**:4 **23**:10 **24**: 7 **28**:8 **31**:5,23,23 **34**:14,24, 25 **35**:3,16 **36**:13 **37**:10,21 **38:**22 **39:**1,5,9,20,21 **40:**19 **41:**15,23 **42:**1,4,5 **44:**1,2 **46:**20 **47:**9 **48:**21 **50:**4,12, 24 **51**:15,21 **52**:4 **53**:17 **54**: 10 **59:**2 **61:**23,25 **62:**10,14 having [2] 21:19 44:25 haystack [1] 48:2 he [85] 3:20 14:4,11,16,17, 19,22,23 **15:**3,10,10,11,15, 16,22,22 **16:**2,3,5,5,7,22,23, 25 **17:**1,2,6,7,7,8,11,14,16, 25 **18:**2,2,6,10,12,13,23,24 **19:**11,11,12,13,20,21,24,24 **20:**12,14 **22:**23,23 **23:**1,1,6 **24:**9 **25:**2,5,5,7 **26:**5 **31:**2,3, 3,5 **33:**15 **35:**11,12 **36:**7,8 **42:**22,22 **47:**16,17 **54:**9,16 **55**:12 **57**:16,23 **60**:13 **62**: 10,11 **63:**9 hear [2] 3:3 15:25 hearing [1] 46:21 heart [1] 19:10 heinous [1] 54:17 **held** [1] **50**:19 help [2] 21:11 57:21 **helps** [1] **13**:18

her [2] 26:16 34:12 here [22] 5:2 15:19 16:2 17: 4 **18:**13 **20:**2,7,13 **28:**2,11, 12 **30:**7,19 **31:**23 **32:**1 **43:**1 **46**:8 **47**:15 **53**:9 **57**:16 **60**:8, 12,15 **20**:15,18 **22**:11,20 **23**: he's [7] **18**:25 **25**:1,4,8 **36**:7 **47:**14.16 high [1] **59**:15 **him** [8] **15**:5 **18**:11,12 **19**:4 **26**:16 **35**:13 **42**:23 **47**:15 himself [1] 6:13 hinges [1] 50:11 his [34] 3:12,14,21 14:11,14, 24 **16**:8,17,21 **17**:19 **18**:9, 18,23 **19:**10,11 **22:**25 **24:**8, 25 **25**:1,4,24 **26**:6 **31**:6,9 **34**:12 **36**:5 **47**:8,11,13 **53**: 24 **54**:9 **55**:11 **57**:23 **62**:12 history [8] 10:24 34:3 49: 10,12,15,24,24 61:19 holdings [1] 49:17 honest [2] 10:11 63:8 honesty [1] 13:10 honor [20] 5:7 6:1 8:11,19, 25 **10**:5 **11**:15 **12**:4 **14**:16 **15**:1,13,17 **17**:4 **19**:25 **20**:3 **23**:4 **29**:12 **32**:8 **59**:6 **62**:21 honors [2] 48:13,13 hook [4] 8:7 9:4 42:3.9 hooks [1] 42:5 how [14] 11:17 15:18 16:1, 1 21:6,22 23:24 32:19,19 **33:**14,14,18 **41:**11 **59:**10 however [1] 12:4 huge [1] **13**:12 human [1] **30**:12 hunting [6] 17:11,23 18:1, 5 35:12,16 hurdles [1] 13:12 hypothetical [3] 27:4 58: hypotheticals [1] 49:1 i'd [1] **62**:22 idea [3] 20:12 42:12 48:16 identify [1] 27:9

if [78] **4:**18 **9:**2,2,13,19,20

10:15 **11**:3,16,23 **13**:17 **15**: 23 **19**:14,18,23 **20**:12 **21**:15 | individuals [1] **22**:10 **23**:10,14,22 **24**:8,14,18,22, 24 **25**:1,4,10 **26**:5 **27**:24 **28**: **33**:15 **35**:12 **37**:7,12,18 **41**: 3,17 **42:**22,24 **44:**2,7 **48:**21 **49:**5,10 **50:**10,16,21 **51:**3 **53**:17,22 **54**:21 **55**:7,19 **56**: 11 **57:**8 **58:**5 **59:**6,16,25 **60:** 21 **61:**6.21 **62:**3 ignorant [5] 14:9 26:1,1 **60:**19,19 **i'll** [1] **7**:14 illegal [4] 3:22 27:24 44:20 **63:**23 illegality [1] 27:1 illegally [5] **15**:3 **18**:13 **20**: 7.13 **36:**12 **illustrate** [1] **48**:9 illustrative [1] 23:9 i'm [20] 7:15 11:12 15:21 29:15,15 32:14,19,23 33:20 **35:1 36:1 48:8 49:12 50:15**, 16 **53**:6,6,7 **57**:18 **60**:17 imagine [5] **54**:24 **57**:3,11, 18 **58:**16 imagining [1] **57**:18 immediately [1] 9:16 immigration [3] 14:23 15: 4 43.4 **immutable** [1] **44**:23 import [2] 41:18 61:6 impose [1] 53:4 imposed [2] **39:**4 **47:**5 inadvertently [1] 47:11 incentive [1] 62:15 include [2] 26:22 52:9 included [1] 52:8 includes [1] **22**:12 including [1] **39**:8 incompatible [1] 61:8 incredible [1] 48:16 incumbent [2] **42**:23,25 indicated [3] 18:8,8 62:25 indictment [3] 46:25 47:3, 24

indictments [1] 47:1 14 16:9 17:8.22 18:2.3.4.18. individual [2] 30:13 57:20 infer [8] 6:19 7:4 8:15,18, 21 **9:**1,6 **22:**5 11,14,24,25 **31**:11,17 **32**:13 inference [6] **5**:22,24 **8**:13 **52:**11,13,15 inferences [3] 10:7 22:5.6 inferred [2] 9:23 19:16 inferring [1] 40:11 inflicted [1] 30:9 information [1] 40:3 infraction [1] 18:11 inherently [1] 28:3 injury [2] 22:19 30:8 innocence [2] 57:20 59:3 innocent [10] 3:13 4:24 5: 16 **10**:1,12 **26**:22,25 **30**:21 **53**:19 **62**:11 inquire [1] **63**:10 insert [1] 4:8 inserted [1] 4:18 inserting [2] 10:9 64:4 instance [5] 5:14 39:9 41: 12.15 **52:**6 instances [3] 46:9 52:4 **61**:14 instead [1] 26:3 **institution** [1] **26**:15 instructed [2] 12:20 16:16 **instruction** [1] **16**:15 intended [2] 8:14 26:22 intent [4] 5:25 19:17 29:9 52:14 intention [1] 30:9 international [1] 33:2 interpret [1] 32:25 interpretation [1] 49:19 interpreted [3] 20:16 51:1 **61**:23 **interrupt** [1] **35**:2 interstate [3] 6:11,14 44:9 intimate [2] 22:14,18 into [11] 3:13 9:11 12:10 13: 4 **14**:17 **17**:13 **20**:6 **41**:19 **47:**4 **48:**7 **52:**25 introduce [3] 17:13,22,23 invited [1] 53:18

invoked [1] 30:7 isn't [8] 5:18 16:8 29:8 36: 8 **38**:4 **44**:18 **56**:3 **57**:8 issue [8] 7:23 13:14,15 15: 6 **16**:9 **33**:3 **50**:19 **62**:7 issued [2] 46:18,21 its [9] 20:17 22:15 34:2 46: 14 **47**:4 **53**:10 **61**:19 **63**:14. it's [49] 4:8 5:24 7:12,14,22 **8**:13 **9**:2,2 **11**:1 **12**:9 **13**:1 **15**:7 **21**:25 **23**:13 **26**:8 **28**: 15 **30**:2 **32**:20,22 **38**:18 **41**: 10,10 43:24 44:15,16 48:20 **49:**24 **51:**9,14 **52:**19,20,20 **53:**24 **54:**19 **55:**8,10,14,20, 21,23 **56:**5,23 **57:**10 **59:**1, 13,14 **60:**25 **63:**13 **64:**7 itself [4] 9:20 27:20 36:21 **59**:19 i've [2] 7:22 41:22

jackson [4] 28:19 37:16, 17 **60:**4 jackson's [2] 30:6 31:7 jail [3] **31:**4 **37:**3 **48:**14 judge [8] 14:24 15:4 19:19 **31:**2 **58:**18 **63:**8,9,10 judgment [3] 21:3 23:10, juries [4] 55:1 58:13,25 59: jurisdict [1] **5**:20 **jurisdiction** [3] **5**:11 **7**:19 **52:**22 jurisdictional [12] 5:6,21 **6:**25 **7:**20 **8:**7 **9:**2,14 **42:**3,5 **51**:7 **52**:12 **53**:3 juror [3] **57**:4,12 **58**:17 jury [17] 12:19 16:15,16 19: 8,19 **22:**4 **23:**22,24 **42:**16 **51**:15,18 **54**:16 **57**:11 **58**: 25 **63:**16,16,17 just [29] 8:21 17:4 25:1 29: 19,22 **30:**3,5,5,21 **31:**13 **32:** 13,18 **33:**17 **34:**13 **35:**15 **36**:14,19 **40**:17 **47**:11 **48**: 14 **50**:8 **51**:14 **54**:21 **55**:14

58:25 **60:**11,21 **62:**5,22

K

kagan [4] 5:4,8 7:24 51:5 kavanaugh [25] 7:25 8:3, 5 **10**:13,19 **28**:14,24 **29**:5 **33**:14,22 **34**:6,20 **35**:1 **45**: 10,14,18 **55:**1,4,7 **56:**15,18 **59:**18,24 **60:**3,6 **kedem** [98] **25**:16,17,19 **26**: 11,24 **27:**2,14,22 **28:**1,22 **29:**1,6,12,16,20 **30:**2,18,23 **31:**9,15,18 **32:**3,8,10,21,24 **33**:20,25 **34**:17,22 **35**:7 **36**: 6,24 **37:**4,9,14,21 **38:**12,17, 20,24 **39:**2,11,16 **40:**15,23 **41:**7,10 **42:**7,11 **43:**6,9,12, 19,24 **44:**6,15,19,24 **45:**9, 13,17 **46:**5 **47:**9,18,22,25 **48:**5,19,22,25 **49:**8,21 **50:**4, 15 **51:**5,9 **53:**6 **54:**18 **55:**3, 5,10 **56:**1,4,23 **57:**2,6,10,25 **58:**4,15 **59:**6,13,23 **60:**2,5, 10 **62:**8 keep [1] 16:13 **kept** [1] **18:**13 kind [5] 5:22 8:22 16:7 43: 5 **51**:10 kinds [1] 45:11 **knew** [16] **8:**6,9 **14:**11,17 **15:**10 **16:**17 **21:**15,17,18 **22:**21,22 **23:**16 **25:**5,5 **31:**5 **42**:20 **know** [55] **3:**12,20 **14:**4,22 **17:**1 **18:**22,25 **19:**3,11,12, 15,16,21,21,24 **21:**1 **23:**2, 11,24,24 **25**:7 **28**:12 **31**:1, 17 **36:**7,20,23 **38:**19,21,23 **39:**21 **41:**15,25 **42:**15,22 **43:**1 **45:**7 **46:**11,12,17 **47:**2, 9 48:1 50:1 52:5 54:9,16, 21,21 **57**:16,23 **60**:9,17 **62**: 5.12 knowing [7] 4:7 12:21 27: 1 **28:**4,7 **41:**3 **61:**6 knowingly [29] 3:11 4:11, 12,16,25 **5:**3 **9:**11 **10:**9 **11:** 3,4 26:5,6 31:21 32:1,6,18,

24 33:4 39:20 40:16,20 41:

18 42:2,9 43:18,21 44:3 60: 23 61:5 knowledge [35] 3:15 4:16, 18,19 12:16 13:16 17:25 18:15,18 19:17 20:21 22:4, 5,7 24:9,25 25:2,4 28:17 29:10 30:24,25 33:1,7 37: 21 38:3 41:14,17 42:12 46: 7 48:18 50:20 63:17 64:4,6 known [1] 4:5 knows [10] 4:3 15:22 16:3, 5 17:2 23:22 36:14 39:23 47:12,17

L

lack [1] 26:20 land [1] 12:7 language [7] 9:10 43:16 **44**:1 **47**:4 **48**:7 **50**:2 **64**:1 large [1] 37:11 largely [1] 58:10 last [4] 35:20 50:10 54:15 61:24 later [2] **20**:9 **55**:13 laughter [2] 17:10 36:16 law [23] 14:6,9 20:15 28:4 **30:**11 **34:**25 **35:**9 **36:**4,9,10, 20,22 **37**:6,11,22 **39**:6,7 **46**: 4 **53:**2,2,8,9,10 law-abiding [2] **20**:8,10 lawful [3] 3:17 33:17 52:21 lawfully [4] 14:17 15:3 28: 13 **43**:1 laws [6] 34:3 38:16 39:13, 14 **43**:5 **53**:17 lawyers [1] **58**:19 least [4] 20:22 28:7 42:15 60:13 leave [1] **36**:13 leaving [2] 38:2 51:1 left [1] 57:1 legal [13] 13:9 21:16,20 25: 24 **35**:14 **38**:23 **48**:18 **51**: 18,20,25 **60**:11,12 **61:**4 legislate [4] 5:13 6:21 9:3 **41**:1 legislates [2] 34:5 48:1 legislative [4] 10:24 49:15,

legislature [1] 3:25 less [1] 39:7 lesser [1] 48:13 let [8] 30:4,4,5 33:23 35:9 **42:**7,11 **46:**5 let's [4] 4:1 38:10 55:11 62: lettina [2] 58:8.9 level [1] **12:**25 liability [2] 31:10 60:20 liable [1] **35**:18 license [6] 17:12.23 18:1.5 **35:**12.16 light [1] 4:21 like [15] **17:**5 **20:**25 **25:**11 **27:**9 **31:**21 **38:**1 **41:**24,24, 25 **43**:10 **51**:8 **52**:17 **56**:12 **62:**4.22 likely [1] 24:1 limine [1] **16**:13 limited [1] 59:16 list [1] 31:19 listed [1] 4:15 lists [1] 41:23 little [1] **64**:9 live [1] 20:7 lived [1] 47:16 lives [1] **20**:8 logically [1] 9:16 long [4] 32:14 41:23 45:20 **60**:18 longer [3] 18:25 19:13 26: long-standing [1] 26:4 look [7] 11:1 20:20 36:18 **37:**13 **38:**8,10,13 looking [1] 38:7

M

22

lot [4] 17:18 47:1 50:24 57:

ma'am [1] 15:13 made [8] 9:20 25:8 34:24 36:14 37:23 45:10 50:4 61: 16 majority [4] 26:19 34:17, 23 54:4 make [3] 24:5 43:8 53:3 makes [11] 3:16,19 4:4,21

27:18 **37:**5 **38:**7,11,14,15 **63**:22 making [4] 48:9 50:15 51: 11 53:23 many [8] **11:**17 **13:**10 **27:**7 **36**:18,22 **47**:21 **50**:1 **59**:10 massive [1] **58**:10 matter [2] 11:12 59:25 matters [4] 29:9,10 44:11, mature [1] 30:11 may [5] 3:10 12:22 25:19 **38**:19 **50**:12 maybe [4] 32:1 37:13 39: 16 **61**:15 me [17] 9:15 11:20 14:3 21: 13,13 **30:**4,5 **32:**14 **33:**23 **35**:9 **37**:7 **42**:7,11 **46**:5 **50**: 12 **52**:13 **56**:2 mean [11] **15:**19 **17:**1.1.17 **32:**25 **36:**4,5 **41:**22 **55:**7 **56:** 18 **60**:25 meaning [3] 21:12,23 62: means [5] 43:25 44:25 45: 2 **54**:11 **60**:20 meant [1] 20:2 medal [2] 48:11.17 mens [25] 4:22 5:5,20,20 9: 21,23 **10:**7,16,17 **20:**18,20 **30**:16 **31**:14 **39**:19 **40**:9 **42**: 13 **43**:16 **45**:12,16,21,24 **46**: 1,2 48:7 58:5 mental [18] 5:24 6:16,24 7: 18,19 **8:**23 **9:**1,7,20 **27:**17 **40**:11,13 **51**:24 **52**:9 **53**:13 **61:**8.8.12 mention [1] 9:21 mentioned [1] 52:1 messy [1] 13:4 might [9] 12:11,12 25:3 29: 3,21 46:10,11,17 52:4 mind [3] 19:11 48:2 59:8 mine [1] 55:20 minerals [1] 33:2 minor [1] 38:1 minute [1] 40:22

miss-advice [1] 63:8 missed [1] 38:5 mistake [15] 14:5 17:4 28: 15,16,25 **29:**3,12 **34:**23,24 **35**:4,8,18 **36**:3 **37**:6 **50**:11 mistaken [3] 28:15 34:12 35:11 mistakes [2] 10:12 43:8 misunderstood [1] 34: **mode** [1] **49**:19 modified [1] 62:1 modifies [1] 4:12 months [4] 19:2,2,2 55:15 morally [2] 37:5,8 morals [1] **37**:12 more [15] 12:12 23:25,25 **25**:6 **33**:11,21,25 **40**:3 **45**:1, 2 **48:**21 **53:**4,4 **54:**23 **62:**1 moreover [1] 61:20 morissette [3] 28:19 30:7 **59**:18 most [6] 3:17 11:13 23:11 **45**:7 **50**:23 **56**:25 moved [1] **16**:13 mr [100] 3:9 16:17 25:16,19, 19 **26**:11,24 **27**:2,14,22 **28**: 1,22 **29:**1,6,12,16,20 **30:**2, 18,23 **31:**9,15,18 **32:**3,8,10, 21,24 **33**:20,25 **34**:17,22 **35**: 7 **36**:6,24 **37**:4,9,14,21 **38**: 12,17,20,24 **39:**2,11,16 **40:** 15,23 **41:**7,10 **42:**7,11 **43:**6, 9,12,19,24 **44:**6,15,19,24 **45**:9,13,17 **46**:5 **47**:9,18,22, 25 **48:**5,19,22,25 **49:**8,21 **50:**4,15 **51:**5,9 **53:**6 **54:**18 **55:**3,5,10 **56:**1,4,23 **57:**2,6, 10,25 **58:**4,15 **59:**6,13,23 **60:**2.5.10 **62:**8 **ms** [62] **3:**6,9 **4:**10 **5:**4,7,10 **6:**1,5,9,17,20 **7:**1,3,6,9,15, 21 **8:**2,4,11,19,25 **9:**9,22 **10:** 5,18,20 **11:**15 **12:**3,16 **13:**8, 22 **14:**7,13,16 **15:**1,13,17, 21,24 **16:**4,11,22 **17:**3,11, 16,20 **19:**7,14,23 **20:**3 **21:**5, 15,24 **22:**22 **23:**4 **24:**5,22,

minutes [1] **62**:18

23.24

24 25:15 62:18,21 much [4] 23:8 39:7 53:3,4 must [5] 3:11 4:11 6:13 22: 15 52:13 my [13] 12:23 16:20 21:12, 13 27:11 32:13 34:21 50: 17 54:22 55:13 59:16 60: 16.19

Ν

n [3] 3:1 47:5 52:3

naive [1] 37:10 name [1] 25:9 namely [1] 51:11 name's [1] 30:6 narrow [1] 5:11 national [1] **50**:18 nationwide [1] 26:4 naturally [1] 45:4 nature [3] 23:20 24:11 25: navigate [1] 12:5 nearly [3] 12:5 23:7 53:10 necessarily [3] 36:20 45: 2 47:2 necessary [2] 30:17 39: need [5] 10:23 14:4,22 59: 3.4 needle [1] 48:2 net [1] 10:11 never [2] 20:10 47:14 new [3] 43:16 45:18 63:20 next [3] 3:4 11:1 32:16 nine [1] 9:17 **ninety-five** [1] **35**:25 **no** [33] **5**:5,19,20 **6**:1,12,23, 23 **9**:19,20 **10**:16 **13**:17,24 **15**:1 **18**:11 **19**:9,13 **20**:12 **25:**10 **26:**17 **27:**8 **29:**12,15 **30**:9 **31**:13 **35**:14 **39**:21 **40**: 15 **43**:10 **46**:1 **48**:16 **50**:20 **59**:6 **62**:3 **nobody** [1] **36:**13 **non-immigrant** [1] **14**:18 nor [1] 25:24 normal [2] 30:13 38:3 normally [4] 24:2 34:5 45: 4 **48**:1

nose [1] 29:8 not [97] 4:9.18.25 5:22 6:10. 16,21 **7**:11,18,23 **8**:1,21 **9**:2, 2 **10:**11 **11:**1,3 **12:**5,19 **13:** 2,10 **15:**5,18 **16:**17 **17:**2 **18:** 25 **19:**6,11,11,22,24,24 **20:** 11 **21:**11,11 **24:**7,15 **25:**22 **27**:6,16,16,19,20 **28**:2 **29**:6 **30:**20 **31:**2,11 **32:**10,18,23 **33:**20 **34:**13 **35:**6 **36:**20 **39:** 4 **40:**17 **41:**10 **44:**4,15,22 **46:**11.17 **48:**2.5.20 **49:**20 **50:**5 **51:**9,14,21 **52:**9,18,19 **53**:6,11,25 **54**:9 **55**:8,10,14, 21 **56:**5,7,23,25 **57:**3 **58:**13 **60:**11,17 **62:**2,11 **63:**5,12, 14 **64:**6.9 notice [10] 22:24 28:8 42: 15,22 **46:**22 **51:**13 **53:**21,24 **59:**23 **61:**16 **notion** [1] **30**:10 notoriously [1] 35:7 **now** [12] **11:**19 **15:**6 **16:**23 **38**:10,11 **47**:14,17 **54**:2 **57**: 1,24 **59:**11 **64:**7 number [6] 12:11,13 13:7 **55**:22 **59**:15 **63**:6

$\overline{\cap}$

o [1] 3:1 **object** [1] **4**:13 obligation [1] 28:11 offense [12] 8:9,10 12:20 **23:**17 **24:**11 **25:**6,9 **28:**21 **33**:8 **45**:21 **55**:12 **58**:6 offenses [4] 31:10 37:24 38:1 54:7 offer [1] **24**:18 offering [1] 23:19 officer [1] 14:24 often [2] 52:18 54:18 oh [1] 29:18 okay [5] 9:5 29:18 33:22 **43:**20 **57:**17 old [5] 24:5 45:18 47:13,14, omissions [3] 33:7,9 61:1 on [49] **3:**8 **10:**3,14 **11:**11

12:20 **14:**14,14,18 **15:**10,10

16:6,15 **17**:7,15 **18**:3,21 **21**: 18 **25**:18 **28**:8 **30**:6 **33**:10. 18 **41:**21 **42:**15,22 **49:**11,14, 18,18 **50:**5,11 **51:**13 **52:**13, 21,24 **53**:7,20,24 **54**:1,5 **55**: 24 **56**:5,22 **57**:3,9 **61**:16 **62**: 10.20 63:15 once [2] 12:6 29:7 one [32] 3:11 4:2 7:14 13: 25 **16**:12 **18**:7,11 **19**:2 **21**:3 **25**:7 **27**:8 **32**:19 **40**:12,12 **44:**16.20.21 **45:**1.3.24 **46:** 15,25 **50**:13,14,22 **51**:8 **52**: 17 **53**:11 **54**:22,23 **55**:19 **57**:22 ones [1] 31:19 one's [3] 41:24 44:21.22 only [16] 3:19 5:12 9:13 12: 12 **16:**4,7,11 **20:**9 **27:**23 **30:** 8.20 **46**:9 **49**:11 **55**:15 **63**:1. 22 opinion [1] 49:13 opinions [1] 41:23

or [62] 4:3,17 10:11,24 12: 19 **13**:2,15,25 **14**:20,24 **17**: 2 **18:**9,12 **19:**19,22 **20:**13 **21:**3,20 **22:**6,14,16,18,23 **23:**13 **25:**5,25 **26:**14,16,20 **27:**10,16,17 **28:**3,7,13,17 **30:**9 **33:**7,9,15 **34:**8,12 **37:** 14 **38**:16 **39**:23 **41**:13 **42**: 15 **43:**2 **45:**25 **46:**11 **51:**13, 14 **52**:24 **53**:18 **54**:21 **57**: 20 59:3 60:13 61:1,8 63:12, 14 oral [2] 3:7 25:17 order [9] 10:10 22:12,15, 25 23:3,5 44:10 46:17,20 orders [1] 46:18 **ordinarily** [1] **3**:16 other [15] 4:15 8:10 17:5 **22**:3 **31**:22 **32**:12 **41**:25 **42**: 10 **46**:24 **47**:21 **50**:12 **51**: 16 **54**:5 **57**:22 **64**:8 others [2] 42:6 45:25 otherwise [7] 3:13 4:18,

opportunity [2] 17:3 46:

23 5:15 10:1 16:20 27:19 our [16] 5:13 10:16.18 16: 11 **19:**7 **28:**1,5 **48:**8 **51:**18 **56**:1,4,8,13 **57**:18 **60**:22 **63**: out [25] 5:10 6:3,8 11:22 12: 13 **16:**14,24 **17:**7 **18:**6,12, 14 **20**:9 **27**:17 **35**:8.19 **42**: 23 **47**:1 **49**:5 **56**:9,10 **58**:6 **60:**18,23 **62:**22 **63:**18 outweigh [1] **24**:13 over [1] 45:15 overcome [2] 13:11 50:2 override [1] 45:22 overstated [1] 62:24 overstatement [1] 52:20 overstayed [2] 36:8 57:23 overstays [3] 36:5 47:8, own [12] 9:8 25:24 26:2 46: 12 **47**:4 **51**:20 **53**:10,24 **54**: 9 60:12.19 61:4 owners [1] 10:10 owners' [1] 25:21

P

p [1] 3:1 p.m [2] 3:2 64:16 pardon [1] 26:11 parents [3] 20:7 21:12 47: 13 parsing [1] **49**:14 part [6] 23:11 27:18 36:22 **38:**15,18 **39:**13 parte [1] 46:19 participate [1] 46:23 particular [1] 61:12 partner [2] 22:14,18 party [2] 24:2,3 past [2] 20:19 62:25 paternalistically [1] 59:4 penalty [2] 53:5 55:16 **people** [16] **9:**18 **11:**17,25 **12:**11,13,25 **13:**11 **24:**16 **26**:22 **28**:5 **43**:8 **51**:13 **54**:4 **57:**22 **58:**7 **59:**10 percent [5] 13:23 34:8,8 **35**:25 **54**:3 percentage [1] **13**:19

perhaps [4] 24:15 27:5 48: 4.6 persistent [1] 30:11 person [30] 3:19 4:11 19:5, 16,22 **20:**12 **21:**15 **22:**2,13 23:16 24:1,19 33:18,24 34: 15 36:5,19 39:24 40:4,4 46: 21.22 47:7.10.12 48:16 52: 6 **57**:16 **58**:2 **59**:2 person's [2] 35:5 52:19 petitioner [3] 3:8 35:11 62: presumably [4] 40:15 50: petitioners [1] 40:19 petitioner's [1] 44:7 phrase [1] **32**:24 physical [2] 22:14,17 place [5] 10:10 38:3 45:15 **51:**2 **64:**4 placed [1] 13:12 plain [3] 10:23 11:1 64:1 plea [2] 13:20 45:8 plead [1] **54**:5 pleading [1] 21:2 pleas [1] 13:24 please [3] 3:10 25:20 36:1 point [13] 15:20 16:2 18:12 **40:**7 **45:**10.15 **50:**16.17 **51:** 11 **54:**22 **56:**1.8 **62:**22 pointed [1] 46:25 posited [1] 15:3 **position** [6] **11:**9 **19:**5,7 29:25 30:1 34:21 possess [4] 18:4 31:12 35: 13.14 possessed [1] **20**:13 possesses [2] 26:7 33:17 possessing [3] 27:20 28: 2 44:8 possession [10] 3:13,17, 21 9:15.17 11:13.25 53:10 **55:**14 **63:**23 possibly [2] **35**:1,2 potential [1] **55**:16 potentially [1] **30**:22 power [3] 5:12 6:21 9:3 practical [8] 11:12 13:9,9 **51**:4 **54**:2 **56**:21 **57**:7 **63**:12 practically [2] 21:25 54:

practice [1] **54**:13 precedent [2] 4:20,22 precedes [2] 32:2,3 predecessor [1] 49:15 preeminent [1] **49**:20 prejudice [2] 12:7 24:13 preponderance [1] 29: present [1] 50:3 21 60:13 61:23 presume [2] 40:2 51:12 presumed [1] 42:14 presumes [1] 11:4 **presumption** [7] **27**:13 **30**:16 **31**:11,21 **44**:2 **45**:20, presumptions [4] 10:24 **11:**2.2 **20:**18 pretty [2] 26:19 37:13 prevail [1] 11:17 prevailing [1] **13**:17 prevent [1] 40:11 previously [1] **24**:20 **prior** [6] **49**:10,12,25 **55**:12 **58**:20 **64**:6 prison [8] 20:14 23:13.13 **33:**24 **34:**15 **36:**11 **58:**2 **59:** probative [4] 24:11,12,12 25.8 problem [9] 34:4 35:3 40: 19 54:2 57:2 60:4 61:21 63: 5.7 problems [1] 52:25 procedural [2] 12:8 13:12 proceeding [1] 12:6 produce [1] 27:5 produces [1] 61:7 product [1] 44:18 program [1] 21:13 prohibit [2] 22:16 23:19 prohibited [4] 23:18 26:6 **39:**25 **41:**16 prohibition [2] 60:24 61:2 proof [3] 25:23 51:24 53:

property [3] 59:20,21 60:8 prosecuted [2] 23:7 50: prosecution [5] 23:16,18. 20 **24**:17 **53**:1 prosecutions [3] 35:20 **49:**3 **62:**23 prosecutor [2] **24:**7.10 prosecutor's [1] 24:6 protected [2] 3:18 30:22 protection [1] **25**:21 prove [19] 13:1.2.3 14:11 16:17 20:24 21:23 23:16 24:4.18.19 31:5 34:10 42:1. 20 **51**:15,17 **55**:20 **63**:21 proved [1] **21**:25 proven [5] 22:20 29:16 30: 3 **42**:16 **54**:11 **provincial** [1] **30**:9 proving [2] 23:20 57:19 provision [6] 27:7 31:24 **39**:22 **41**:19 **43**:25 **61**:17 provisions [1] 4:14 punish [1] 21:9 punishable [4] 25:6 45:1, 2 54:22 purchases [1] 40:5 purchasing [2] 39:25 40: purpose [4] 5:3 10:9 58:1 **64:**3 pursue [2] 12:2,4 put [11] 5:2 9:11,16 21:12, 13 **28**:17 **31**:3 **34**:15 **45**:24

46:1 **47**:4

question [15] 11:8,11 16: 20 19:8.9 27:12 32:13 33: 18 **34**:1 **38**:5 **39**:17 **49**:1 **52**: 18 **53**:1 **55**:24 questions [2] 25:11 62:3 quite [1] 36:8 quote [1] 33:9

R

r [1] 3:1 raise [3] **35:**18 **62:**14.15 raised [2] 27:9 29:14

range [2] 17:7 18:7 rape [2] 24:20 42:19 rare [1] **54:**8 rather [1] 63:15 rea [24] 4:22 5:5,20 9:21,23 **10:**7,16,17 **20:**18,21 **30:**16 **31**:14 **39**:19 **40**:9 **42**:13 **43**: 17 **45**:12.16.21.24 **46**:1.2 **48**:8 **58**:5 reach [3] 12:6 16:9 59:9 reaching [1] **52**:15 read [9] 11:4.23 14:22.25 **27:**16,17 **41:**22 **48:**7 **60:**25 reading [1] 63:25 reads [1] 5:1 really [8] 8:7 10:3 19:21 20: 2 **35:**23 **42:**14 **49:**12 **55:**23 reason [11] 8:20 9:6 13:24 **18:**22,24 **19:**12,15,21 **34:**2 **42**:18 **49**:2 reasonable [7] 4:3 17:4 **22**:5.6 **39**:24 **42**:17 **43**:17 reasonably [5] 22:18 40: 23 46:11,12 61:15 reasons [1] 64:12 rebuttal [1] 62:19 received [4] 23:6 46:22 54: 24 55:12 recently [1] 33:11 recipients [1] 43:14 recklessly [2] 26:1 60:19 recognized [2] 28:16 29:2 recordkeeping [1] 38:2 recreate [1] 29:23 redesign [1] 49:2 reference [1] 61:1 references [1] 50:6 referring [1] **56**:15 reflects [1] 26:3 regarding [1] 13:15 regardless [1] 63:2 regulation [1] 33:5 regulatory [2] 33:8 60:24 rehaif [2] 3:4 16:17 reinterpret [1] 58:5 related [2] 6:11 22:25 relates [2] 5:12 9:25 relatively [1] 38:1

relevant [4] 18:1,18 33:25 **53**:14 relied [1] 33:10 relief [2] 12:12 13:13 relieves [1] 63:21 rely [2] 49:14 50:5 remain [3] 15:11 26:1 60: 18 remember [1] **60**:16 remembered [1] **55**:15 represents [1] **22**:13 require [9] 10:17,17 22:4 **37:**14 **42:**19 **46:**7 **51:**21.24 **61**:12 required [7] 3:20 28:18,20 **37:**25 **40:**12,14 **50:**20 requirement [17] 3:15 4:7 **5:**21 **6:**12 **7:**19 **8:**23 **9:**7 **11:** 24 **37:**23 **38:**3,6 **39:**4 **40:**21 **41**:14.19 **47**:6 **61**:7 requirements [4] 4:16 14: 19.20 48:8 requires [2] 33:6 53:12 requiring [1] **25**:22 reserve [1] 25:11 resolve [1] 45:8 respect [8] 19:14 31:25 39: 19 **51:**25 **52:**16 **53:**13 **56:** 14 **61**:12 respectfully [4] 6:2 10:22 **58:4 63:11** respondent [1] **25**:18 rest [3] 25:12 49:18 52:13 resting [1] 54:1 restraining [7] 22:12,24 23:3,5 46:17,18,20 result [1] 59:9 results [1] 27:5 reverse [2] 62:6 64:13 review [2] 62:7.10 revoke [1] 14:24 revolutionize [1] 50:22 ridiculous [2] 55:8,10 right [29] 6:18 7:1,2,5 8:3, 10 **10**:19 **11**:12,16 **14**:21 **19:**18 **34:**7,14 **35:**14 **36:**6 **37:**2 **38:**8,20 **43:**7,20 **45:**9, 15,17 48:19,22 55:17 59:23

60:2.5 risk [2] 35:22 56:8 rob [1] **30**:6 robbery [1] **24:**20 robert [1] 30:6 roberts [9] 3:3 12:15,18 **17:**14,17 **25:**13,16 **62:**16 **64:**14 robs [1] 48:11 rosemary [2] 3:7 62:19 routinely [1] **53**:18 rule [6] 36:13 41:2 51:2 52: 12 **63:**20.20 rules [1] 38:16 run [2] 52:25 55:21

S

s [1] 3:1 **safe** [1] **25**:25 safety [1] 22:14 said [13] 3:25 11:20 15:11 **17**:24 **33**:6 **34**:13 **35**:5 **37**:1 **38:**22 **39:**1,1,3 **44:**8 same [12] 3:24 22:1 33:1, 10 **40:**17 **41:**22 **42:**24 **44:**1 **47**:19 **52**:10 **53**:23 **54**:1 saw [1] 60:4 say [15] 7:5,7,14 8:17 11:19, 23 **52:**20 **54:**21 **55:**11,13 **56:**20 **57:**21 **60:**15 **62:**5 **63:** 10 saying [2] 10:15 29:19 says [7] 4:1 8:23 21:7 35: 11 **36:**10,13 **63:**13 school [9] 15:23 16:3,24 **17:**2,8 **18:**22,23 **19:**1 **26:**16 seal [1] 47:1 second [3] 15:7 44:13,16 section [1] 13:22 sections [1] 45:12 see [2] 47:17 51:23 seem [3] 20:23 50:13 56: 12 seems [5] 48:15 49:14 50: 12 **52**:13 **56**:2 self-evident [2] 26:20,21 selling [2] 4:2 52:7 send [1] 58:2

sense [4] 3:16,19 4:21 34:

sentence [2] 54:25 55:13 sentencing [1] 62:25 separate [3] 31:24 33:8 **43**:25 **separates** [1] **30**:20 **separating** [1] **60**:23 series [1] 21:1 serious [6] 23:24,25 25:6 36:11 53:4.4 served [1] 58:2 serving [1] 59:11 set [1] 22:10 several [1] 4:14 **she** [1] **33:**15 shifting [2] 56:8 58:16 shot [1] 18:7 should [10] 3:20 4:8 17:8 **21:**1 **33:**23 **37:**11,12,13 **42:** 16 **50:**8 shouldn't [3] 11:11 43:21 **58**:25 show [4] 15:14 22:2 39:5 **62:**10 shown [1] 12:8 **shows** [3] **23**:10 **53**:15.22 side [2] 16:12 49:18 **significant** [3] **12**:13 **55**: 22 **63**:6 significantly [1] 13:25 silent [3] 5:2 9:23 48:7 similar [1] **52**:15 **simple** [1] **12**:5 simply [1] 9:2 since [1] 30:6 single [3] 19:3 30:3 53:11 sir [4] 7:3,6 8:2,4 situation [3] 16:11 20:5 **52**:25 **situations** [1] **36**:18 six [1] 62:18 **skip** [1] **9**:13 **slim** [1] **13**:17 small [5] 12:12 49:8 55:22 **56:**11 **63:**6 **SO** [88] **3:**19 **4:**4,8,24 **5:**8 **6:** 18 **8:**24 **9:**5 **10:**2,23 **11:**21 **12**:10,22 **13**:6 **14**:9 **15**:5,9,

18 **16**:8 **18**:6 **22**:11,20 **24**: 17 26:16,24 28:10,15,24 29: 18,22,24,24 **30:**23 **31:**15,17, 18 **32**:8,24 **33**:20 **34**:9 **35**:7, 24 **36:**6,14,25 **37:**4,18,19 **38:**8,24 **39:**2,15,16,16 **40:**2, 7 **41:**7,10,16 **42:**4,7,10,11 **43**:21 **44**:6 **46**:19 **47**:2,3,9 **48**:13,20 **50**:3 **52**:23 **53**:6 **54:**14,18 **55:**15,18,18 **56:**4, 4 **57:**2,11,13,25 **59:**18 **62:**2, **so-called** [1] **52**:12 solely [1] 9:3 some [12] 15:19 16:2 30: 16 **31**:20,20 **35**:4 **39**:19 **42**: 4 **46**:18 **51**:12.24 **54**:17 someone [15] **18:**20 **19:**15 **21**:9,11,11 **23**:14 **28**:10 **33**: 4 **37**:5 **46**:10,16,24 **52**:5 **53**: 20 61:15 **something** [12] **5**:15,16 **7**: 12 **27:**19 **40:**24 **45:**3 **50:**25 **54**:10 **55**:14 **60**:12 **61**:24 **64**:5 sometimes [5] 36:4 38:14 **55:**5.6 **56:**6 somewhat [1] **62**:24 **somewhere** [1] **14:**23 **sorry** [7] **7**:15 **15**:21 **35**:2 **36:**1 **50:**15,16 **51:**6 sort [1] 58:22 sorts [2] 61:7 63:17 **sotomayor** [26] 11:5,7 14: 2,8,14,21 **15**:9,14,18,22 **16**: 1,5,19,25 **20:**23 **21:**6,22 **26:** 9,12,25 27:11,15,23 40:22, 25 **41:**8 sought [1] 21:10 speak [1] 42:11 speaking [3] 21:25 37:5,8 **specific** [7] **14:**19 **33:**7,9 **39:**7 **41:**8 **61:**1,17 specifically [1] 16:16 specified [2] 41:13 46:19 **specify** [1] **41**:17 **staples** [1] **27:**13 start [2] 31:11 58:19

started [2] 21:19 45:20 state [8] 31:20 51:24 52:9 **53:**2,8,10,13 **61:**12 **statement** [1] **46:**3 **states** [9] **3**:5 **4**:10 **28**:12 **42:**25 **44:**10 **53:**16,23 **61:**8, status [54] 3:14.21 4:5 6: 22 **9:**8 **11:**24 **12:**17 **13:**16 **16:**18 **17:**19 **18:**16 **20:**21. 24 **21**:7 **24**:9 **25**:24 **26**:6,17, 19 **28:**7.9 **30:**25 **31:**6 **33:**16 **34**:12 **38**:23 **39**:19 **40**:1 **41**: 16 **42**:12 **44**:17 **45**:3 **46**:8, 13 **50**:20 **51**:8,18,20,25 **52**: 6,16,19 **53**:13,24 **54**:10 **60**: 9,11,12,20 **61:**4,16 **62:**12 **63**:24 **64**:1 **statute** [22] **3**:24 **4**:25 **5**:3 **9**:10,20,22 **10**:4,14 **19**:6 **26**: 5 **33:**4 **38:**7 **39:**9 **40:**10 **48:** 8 **49**:16.25 **50**:3 **59**:12 **62**: 24 **63**:17 **64**:7 **statutes** [5] **22:**3 **45:**11,18, 19 64:2 statute's [1] 10:21 **statutory** [2] **42**:19 **64**:3 stay [1] 36:11 **step** [3] **11:**1 **25:**22 **39:**17 **still** [3] **4:**17 **10:**17 **18:**2 stipulate [5] 23:19 24:3,8, 10.19 stop [1] 33:23 **stopped** [4] **15:**16,23 **16:**3 **18:**10 **story** [1] **16**:12 strands [1] 60:22 strict [1] 31:10 **stronger** [1] **24**:6 structure [3] 9:10 10:21. 22 structured [1] 53:17 student [14] 14:15,18 15: 11,12,16 **16:**6 **17:**2,19 **18:**2, 21 19:1,12,13 26:14 stuff [1] 13:4 sub [1] 32:11

16,25 **53:**1 **subjective** [1] **25**:23 **submit** [3] **6**:2 **10**:22 **63**:11 **submitted** [2] **64:**15,17 subparagraph [1] 22:9 subsection [8] 33:12 39: 22 **41**:13 **46**:15 **47**:4,5 **52**:3, subsections [4] 40:17 52: **substance** [1] **21**:8 substantial [1] 13:7 **substantive** [8] **5**:14 **9**:4, 24 **10:**8 **32:**9 **43:**22 **44:**5,14 such [6] 22:17 33:5 37:1 **46:**21.22 **48:**8 sudden [3] 26:15 41:4 58: **suddenly** [1] **48**:17 **suggest** [1] **17:**18 **summary** [1] **34:**21 **superseded** [1] **49**:25 **support** [1] **22:**7 supported [2] 10:20 18:9 **supports** [2] **10:**6,8 **suppose** [7] **12:**19 **18:**20 **34:**6,7 **39:**13,14,14 **supposed** [1] **63**:9 **supreme** [2] **11**:19 **37**:1 sure [17] 19:4 27:2.14 29:1 **32:**21 **33:**20 **34:**22 **36:**8,24 **38:**12,17,24 **39:**11 **45:**13 **47**:22 **53**:6 **62**:8 sword [1] 56:3 **sympathy** [2] **56:**8,13 **system** [1] **57**:19 systems [1] 30:11

Т

t [2] 3:7 62:19 tablets [1] 49:11 tail [3] 58:8,9,10 take [3] 4:1 20:5 25:22 taking [2] 17:14 21:19 talk [1] 49:9 talked [3] 43:11 52:2,3 talking [7] 5:14 30:20 42:2 53:9 54:5 58:19 60:10 targeted [2] 7:10,11

technical [1] 39:15 tell [2] 14:3 32:14 tells [1] 40:8 ten [1] 58:2 tend [1] 48:7 tent [1] 29:8 terms [2] 22:15 45:16 terrible [1] 50:11 test [1] 27:3 texas [1] 47:17 **text** [6] **10**:3,6,14,21,22 **40**: textual [3] 46:6 50:4 60:22 textually [1] 41:11 than [10] **12**:9,22,22 **25**:7 **40**:4 **45**:1,3 **54**:23 **58**:8 **62**: thank [8] 3:9 8:11 25:13.15 **62:**16,21 **64:**13,14 that's [34] 7:10 8:14 11:16 **13:**25 **15:**5,16 **16:**6 **17:**13 **20**:2 **24**:14,23 **27**:19,22 **28**: 1 **37:**15 **40:**6,7 **45:**9,14,17, 19 **48:**3,6 **49:**17,19,20,21, 25 **52**:8 **56**:18 **57**:17 **58**:8 **63:**11.18 their [14] 12:16,17 13:15,16 **20:**7,8 **26:**2 **27:**1 **28:**6 **46:** 12 **53**:13,17 **59**:3 **61**:16 them [7] 20:20 21:3,19 46: 14 **53**:12 **56**:25 **63**:2 themselves [1] 40:5 then [25] 10:2 11:17,25 13: 8 **18:**7 **19:**24 **22:**15 **23:**23 **24**:10,15,17 **25**:8 **29**:8 **30**:1 **33**:17,22,23 **38**:5 **42**:11 **47**: 7 **55:**19 **56:**24 **57:**8 **59:**3,8 theory [2] 5:19 7:17 there [54] 3:24 4:9,18 5:5 9: 6,9,19 **10:**16 **11:**3 **12:**3,12, 13 **13**:22 **17**:3,18,23,24 **19**: 1 **21**:4 **22**:11 **23**:23 **28**:5 **29**: 20,20,20 **31:**19 **32:**10 **33:**3, 23 **34**:10 **35**:4,14 **36**:3,18 **38:**23 **39:**18 **40:**10 **41:**11, 14,17 **43:**19 **45:**25 **46:**9 **50:** 17,20 **51**:12,16 **55**:22 **57**:21 **59:**25 **62:**3 **63:**7,7 **64:**7

therefore [2] 28:4 55:24 thereof [1] 26:20 there's [17] 4:4 5:19 6:12 **13:**8,24 **21:**1 **24:**18 **28:**24, 25 **29**:19 **36**:10,12 **42**:18 **43**:16 **51**:6 **63**:1,4 these [6] 11:13 34:19 42:4 **44**:22 **45**:7 **57**:1 they [27] 9:11,13,15 13:3,5, 14 **15**:14 **19**:4 **20**:10 **21**:10, 13,17,17,18,18,19 **28:**8 **33:** 20 34:25 36:22 39:6 43:6 **46**:12 **55**:5,6 **56**:11 **63**:18 they're [11] 13:2 20:8,11 **26:**17 **28:**11,12,15 **39:**13,14, 15 **60**:8 they've [1] 47:14 thing [13] 13:1 19:3 30:20 **36:**21,21 **38:**7 **39:**10,12 **41:** 25 **51:**14,19 **54:**15,20 things [6] 22:21 38:1 41: 23 42:10 51:12.16 think [40] 8:21 11:12 13:6 **14:**3 **20:**2,4,5,8 **26:**8,21 **33:** 21 34:3,7,14 37:15 38:24 **39:**2,21 **41:**21 **43:**4,15 **44:**6, 10,25 **45**:9 **47**:21 **48**:9,21, 23 **50**:1 **51**:6,9,10 **52**:19 **53**: 14,19,22,25 **59:**21 **62:**23 thinking [1] 55:16 this [63] 3:24,24 4:20,21,24 **5**:10,22 **7**:22,24 **8**:15,21 **9**: 23 **10**:6 **11**:2,3,5 **12**:25 **14**: 17 **16:**8,9 **20:**6 **23:**11,17,24 **24**:19 **25**:5 **27**:6 **29**:23 **30**: 15,16 **31:**10 **32:**4,6,19 **33:**1, 6,10 **34**:9 **37**:1 **38**:22 **39**:2, 17 **41**:24,24 **45**:19 **47**:13 **48:**17 **49:**10,10 **51:**4,8 **52:** 17 **53**:15,17 **57**:22 **60**:7,25 **62:**24 **63:**20,23 **64:**2,10,10 those [18] 8:5 13:20 14:20 **21**:18 **22**:6,21 **23**:2 **26**:22 **31**:18 **34**:10,18 **35**:3 **49**:22 **50:**6 **52:**3 **53:**7 **61:**17 **64:**12 though [4] 17:6 38:19 59:1 **61:**25 thought [11] 10:13 14:22,

subject [5] **20**:14 **33**:24 **46**:

23 18:2 33:16,16 39:18 48: 15 **59:**22 **60:**1 **61:**15 thousands [1] **27**:7 threat [1] 22:13 threatened [1] 22:17 three [2] 45:25 61:5 through [2] 22:5 28:19 throughout [1] **29**:24 tie [1] 60:21 time [13] 7:14 15:15 18:4 **25**:12 **34**:8,9 **45**:20 **48**:21 **51:**23 **55:**13 **59:**11.16 **63:**4 times [2] 27:7 62:1 tiny [1] 58:10 today [1] 49:20 together [1] 60:21 token [1] 42:24 told [5] 15:15 18:11 31:2 **47**:15 **50**:8 too [2] 37:19 56:16 took [1] 47:3 tool [1] 24:6 totally [1] 58:20 traffic [1] 18:11 transcript [1] 21:2 **transforms** [1] **3**:12 transient [1] 30:10 **transport** [1] **6**:13 transportation [1] 6:11 traveled [1] 44:8 treatment [1] 46:14 tremendous [1] 48:24 **trial** [10] **13:**21 **15:**2 **16:**13 **30:**3 **54:**11,12 **57:**6 **58:**18, 22.22 trials [1] 56:9 true [4] 24:14,23 35:2 44: truly [4] 19:24 33:15,16 34: trust [1] 58:25 try [2] 7:14 62:15 turn [3] 11:11 51:3 56:21 two [10] 5:9 46:9,9 47:13, 16 **53**:14 **55**:18 **57**:17 **61**:3, 14 type [9] 20:4 25:8 27:9 34: 4,23 **35:**17 **42:**16 **51:**14,19

types [2] 4:15 37:24

unaware [1] 16:22 unbeknownst [1] 26:15 uncertain [1] 38:19 unclear [1] 50:16 under [14] 11:18 20:15 29: 8 **37**:2 **42**:21 **47**:1 **53**:2 **57**: 23 **58:**21 **59:**11 **61:**9 **62:**9, 23 63:3 underlie [1] 33:8 underlying [2] 21:16 51:2 understand [3] 47:18 55: 19 **58:**14 understanding [1] 33:11 understands [1] 18:22 undoing [1] 50:9 unfairness [1] 48:24 united [4] 3:5 28:12 42:25 44:10 universal [1] 30:10 unlawful [4] 38:8,11,14,15 unlawfully [5] 20:13 28: 13 35:15 43:2 44:9 unless [5] 8:23 13:14 39:3 **40:**7.8 unlikely [2] 53:16,16 unreasonable [1] 53:25 unrelated [1] 58:20 until [1] 15:4 unusual [1] **25**:22 **up** [9] **10**:11 **13**:5 **27**:4 **30**:5 **34:**15 **36:**14 **48:**9,25 **53:**8 upon [2] 42:23 43:1 us [10] 10:6,8,17 31:8 40:8, 11 **49**:11,23 **50**:1,8 use [4] 22:16,16,17 45:11 uses [1] 22:1 usually [2] 31:20 56:6

V

valid [1] 18:24 value [1] 24:13 vanishingly [1] 49:8 various [1] 60:22 vast [4] 26:19 34:17,22 54: verb [1] 4:12

verdicts [1] 13:20 versus [4] 3:4 13:20 35:9 **42:**15 very [15] 3:24 5:11 13:6,7 **22:**9,11 **32:**4,6 **40:**7 **44:**5 **49**:14 **50**:13 **59**:15 **64**:9,10 veteran [1] 48:11 victim [1] 42:21 victory [1] 24:16 video [1] 31:17 view [3] **37:**11 **62:**5,9 violate [6] 3:11 4:11.12 9: 12 **40**:20 **61**:2 violated [1] 14:20 violates [7] 26:5 32:6,25 **33:**5 **40:**16 **60:**24 **61:**6 violating [2] 37:22 39:6 violations [1] 38:2 violent [1] 22:25 virtually [1] **63**:16 virtue [1] 28:6 visa [16] 14:11,18,18,24 15: 11 **16:**6,7 **18:**3,21,24 **26:**14 **36**:5 **47**:8,11 **57**:23 **60**:16

W

waq [2] 58:8.9 wait [1] 40:22 want [12] 7:18 8:15 11:22. 22,22 **12**:11 **21**:9 **32**:15 **46**: 7 **51:**15 **54:**16 **56:**20 wanted [7] 5:23 9:7,13 17: 12 **50:**21 **51:**21 **61:**11 wants [2] 8:22 51:23 warrant [1] 18:12 was [72] 11:21 12:20 14:11, 17 **15:**2,2,15 **16:**16,22,23 **17:**6,7,14,18 **18:**1,2,10,13, 18 **20:**13 **22:**2,25 **23:**17,23, 25 **24**:1,19,25 **25**:2,5,6 **31**:2, 2,3,3,9,14,19 **33:**3,16 **34:**12, 20 **35**:11 **37**:24,25 **38**:2 **39**: 18 **42**:21,22,23 **46**:13 **47**:16 **48**:17 **50**:15,16,17,20,25 **51**: 11 **53**:25 **54**:22 **57**:16 **59**: 19,20,21,22 **60:**1,16 **61:**10 **62:**10 **64:**6,16 wasn't [4] 5:2 15:3 31:13 **55**:16

way [13] **13:**20,25 **20:**15,22 22:11 33:1 39:17 40:17 41: 22 **49**:3 **50**:22 **53**:17 **61**:21 ways [2] 21:1 53:14 **we** [63] **4:**6,8 **6:**7,19 **7:**4,4,4, 7,13 **8:**15,15,17,20,21,21, 25 **10**:21,23 **11**:23 **15**:18 **16**:2,4,9,11 **17**:21 **25**:10 **27**: 4,12 **30:**15 **31:**7,23,23 **32:** 25 **37**:13 **38**:6,11 **39**:1,21, 21 41:25 42:8,9,18 46:1 47: 25 **48:**25 **50:**3.4.8 **51:**3.12. 17,18 **52**:3,24 **56**:24 **58**:25 **59:**3,4 **62:**5,6 **63:**3,11 weak [1] 64:10 we'd [1] 64:12 weight [1] 64:10 well [26] 4:1 6:15 7:24 11: 19,24 **12**:15,18 **24**:14,19 **26**: 23 27:11 29:5,7 30:4 31:1, 17,25 **33:**22 **34:**20 **40:**6,18 **43**:3 **44**:17 **54**:13 **55**:7 **59**: we'll [1] 3:3 went [2] 18:6,7 were [14] 9:19 10:15,16 13: 5 **20:**10 **21:**17 **23:**12 **35:**20 **39**:6 **41**:18 **44**:2 **49**:10 **52**: 18 **58:**16 we're [14] 5:14 20:17 27:15. 16 **29**:22 **30**:19 **46**:10 **53**: 11 **54:**5 **55:**18 **56:**7 **57:**1 **58:** 13 60:10 weren't [1] 21:19 we've [7] 8:7 31:16 32:1 **43**:11 **52**:1,2 **53**:9 what [56] 3:23 4:6 5:8 7:16, 16,21 **8:**14,14 **9:**5,6,19,20 **11:**20 **12:**24 **13:**5,19 **14:**3,3, 9 **16**:20 **19**:10,18 **20**:2 **22**:8 **26:**9,12,18 **27:**12 **28:**14,24, 25 **30**:15 **31**:7 **33**:6 **34**:20 **35**:8,24 **36**:8,23 **37**:15 **40**:8 **42**:14 **48**:16 **49**:17 **50**:3 **53**: 2,19,20 **54:**7 **57:**5,24 **58:**1 **59:**7 **60:**15,17 **63:**18 whatever [2] 21:20 43:14 what's [4] 6:6 16:8 29:24.

Official - Subject to Final Review

24 when [18] 4:8.25 9:22 12: 10 **20**:19 **21**:11,18 **29**:9,10 **30**:8 **31**:3 **38**:11 **47**:15 **51**: 22 **59:**8 **60:**16 **61:**11.20 where [22] 3:25 4:4 21:7 **31:**1 **34:**11 **36:**18.21.22.25 **37:**19 **38:**6 **39:**9.23 **41:**23 **42:**2 **46:**10 **52:**4,25 **55:**23 **58**:9 **61**:14 **63**:7 whereas [3] 5:13 6:22 8:8 whereupon [1] **64**:16 whether [15] 8:6,9 12:19 **13:**2,3 **17:**2 **28:**8,12 **30:**2 **34**:1 **35**:12 **43**:1 **45**:24,25 **49**:2 which [28] 4:22 5:23 18:13 22:9 23:4 24:5 31:10.19 33: | worse [2] 32:1 58:7 12 **36:**13 **37:**25 **38:**10,13,14 **39:**23 **40:**20 **41:**5 **43:**25 **45:** 4 **46**:16,17,21,22 **53**:14 **54**: 11 **55**:12 **60**:13.24 **who** [31] **11:**17 **12:**1,11,13 **18:**20 **20:**6,12 **21:**7,9,12 **22:** 10 **25**:25 **26**:14 **28**:6,10 **33**: 4 **37:**5 **40:**4 **44:**9 **47:**7,10, 12 **48**:11,16 **49**:23 **50**:1 **54**: 24 **55**:11 **57**:16,22 **59**:25 whoever [1] **19**:19 whole [4] 21:1 45:14 50:24 **63**:20 who's [3] 39:25 46:16.24 why [21] 4:8 6:7,18 7:7,13, 13 **16**:8 **21**:9 **23**:11 **33**:23 **36:**2 **40:**2 **41:**12,17 **43:**21, 21 **45**:19 **48**:3,6 **52**:8 **60**:6 will [14] 20:4 21:14 22:4 30: 12 **34:**24,24,25 **54:**8,9,10, 15,18 **56:**6 **57:**10 willfulness [5] **37:**22.25 **38**:6 **39**:4 **47**:5 willing [1] **29**:3 win [1] **24**:15 with [47] 3:23 12:25 14:20 **16**:14 **17**:5 **19**:14 **20**:7 **23**: 15 **24**:16 **26**:10,13,13,18 **27**: 5.12 **28:**4,7 **30:**15 **31:**11,25 **32:**23 **34:**3 **37:**4,7,18 **38:**5,

9 **39:**19 **41:**21 **45:**20 **48:**2, 18.25 **51:**24 **52:**15 **53:**13 **55**:18 **56**:13 **57**:1 **60**:14 **61**: 3,12,18,21 **64:**1,2,3 withdrawals [1] **21:**20 within [4] 3:20 19:6 39:10 **58**:22 witnesses [1] **58**:19 won't [4] **35**:3 **54**:14,19 **56**: word [2] 31:20 32:5 work [4] 32:19 40:16 50:9 worked [2] 49:3 50:24 world [3] **12**:10 **54**:15,20 worried [2] **52**:5 **57**:13 worry [3] 46:11 59:4,4 would [59] 5:25 6:1 9:1,6, 16 **10:**21 **11:**5 **12:**3.19 **13:**6. 6 **14:**4,10 **17:**24 **18:**8,14,17 **19**:6,8,24 **20**:14 **21**:9,22 **22**: 18 **23**:5 **24**:5,7,10,12,13 **25**: 11 **27**:5 **29**:6 **32**:17 **34**:4,15 **39:**20 **40:**2 **41:**17 **42:**9 **44:**2, 7 **45:**4 **48:**17 **50:**24 **51:**15, 17,17,21 52:18,24 53:16 59: 9 **61:**23 **62:**4,6,9,14 **63:**11 wouldn't [6] 11:25 42:8 46: 12 **47:**2 **52:**5 **61:**16 written [1] 41:22 wrong [4] 14:25 32:14 34: 21 63:10 X

X [1] **48**:12

v [1] **48:**12

56:17

x-citement [1] 31:17

Y

yeah [4] 6:4 21:12 43:12

1,3 **54:**23 **59:**14 **62:**23

58:3 **61:**24 **63:**1

year [8] **25**:7 **27**:8 **35**:20 **45**:

years [16] **20:**14 **23:**13,13

31:4 **33**:24 **34**:16 **36**:11 **47**:

13,14,16 **48:**14 **50:**10 **55:**11

yes [17] 5:7 6:17 7:3,6 8:2,

4,11,19,25 **11:**15 **14:**13,16 **15**:13.17 **20**:3 **23**:4 **59**:9 yet [4] 31:3 34:15 35:5 61: you'd [3] **43**:3,15 **45**:6 your [38] 5:7 6:1 8:8,11,19, 25 **10**:2,5,13 **11**:9,15 **12**:4 **14:**16 **15:**1.9.13.17 **16:**10 **17:**4 **19:**5,25 **20:**3 **23:**4 **29:** 12 **32**:8 **34**:21 **39**:17 **41**:16 **45:**3 **49:**18 **55:**19 **56:**7,19 **59:**6 **60:**9 **62:**5.5.21 you're [19] 18:3,3 20:25 21: 2 23:11 27:6,24 28:4 29:18 **34**:7 **35**:21 **42**:2,24 **45**:7 **52**: 6 **56:**13 **60:**9 **61:**3 **63:**10 you've [4] 27:9 35:5 38:4 **55:**8

Ζ

z [1] **48:**12