1	IN THE SUPREME COURT OF THE UNITED STATES
2	x
3	SCHINDLER ELEVATOR CORPORATION, :
4	Petitioner : No. 10-188
5	v. :
6	UNITED STATES, EX REL. DANIEL KIRK:
7	x
8	Washington, D.C.
9	Tuesday, March 1, 2011
10	
11	The above-entitled matter came on for oral
12	argument before the Supreme Court of the United States
13	at 11:20 a.m.
14	APPEARANCES:
15	STEVEN ALAN REISS, ESQ., New York, New York; on behalf
16	of Petitioner.
17	JONATHAN A. WILLENS, ESQ., New York, New York; on behalf
18	of Respondent.
19	MELISSA ARBUS SHERRY, ESQ., Assistant to the Solicitor
20	General, Department of Justice, Washington, D.C.; on
21	behalf of the United States, as amicus curiae,
22	supporting Respondent.
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1	CONTENTS	
2	ORAL ARGUMENT OF	PAGE
3	STEVEN ALAN REISS, ESQ.	
4	On behalf of the Petitioner	3
5	ORAL ARGUMENT OF	
6	JONATHAN A. WILLENS, ESQ.	
7	On behalf of the Respondent	15
8	ORAL ARGUMENT OF	
9	MELISSA ARBUS SHERRY, ESQ.	
10	On behalf of the United States, as	
11	amicus curiae, supporting Respondent	32
12	REBUTTAL ARGUMENT OF	
13	STEVEN ALAN REISS, ESQ.	
14	On behalf of the Petitioner	42
15		
16		
17		
18		
19		
20		
21		
22		
23		
24		
25		

1 PROCEEDINGS 2 (11:20 a.m.) 3 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: We'll hear argument 4 next in Case 10-188, Schindler Elevator Corporation v. United States ex rel. Daniel Kirk. 5 б Mr. Reiss. 7 ORAL ARGUMENT OF STEVEN ALAN REISS 8 ON BEHALF OF THE PETITIONER 9 MR. REISS: Mr. Chief Justice, and may it 10 please the Court: 11 The question in this case is whether a FOIA 12 response is a report or investigation within the meaning 13 of the False Claims Act public disclosure bar. Our 14 position that it is allows the Court to reach the 15 critical question whether a relator has contributed genuinely valuable information. The position taken by 16 17 Mr. Kirk and the Government would disallow the public 18 disclosure bar before reaching that critical issue, and 19 it would therefore lead to a host of lawsuits by 20 relators with no meaningful information to contribute, 21 and that is precisely the result that the public -- the public disclosure bar is intended to prohibit. 22 23 Now --24 JUSTICE GINSBURG: But suppose the FOIA information is just to confirm, to back up, to fill out; 25

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1 that the -- the relator suspects there's a fraud going 2 on, and he thinks that the -- the fraud will be 3 documented by filings that the alleged fraudulent party 4 has made in the government. 5 MR. REISS: Justice --JUSTICE GINSBURG: Yes. 6 7 MR. REISS: Justice Ginsburg, that may well 8 be a legitimate use of a FOIA request, and the question 9 then becomes whether the information disclosed in the 10 FOIA response reveals the allegations and transactions 11 upon which the qui tam suit is based. But that 12 question, that use by a relator of the FOIA process, 13 doesn't go to whether or not a FOIA response is itself a 14 report or investigation within the statute. 15 A relator can still escape the public 16 disclosure bar if the relator can demonstrate that his complaint is not based upon the allegations and 17 18 transactions that are disclosed in the FOIA response. 19 JUSTICE GINSBURG: So in each case, we'd 20 have to tell what was the -- the false claims claim; was 21 it so heavily dependent on FOIA disclosures, or was the FOIA disclosures -- say they were a minimal part of 22 23 the --24 MR. REISS: Precisely, Justice Ginsburg. In fact, what a court should do is precisely what the 25

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1 district court did in this very case in a very thorough 2 opinion. Judge Stein went through every element 3 required for the public disclosure bar to be invoked, 4 including whether the FOIA response was a report or 5 investigation, including whether Mr. Kirk's complaint was based on allegations and transactions disclosed in б 7 that FOIA response, and concluded that every prong of 8 the disclosure -- public disclosure bar was met, and, 9 therefore, the public disclosure bar prevented 10 Mr. Kirk's claims. And that is precisely the analysis 11 that we contend ought to happen. 12 Under the Government's position and Mr. Kirk's position, you never get to the critical 13 14 inquiries about whether the allegations in a relator's 15 complaint were publicly disclosed in a report or 16 investigation, because under their view, a FOIA response itself is rarely going to qualify as a -- as an 17 18 administrative report or as an administrative 19 investigation. 20 We think that view is plainly incorrect 21 under the ordinary uses of the words "report or 22 investigation, " a position that was obviously found to be the case by the First, Fifth, and Third Circuits. 23 24 JUSTICE GINSBURG: If I -- if I submitted, as we -- all Federal judges do, financial disclosure 25

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statements to an administrative office, and then someone from the press has a Freedom of Information Act request to see that financial disclosure statement, does it then become -- does it become the report of the administrative office, rather than my report to the administrative office?

MR. REISS: Well, Justice Ginsburg, that's 7 8 an interesting question, and whether -- and some lower 9 courts have held that if the Federal -- if the -- if the report -- even though the report is filled out by a 10 11 nongovernmental person, such as yourself in this 12 instance, it might still qualify as an administrative report because the information being sought is dictated 13 14 by a Federal administrative agency.

Now, we don't think you have to reach that position for -- for Schindler to prevail here, because the one thing that is clear is that a FOIA response by the Department of Labor is itself an administrative report or investigation. It is a Federal --

JUSTICE KENNEDY: Suppose that in this case, the agency has said: Well, we have 10 files where these documents are, and we'll make them available you to in the reading room. Go to the reading room.

24 Is that a report?

25 MR. REISS: Justice Kennedy, if the agency

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has exercised some selectivity in terms of what it's put in that reading room, we would argue that it is a report. That's a far cry from what we have here, but that's a much closer case.

5 But with respect to FOIA responses, the 6 third way in which information is disclosed by an agency 7 under FOIA, it is always in response to a specific FOIA 8 request. The FOIA response constitutes the agency's 9 official response to that request. It's subject to 10 appeal, appeals -- even subject to appeal in the Federal 11 courts, and this Court itself has had --

JUSTICE KENNEDY: Well, I don't know if the files are digitized or not, but if they want this particular veteran's report, suppose you could just push a button, and they all come out. Is -- is that a report when those veteran's documents are just put together in a rubber band and shipped off?

18 MR. REISS: It certainly is a report. A19 report is any officially sanctioned notification.

20 Common understanding.

21 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: It doesn't sound 22 like in normal parlance if you come to an agency and say 23 I want these documents, and the person comes down and 24 says here they are, he's not going to say here's my 25 report. He's going to say here are the documents you

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1 asked for; this is our response.

2 MR. REISS: Mr. Chief Justice, it is a 3 report in the following sense: The agency is saying, one, we have these documents; two, these documents are 4 the very documents you're asking for. That is --5 б CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: There's information, 7 facts, that you can glean from their action, but that 8 doesn't make what they've done a report. 9 MR. REISS: Well, with all due respect, Mr. Chief Justice, I think their response in handing 10 over the documents, saying these are the documents, is a 11 report that we have these documents; here are the 12 13 documents you've requested. Now, of course --14 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: So that means that if 15 they tell you go look for it on the Web site of X 16 agency, then they are incorporating everything that that other agency has as part of their report? 17 18 MR. REISS: Well, they are --19 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: That it's not a response 20 in telling you you've got to find what you're looking 21 for? 22 MR. REISS: It is a report in the sense they're reporting where to look for it. It is a far cry 23 24 from the FOIA responses at issue in this case and most FOIA responses. In this case, there are three different 25

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FOIA responses at issue. The first two FOIA responses have two important pieces to them. They say, one, for certain years we couldn't find any of these VETS-100 reports, we don't have them. We do have them for other years.

б Those responses communicated key facts upon 7 which Mr. Kirk based his qui tam complaint. He alleged 8 that in 6 of the years -- 6 of the 9 years at issue 9 here, his allegation is Schindler never filed these 10 required VETS-100 reports. The communication by the 11 Department of Labor, we don't have those reports in 12 those years, was the sole basis on which those 13 allegations are made and is clearly a report. The 14 report is: We don't have those reports.

15 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Is your position 16 that sometimes it can't -- a FOIA response can be a 17 report and other times it's not?

18 MR. REISS: No, Mr. Chief Justice. Our 19 position is that every FOIA response is itself a 20 report -- many will require an investigation -- but 21 every FOIA response is itself a report within the 22 ordinary meaning of the word "report," which is a 23 notification. There are news reports, there are weather 24 reports, there are traffic reports. There are, as in 25 this case, VETS-100 reports. They are all reports.

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1	JUSTICE GINSBURG: So there's no difference
2	between a report the government has an investigating
3	commission and it works up a report as opposed to the
4	many government agencies that are just repositories?
5	They accept pieces of paper, reports, filed by other
б	people, like a tax return, like a financial disclosure.
7	The agency does nothing, has no input.
8	I mean, there's surely different between
9	those two kinds one, I would say, the natural
10	understanding would be it's a report by the person who's
11	filing it to the agency; and the other, where the agency
12	puts personnel to investigate an issue, is a report of
13	the agency. And you seem to say, no, they're all
14	reports of the agency.
15	MR. REISS: Justice Ginsburg, let me be
16	clear. If if the agency simply had an open-door
17	policy, just filed everything in a room and said in
18	response to a FOIA request those documents are publicly
19	available, you can go in and search our files, figure
20	out if those reports are there or not that agency
21	response would not be a a report or investigation. A
22	response that simply says do the search yourself
23	JUSTICE GINSBURG: Let's take this very
24	case
25	MR. REISS: We may or may not have the

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1 document.

2 JUSTICE GINSBURG: I'm asking you isn't 3 there a difference between saying we want the raw filings, we want what Schindler filed, we don't want the 4 government to do any investigations, we want them to do 5 just the mechanical thing that they do under FOIA, and б 7 an agency saying we're going to investigate and make a 8 report, we're going to put our people under the investigators, and we're going to interview witnesses, 9 10 they're going to examine documents, and -- and we'll 11 make a report? 12 That's how I understand a government report. But it's very hard for me to understand how a report by 13 14 Schindler becomes a government report simply because it 15 is filed with the agency. 16 MR. REISS: Justice Ginsburg, we think that reports and investigations can certainly vary 17 18 drastically in degree and kind. An antitrust 19 investigation may require millions and millions of 20 documents and take the Justice Department 4 years. On the other hand, if the Department of 21 Labor itself had decided to determine or to investigate 22 23 whether Schindler itself had filed these VETS-100 reports, it would have done exactly what it did in 24 response to Mr. Kirk's FOIA request. It would have --25

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1 it went to -- his request started out with the 2 Department of Labor Office of Information. 3 It was sent to the Division on Investigation and Compliance, located in a completely separate 4 building. The response to his request was delivered by 5 Mr. Robert Wilson, who is the chief of the б 7 Investigations and Compliance Division. His activity 8 clearly constitutes an investigation, and the results 9 that he gives to Mr. Kirk is clearly a report. 10 There may be many other agency activities that are far more detailed, far more complex, but it 11 doesn't make what is done in response to a FOIA request 12 not a report or investigation. They are still reports 13 14 and investigations within the ordinary meaning of those 15 words. JUSTICE ALITO: But is the question whether 16 the documents that are turned over themselves reports or 17 18 whether they are included in a report? I thought what 19 (e)(4) said was that you -- you determine whether it is 20 in a congressional administrative or accounting office 21 report. 22 So that, suppose the Department of Labor

issued what everybody would concede is a report and appended to that certain documents, wouldn't those documents be in the report, even though they are not the

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1 report themselves?

2 MR. REISS: Absolutely, Justice Alito. 3 When -- when a FOIA response says, as it did in this case, we didn't -- say it says we didn't find certain 4 5 documents; we did find certain documents. Here are the documents we found. The attachment of the documents б 7 that's found is part of the report, but the report is --8 is a complete report. We didn't find some things; we 9 found these things, here are the things we found; they 10 meet the description of what you asked for. The 11 documents being attached are clearly part of the report. Now, we think that the position taken by the 12 Government and the Respondent also creates fairly 13 14 serious dislocations. Under the definition of "report" 15 advanced by Mr. Kirk and the Government, many things 16 that are actually called reports by statute are not 17 reports.

18 The Department of Labor's -- Department of 19 Labor reports that it is required to file detailing its oversight and compliance of VEVRRA, the statute at issue 20 21 here, is called a report under section 1354. The -- the report that every agency must file under the Freedom of 22 23 Information Act detailing their activities and their compliance with FOIA, itself called a report under the 24 Freedom of Information Act, that is not a report under 25

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1 the definition advanced by the Government and Kirk, 2 because they require some element that appears nowhere 3 in the public disclosure bar. They require an element 4 of some kind of search for wrongdoing or fraud. That definition appears nowhere in the public disclosure bar. 5 JUSTICE GINSBURG: We'll find out from them б 7 if that is what they have set their position. I had not 8 read them to say that. I read them to say only -- to challenge your position that every FOIA response is 9 10 necessarily a report for purposes of the False Claims 11 Act. 12 MR. REISS: Yes, Justice Ginsburg, but their response is that certain FOIA responses will constitute 13 14 a report or investigation, depending on the underlying 15 documents that are disclosed. 16 JUSTICE GINSBURG: If you request a report, 17 then you get a report. 18 MR. REISS: But -- but their -- their test 19 for the underlying documents is effectively the resurrection of their on-the-trail notion that this 20 21 Court rejected only last term in the Graham County case. They infused that requirement, the report requirement, 22 with this notion that the government has to be looking 23 for something wrong. And if the report that is 24 disclosed along with, as Justice Alito points out, the 25

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FOIA response is a report that indicates the government was looking for something wrong, well, that's a report. If it doesn't indicate that, it doesn't qualify as a report.

5 We think that crabbed definition of report is not the ordinary definition of report, and this Court б 7 has said innumerable times, including I've heard even 8 today that the Court looks to the ordinary, regular 9 meaning of terms. The ordinary meaning of "report" 10 clearly encompasses every FOIA response. 11 If there are no further questions, Mr. Chief 12 Justice, I would reserve my time. 13 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Thank you, counsel. 14 Mr. Willens. 15 ORAL ARGUMENT OF JONATHAN A. WILLENS 16 ON BEHALF OF THE RESPONDENT MR. WILLENS: Mr. Chief Justice, and may it 17 please the Court: 18 19 Schindler is asking the Court to construe 20 "administrative report" far too broadly. In its view, 21 the public disclosure bar would apply to all FOIA documents, regardless of their content. It would also 22 23 apply to nearly all other documents created or disclosed by the government. This construction of the bar would 24 25 seriously undermine the operation of the False Claims

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1 Act.

2	Congress amended the Act in 1986 to
3	encourage whistleblowers specifically to use government
4	records in their investigations. This Court recognized
5	that objective in the Hughes Aircraft case.
б	CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Most of the maybe
7	I'm maybe this isn't correct, but many FOIA responses
8	include more than just turning over the documents.
9	They've got a privilege log or other things, this
10	exemption applies, here's a document, but these things
11	are blacked out, and they tell you why. Is that a
12	report?
13	MR. WILLENS: No, Your Honor. If it's a
14	FOIA response, it's not a report. The the documents
15	here are very, very typical of a low-level FOIA
16	response, and the this Court, of course, gets more
17	complicated FOIA cases with our First Amendment issues
18	and national security issues, but this is a very, very
19	standard FOIA response. And the letter, which is in the
20	record, is a very typical FOIA response. It's a form
21	letter with three paragraphs: We got your request;
22	here's what we found, you can appeal if you want to.
23	They're all the same.
24	So for this purpose, it's useful just to
25	look at this one That there's always a pessibility

25 look at this one. That -- there's always a possibility

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1 that a FOIA officer will uncover something else, a sign 2 of wrongdoing, for example; but that -- at that point, 3 it becomes not a FOIA case anymore, not a FOIA process anymore. FOIA is very limited to just the finding and 4 releasing of documents. And for that reason, we --5 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Well, but it's not б 7 really because it does get into the assertion of 8 exemptions and privileges, and --9 MR. WILLENS: That's true. 10 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: -- things of that 11 sort. And why isn't that a report of somebody's 12 evaluation of the particular documents that are being 13 released? 14 MR. WILLENS: The -- all the work that Your 15 Honor described goes into whether or not that document 16 should be released; and under the False Claims Act test the release of documents is only the first test in the 17 18 five-part public disclosure bar test. It -- FOIA just 19 moves the -- the document from the government files into 20 the public and satisfies the first prong of the test. 21 But the Second Circuit said that the second part of the test requires an examination of the individual documents 22 23 that are being released. 24 JUSTICE ALITO: Well, could we talk about

25 the test that you propose? You say that a report is a

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usually formal account of the results of an 1 2 investigation given by a group or person authorized to 3 make it, right? 4 MR. WILLENS: That's right. 5 JUSTICE ALITO: And then an investigation is б most reasonably understood as an official probe into 7 fraudulent conduct. MR. WILLENS: That's correct, Your Honor. 8 9 That --10 JUSTICE ALITO: So if the report does not 11 investigate fraudulent conduct, then it isn't -- if 12 something does not involve information about fraudulent 13 conduct, it's not a report? 14 MR. WILLENS: We -- we wouldn't take that 15 hard a line, Your Honor. The -- the material you're 16 quoting comes out of the dictionary, and we were looking for a good -- it's based on dictionary definitions, I 17 18 mean. We were looking for a good, reasonable definition 19 to come out of Webster's Dictionary. We're asking the 20 Court to adopt the Second Circuit's definition, which is 21 broader and doesn't have an explicit requirement of investigation into fraud. And we certainly aren't 22 23 asking the Court to rule that all the standard administrative reports that agencies issue all the time 24 25 are not reports.

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1	But it's very useful in a close case where
2	the document doesn't say this is the administrative
3	report or the report of staff on a particular issue
4	it's very helpful in a close case to look at the context
5	of the statute.
б	JUSTICE ALITO: Well, could I ask you about
7	a document to which your adversary referred? The
8	Department of Justice and all of the other departments
9	are required annually to issue what are termed Freedom
10	of Information Act reports. Now, is that a report
11	MR. WILLENS: Yes.
12	JUSTICE ALITO: under the False Claims
13	Act?
14	MR. WILLENS: Yes, it is, Your Honor, and
15	we've argued that because the FOIA uses the word
16	"response" for the documents we're talking about today
17	and uses the word "report" for that document that goes
18	to Congress, it must have understood those words to mean
19	different things.
20	JUSTICE ALITO: But this report is
21	doesn't seem to involve a process that's any less
22	mechanical than responding to a FOIA report. It's
23	basically a compilation of statistics: how many
24	requests were filed, how long it took to process them,
25	exemptions that were claimed, and so forth. So what's

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1 the difference? 2 MR. WILLENS: Well, FOIA is a special case, 3 Your Honor; that's the first difference. It only looks 4 into whether or not documents should move from government files into the public, and we're suggesting 5 that because there's such a strong government purpose in б 7 encouraging whistleblowers to bring those documents out, 8 that in order to give meaning to the list of enumerated sources here you have to look at what the documents are 9 10 there, that are coming out. 11 You can look at this FOIA cover letter, and 12 I think you'll see that it doesn't have any substantive content to it. It just refers to the investigation, or 13 14 it refers to the FOIA search that was -- that took place 15 here. 16 JUSTICE SCALIA: Well --MR. WILLENS: In a lot of ways -- sorry. 17 JUSTICE SCALIA: Give us -- give us your 18 19 definition. You say you're not standing by the 20 dictionary definition --21 MR. WILLENS: Right. 22 JUSTICE SCALIA: -- that was read. You're 23 -- what is your definition? It's not just reports of investigations into fraud. What else is it? 24 25 MR. WILLENS: On the investigation side,

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1 it's a definition -- the definition is a focused and 2 sustained inquiry toward a government end, a substantive 3 government end that would have to do with the policies 4 and practices of the -- of the agency; that is, uncovering noncompliance or assembling information about 5 б a policy program or something like that. We're trying 7 to distinguish that from --8 JUSTICE SCALIA: Do you know any -- any 9 dictionary that gives that definition? I mean, the 10 advantage of -- of the Petitioners' is they use a -- a 11 dictionary definition. It may be a very broad one and 12 you don't like it for that reason, but it is the way the 13 word is sometimes used. 14 MR. WILLENS: It is, Your Honor. 15 JUSTICE SCALIA: I don't know any dictionary 16 that would define the word the way you say it. 17 MR. WILLENS: That's the Second Circuit's 18 holding, Your Honor. That's exactly why we spent a 19 large part of our brief explaining why there's a better 20 dictionary definition than the one that Petitioner uses. 21 One important difference --22 JUSTICE GINSBURG: Which is -- can you point 23 us to the page so we can see the Second Circuit's definition of report and the Second Circuit's definition 24

25 of an FCA investigation?

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MR. WILLENS: I'm not sure that I can do
 that, Your Honor.

3 JUSTICE GINSBURG: Well, I don't -- I don't 4 want to eat into your time.

5 JUSTICE ALITO: Well, I -- I understood the 6 definition that I read to be the position that you are 7 advocating, not simply some dictionary -- some 8 definition that happens to appear in the dictionary. I 9 understood that to be the test that you were saying we 10 should adopt. Am I wrong? Did I misread your brief?

11 MR. WILLENS: We -- we believe that that's a 12 good definition that could be used, Your Honor, but the 13 trouble is that there's not going to be any dictionary 14 definition that covers all the innumerable ways that 15 "administrative report" can be used. And I wanted to 16 just -- to answer your earlier question to say that, of course, there are standard administrative reports that 17 18 agencies issue. The -- the courts below have been 19 resolving this kind of issue outside the FOIA context 20 for 25 years since this statute was passed without any serious trouble. 21

JUSTICE ALITO: But if we adopt your definition, isn't it true that a lot of things that are labeled Department of Labor report, Justice Department Freedom of Information Act report, are not reports?

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1	MR. WILLENS: Yes, Your Honor, and that's
2	why I told you that the Second Circuit's definition, if
3	you're looking for an overarching definition, is a
4	better one. The trouble there
5	JUSTICE ALITO: So you're withdrawing from
6	the definition that you proposed in your brief?
7	MR. WILLENS: I I believe they are both
8	helpful, Your Honor, and I also believe that the the
9	Second Circuit's definition covers all of these kinds of
10	reports, but there's no need for this Court to issue its
11	own definition. There's another way of resolving this
12	case, which is simply to answer the question of whether
13	FOIA responses, which are unique in many respects, and
14	have their own statutory and regulatory structure, are
15	administrative reports or investigations on their own
16	terms. And
17	JUSTICE SCALIA: Don't we have to say why?
18	Don't we have to say why they are they are that?
19	MR. WILLENS: Of course, you have
20	JUSTICE SCALIA: And once we have to say
21	why, we're we're getting into the need for defining
22	what a report is.
23	MR. WILLENS: Well, I it would be
24	possible
25	JUSTICE SCALIA: We don't usually just say

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yes, no; you know, we usually give reasons. 1 2 MR. WILLENS: I agree with that, Your Honor, 3 but point two of our brief is an explanation of why it 4 makes sense not to have a categorical rule that every FOIA response and all of its attachments are always 5 administrative reports and investigations. And I submit б 7 you don't have to, to find administrative report an 8 investigation for all purposes in order just to answer 9 that narrow question. 10 For example, the word "investigation" is 11 used in the False Claims Act for a very specific kind of 12 investigation: a law enforcement investigation. And a

13 FOIA search, which is defined in that statute as a 14 review, is not an investigation.

15 JUSTICE SCALIA: Let's talk about the 16 purpose of the statute. Surely, that should bear upon 17 how you read the -- what you read the words to mean. I 18 had thought that the purpose was as -- as Petitioner's 19 counsel said, the purpose was to allow people to bring 20 qui tam actions who have their own information and who 21 are not just relying on information that they -- that is 22 not personal to them. Is that accurate or not? 23 MR. WILLENS: No, Your Honor. The -- the

24 statute has always encouraged both insiders and people 25 who are dealing with secondhand information, what we

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used to call private attorney generals, to go out and do 1 2 their own investigation. And Congress amended the 3 statute in 1986 to encourage those people and insiders 4 like Mr. Kirk to get documents out of the government files that they need as evidence to support their case. 5 The case doesn't lack merit simply because б 7 the whistleblower needs additional evidence to prove his 8 case in court, and FOIA is a critical aspect of that 9 because relators frequently don't have one piece of 10 information, which is what their corporation said to 11 government contracting officers. That is, Mr. Kirk, for 12 example, knows operationally -- he knows that every contract Schindler had for 15 years was breached because 13 14 they were not following the key contractual provision to 15 abide by the --16 JUSTICE SCALIA: He only knows that because 17 of the FOIA response. 18 MR. WILLENS: No, Your Honor. 19 JUSTICE SCALIA: Because -- because the 20 agency said we don't have any reports for those 5 years. 21 Why isn't that information from the agency a report by 22 the agency that we don't have any documents from those 5 years, and, therefore, your client says they didn't file 23 24 documents for those 5 years? 25 MR. WILLENS: There were a few statements

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wrapped up in that -- in that question, Your Honor. But the point I'm trying to make is that Mr. Kirk has a vast amount of inside knowledge about this breach of contract that was going on for so many years, and it's different from the notification requirement. That's what triggers the False Claims Act liability.

7 But it's different from saying that there 8 was a fraudulent scheme going on for 10 or 15 years that 9 damaged the government, damaged the veterans employed by 10 the company, and -- and undermined the whole purpose of 11 VEVRRA that requires it to be in these contracts.

JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: Counsel, the -- I think you've just divided up two issues. The first is, the FOIA letter does tell you that there weren't reports for certain years.

MR. WILLENS: It said -- the word is that reports were not found.

JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: Found. Now, the issue is different from whether the ones that were found were false or not; is that correct?

21 MR. WILLENS: That's true, and I would say 22 it's also different from the issue of whether they were 23 filed, because the fact that the agency didn't find them 24 during a cursory review of its records, which is -- a 25 reasonable review of the records is all it's required to

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do. In a compliance investigation, of course, they 1 would go on much further. They would look to see if the 2 3 documents were filed somewhere else. If they --4 JUSTICE SCALIA: But your client would search if they weren't filed, and on the basis of no 5 other information except this FOIA response. б 7 MR. WILLENS: It's not no other information, Your Honor. It's a pattern of --8 9 JUSTICE SCALIA: How else does your client know that there were no reports filed for these years, 10 11 which is part of the -- part of the claim here? 12 MR. WILLENS: He knows that Schindler did not collect the information that it would have needed in 13 14 order to file accurate reports. 15 JUSTICE SCALIA: He wasn't there during 16 those years, was he? 17 MR. WILLENS: He was only not there during the very tail end of our period, which runs from 1999 to 18 19 2005. He was there and he was fired or let go in the 20 middle of 2003, so he has personal knowledge of all of 21 that failure to collect the information. The question, then, is whether Schindler filed false reports or failed 22 to file them at all, and he alleged, without reference 23 to the FOIA response, that it had to be one or the 24 25 other. And either way, it's going to be a violation,

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1 and that's sufficient at this stage of the case. 2 We're the 12(b)(1) motion, Your Honor. I 3 haven't had an opportunity for discovery and we don't 4 know anything else about Schindler's conduct, but it's -- it's not correct to say that -- well, I think 5 I've answered the question. б JUSTICE ALITO: Well, may I ask you why a 7 8 FOIA response doesn't satisfy the Second Circuit's test? 9 An investigation, the Court says, quote, "implies a more 10 focused and sustained inquiry toward a government end." 11 Now, the government end in responding to a FOIA request is compliance with FOIA, and somebody has 12 13 to search for these records and determine whether any 14 exemptions apply, and that would seem to be focused and 15 sustained. So what element is missing? 16 MR. WILLENS: The -- there's a missing government end here because all that's happening is the 17 18 transmission of documents from inside the agency to the 19 outside the agency. 20 JUSTICE KENNEDY: But that's the way the Second Circuit defined its own, or limited its own 21 definition. But why isn't it -- why isn't the Ninth 22 23 Circuit incorrect -- pardon me, the Second Circuit incorrect when it says that this is not a governmental 24

25 end? It is a governmental end.

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1	MR. WILLENS: Obviously, satisfying the
2	requirements of FOIA and its regulations is a government
3	end to that extent, but the Second Circuit was trying to
4	distinguish between the substantive work of an agency
5	and the more ministerial but still important act of
б	taking documents out of files and sending them out to
7	the public. A FOIA officer is is separate and apart
8	in most cases from other programmatic officers in an
9	agency, because we want to keep that act of taking
10	documents out of the files and making them public
11	separate from people who might not want those documents
12	to go out into the files into the public.
13	CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: The person is the
14	person is separate but is often dealing on a regular
15	basis with people who have line responsibilities and
16	something else.
17	MR. WILLENS: Of course.
18	CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: He sees something
19	well, that looks like it might be a problem he gets
20	on the phone or goes down there and says: Is this
21	covered by the exemption or not?
22	MR. WILLENS: Of course. I didn't mean to
23	say that they don't speak to them. It's just that
24	there's a different line of authority in most cases, and
25	it's a different kind of mission. So I I hear the

29

question, and I understand the problem, but at some point you need to distinguish between what FOIA's trying to do, which is to make documents public, and what the government agency's work is, which is to implement its policies, procedures, sign contracts, build roads and whatever else it does.

7 There's such a strong government purpose in 8 getting these documents out to the public, and specifically in this case to relators and whistleblowers 9 10 that this Court has held, 15 -- has held, almost 15 11 years ago, that that is why Congress amended the statute 12 in 1986, and to tell the Congress now 25 years later 13 that they made a mistake when they used the word 14 "administrative report" and they accidentally covered a 15 vast number of documents, they could have used the word 16 "agency records," which they used in FOIA to cover everything. But instead, Congress chose a very narrow 17 18 set of enumerated sources, specifically so that other 19 documents would be available to relators.

As I tried to say before, getting those FOIA documents out to a relator is particularly important, because it has the correspondence between Schindler or other contractor and the government.

24JUSTICE ALITO: How do you determine which25government ends count and which government ends don't

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1 count?

2 MR. WILLENS: My only argument is that FOIA 3 is a different kind of mission.

JUSTICE ALITO: That's the only
government -- compliance with FOIA is the only
government end that doesn't count?
MR. WILLENS: I believe FOIA is a special
case, Your Honor, and there are many reasons why that -that would be the case. We've argued that the -- the
plain language of FOIA indicates that a response is not

11 a report; a search is not an investigation.

JUSTICE ALITO: So a report that goes to a department or agency's compliance with some law that is not directly related to the mission of that department, that would qualify as a -- as a government end for these purposes, but FOIA's the only thing that doesn't count?

17 MR. WILLENS: FOIA is the only thing that --18 that doesn't count. It's like a publishing house or a 19 little clearing house inside each agency whose job is to 20 take manuscripts, or in this case, reports or audits or 21 hearings or whatever, and take them out into the public. I think it's fair to distinguish between that function, 22 the publication function, and the substantive work of 23 24 the agency. If you don't do that, then you're heading 25 down a slippery slope which Schindler eloquently

31

1 articulated in its reply brief. You end up at a point 2 where not only FOIA documents are covered, but non-FOIA 3 documents, in one case, even SEC filings, private SEC 4 filings that are automatically posted to the commission's computer, Schindler seems to think that 5 those are administrative reports. б 7 And you've, of course, transformed every 8 private document, like these VETS-100 reports, into 9 public documents simply by the process of corporate 10 filing and then release by the government. There's 11 simply no basis for that in the statute, and it would 12 cause enormous harm to the operation of the statute. 13 Thank you. 14 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Thank you, Counsel. 15 Ms. Sherry. 16 ORAL ARGUMENT OF MELISSA ARBUS SHERRY, ON BEHALF OF THE UNITED STATES, AS AMICUS CURIAE, 17 18 SUPPORTING RESPONDENT 19 MS. SHERRY: Mr. Chief Justice, and may it 20 please the Court: 21 I want to start with one thing that hasn't 22 yet been brought up this morning, and that is the context. We are not talking about words in isolation. 23 We're not talking about the abstract meaning of the word 24 25 "report." What we're talking about is public

32

1 disclosures of allegations or transactions in a 2 congressional, administrative, or GAO report hearing, 3 audit or investigation. And in that context, the word, the phrase "administrative report," the phrase 4 "administrative investigation," has some meaning. 5 б When you speak of a congressional 7 investigation, when you speak of a GAO report, and when 8 you speak of an administrative audit, that conjures up a certain image that goes beyond the simple search for 9 10 responsive records in response to a --11 JUSTICE ALITO: Your test, am I right --12 this is page 21 of your brief -- that it has to go to 13 the uncovering of the truth of the matter or inquiring 14 into wrongdoing. Is that your test? 15 MS. SHERRY: I don't think it has to go just 16 to the inquiring into wrongdoing. I think the way to 17 think about it is whether or not the agency or the governmental entity is engaging in a substantive inquiry 18 19 into and a substantive analysis of information of data, 20 of facts, and that's the distinction between what an 21 agency does in response to FOIA. 22 FOIA is a means of public disclosure. It's 23 a method by which an agency grants the public access to preexisting records that are in its possession. It is 24 25 essentially the public disclosure component of the

33

1 public disclosure bar --

JUSTICE ALITO: Isn't the test whether -the test is whether there's a substantive analysis of
facts?

5 MS. SHERRY: There's a substantive analysis of the facts. For example, in the FOIA context, while б 7 the agency is certainly pulling responsive records and 8 is engaging in some sort of inquiry into whether exemptions apply and whether the information can be 9 10 released or should be released, it's not looking at the 11 data. It's not looking at the information that's in that document for its substantive content. 12

JUSTICE ALITO: So -- but when the -- when the DOJ pulls together at the end of the fiscal year the number of FOIA requests that it received and calculates the length of time they were pending and discloses that in the annual freedom of act -- Freedom of Information Act report, that is a report?

MS. SHERRY: I think that would be a report under our definition because the Department of Justice is actually engaging with the data, engaging in the analysis. And if I'm remembering correctly, I think it also requires, for example, the Attorney General to report on how it's encouraging compliance with FOIA by the different agencies.

34

1	And so I think in most of the circumstances
2	that it would still qualify as a report, and I think
3	FOIA is quite distinct from that.
4	And if you look at the facts of this case in
5	particular, it demonstrates what the substance of the
б	agency's action is in a FOIA case. It's again, it's
7	a means of public disclosure. Congress could have
8	enacted a very different public disclosure bar. In 1943
9	to 1986, there was what was called the government
10	knowledge bar.
11	JUSTICE ALITO: Every report is a mean
12	means of public disclosure. Does the Freedom of
13	Information Act report is a means of public disclosure,
14	that's the reason that Congress required it.
15	MS. SHERRY: That's that's certainly
16	true, but the public disclosure bar requires more than
17	just the public disclosure. Congress made the extra
18	effort and included only particular enumerated
19	governmental sources. Whatever the line is, we know
20	that it cannot be any dissemination of information from
21	a governmental entity.
22	JUSTICE ALITO: But I'm I'm still
23	struggling to find out what the definition is of of a
24	report or an investigation. You say it's a substantive
25	analysis of facts. Does not the person who processes a

35

FOIA request have to engage in a substantive analysis of facts to determine whether particular documents fall within the scope of the request, whether certain materials are covered by exemptions?

5 MS. SHERRY: I don't think the -- two answers to that question. One is I don't think the 6 7 officer engaging in any substantive analysis of the 8 facts that are in the records that it's disclosing, but the second answer to that question is if that's all 9 10 that's required, then I think we're back to a position 11 where every disclosure of information by the government 12 would qualify as a public disclosure.

And we not -- we know that's not the choice that Congress made. It included only specifically enumerated sources, and it chose particular words. It chose report, hearing, audit or investigation. It is hard to think of what other words Congress could have used to describe the type of report we are talking about or the type of investigation besides those words.

If Congress had wanted to have a broader meaning, it had a number of other types of words at its disposal. It could have said document, it could have said communication, it could have said record, and then it would map quite well on to what FOIA is, which is the public disclosure of agency records. It didn't do any

36

1 of that, and so I think we have to give some credence to 2 the choice of words and to the fact that Congress --3 JUSTICE BREYER: So what -- why -- imagine 4 everything here is the same. That is, what I imagine happened here is that an individual wrote and asked for 5 a FOIA request. Did Schindler Elevator file a certain б kind of statement. And you say that's not a report. 7 8 Now, imagine everything the same except the person who asks is called Joe Smith, fraud officer for 9 10 the agency. Everything else is the same. Now is it a 11 report? 12 MS. SHERRY: No, and -- I'm sorry. The second circumstance it is, but let me -- I answered that 13 14 incorrectly. The second circumstance it would be, but 15 let me explain the distinction. 16 JUSTICE BREYER: All right. 17 JUSTICE SCALIA: You don't understand the 18 circumstance. 19 JUSTICE BREYER: That is exactly what 20 happened here. MS. SHERRY: Let me -- that is not -- that's 21 22 what I want to explain, that's not -- that's not what 23 happened here. If I submitted a FOIA request and said 24 did so-and-so company file a report, I wouldn't get a 25 response, that's not a proper FOIA request.

37

1	JUSTICE BREYER: No, no, it says, please
2	tell me any documents that they filed that says da, da,
3	da, something like that, okay? Now, we have the same
4	thing, word for word, except the person who makes the
5	request is not Mrs. Mary Jones from the public, the
6	person who makes the request is the fraud officer for
7	the agency that's worried about being defrauded. And
8	all I'm interested in is, are they both not reports? Is
9	one a report and not the other? Or are they both
10	reports?
11	MS. SHERRY: The second one would be a
12	report if there was an investigation going on.
13	JUSTICE BREYER: I'm just telling you the
14	facts. The facts are just what I said.
15	MS. SHERRY: If if
16	JUSTICE BREYER: Everything the same except
17	he signs his name, "fraud officer."
18	MS. SHERRY: Then then I misunderstood
19	the hypothetical. No, it doesn't matter who signing the
20	piece of paper. What matters is the substance of the
21	JUSTICE BREYER: All right. So, then, if a
22	person who is an outside person gets a hold of two
23	documents, one, the request, and two the response, which
24	is to say, yes, I found 15 reports, they're all signed
25	by Mickey Mouse, okay? And he bases a complaint, there

38

is no such person as Mickey Mouse, it's a fraud, okay?
 Then you go right ahead and bring the qui tam because it
 wasn't falling within the exception.

Is that right, in the Government's view? 4 MS. SHERRY: In the Government's view the 5 fact that the information was obtained through a FOIA 6 7 request doesn't answer the question as to whether the 8 underlying document is an administrative report or an administrative audit or anything else of the sort. The 9 10 FOIA -- the agency's response to a FOIA request, again, is nothing more than the first --11

JUSTICE BREYER: No, no, you're repeating --I'm trying to show you what the problem is in my mind. I -- I can't quite work out the right definition, and that's what I'm trying to get enlightened on.

MS. SHERRY: And -- and the definition -and -- and I would be the first to acknowledge that there may be difficult questions at the margin.

JUSTICE BREYER: I'm not trying to make a difficult question. All I want is your enlightenment about how when I write these two cases down, should I distinguish them? Should I say they're both the same or what?

24 MS. SHERRY: I think based on your 25 hypothetical in both circumstances, all that is done is

39

1 the agency has looked in its files to see if it has 2 responsive records and disclose them, then in both 3 circumstances that's not a report and there was no --4 JUSTICE BREYER: You say in most. In my 5 circumstance --MS. SHERRY: Oh, sorry. In both 6 7 circumstances. 8 JUSTICE BREYER: In both circumstances.

9 MS. SHERRY: Then it's not -- it's not a report and there's been no investigation. And I think 10 11 words have meaning, and it's significant that FOIA does 12 not refer to what an agency does as an investigation. 13 It refers to it as a reasonable search for responsive 14 records, and this Court has never referred to it as an 15 investigation, no court ever has. And that's because there's a substantive distinction between an 16 investigation, certainly between a GAO investigation, 17 18 between a congressional investigation and what an agency 19 does in response to a FOIA request.

To give an example, the GAO is not subject to FOIA, but it does in its regulation respond to requests from the public much the same way that an agency does in response to a FOIA request. I think it would be a rather strange use of the language to think of that as a GAO investigation and to think of the

40

1 response as a GAO report. 2 Another example, and again, we're talking 3 about ordinary usage, not any possible usage. JUSTICE SCALIA: I don't -- I don't want to 4 have to play these games every time there's --5 there's -- there's one of these qui tam actions. I б mean, the advantage of Petitioner's solution is that 7 8 it -- it's easy -- it's easy to apply. I don't find 9 yours easy to apply at all. 10 MS. SHERRY: It may be easy to apply, but 11 it's easy to apply and it reads out an entire subset 12 enumerated sources that Congress thought important to 13 include. 14 JUSTICE GINSBURG: Did the FCA, the 15 amendments in 2009, which are not retroactive, do they 16 have any bearing on this problem prospectively? 17 MS. SHERRY: On a prospective -- not -- not 18 directly in that the words "report," "hearing," "audit" 19 or "investigation" are still included, but it did 20 narrowly and further define what that means. It added a 21 Federal context, and so this Court had decided in Graham 22 County that there was no Federal nexus required for the second category of documents and going forward with the 23 24 2010 amendments there now is. 25 And so, on a prospective basis -- may I

41

1	finish? On a prospective basis, State audits, State
2	reports would not be subject would not bar a qui tam
3	case, unless if this Court holds otherwise they're
4	produced in response to a FOIA request.
5	CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Thank you, counsel.
6	Mr. Reiss, you have 14 minutes remaining.
7	REBUTTAL ARGUMENT OF STEVEN ALAN REISS
8	ON BEHALF OF THE PETITIONER
9	MR. REISS: I don't think I'll use it all,
10	Mr. Chief Justice.
11	Justice Ginsburg, in response to your
12	request, the new version of the False Claims Act lets
13	the government disclaim the public disclosure bar. It
14	now says the bar can apply unless opposed by the
15	government. So the government has an automatic ability
16	to stop the imposition of the public disclosure bar
17	simply by opposing it. So that is a material change in
18	the government's favor that the new False Claims Act has
19	made.
20	Let me just address an underlying premise
21	that we've heard, I think, somewhat repeatedly from the
22	Government and Mr. Kirk, and that is this notion that
23	FOIA is simply an automatic process, that agencies are a
24	publishing house or clearinghouses. That notion is
25	utterly belied by the statute and the process itself,

42

and it's utterly belied by the statistics from the
 Department of Labor in terms of what their responses are
 and how they do them.

4 In 2008, which was the last year we were able to find statistics for, the Department of Labor, 5 the department at issue here, processed 17,000 FOIA б 7 responses. Only 28 percent were granted in full. 8 Thirty-two percent were denied in full, 10 percent, 9 based on the statutory exemptions, and 22 percent based 10 on other statutes like the Privacy Act, and 40 percent 11 of those 17,000 responses were partial responses. So we 12 can give you some but not all; and in fact the FOIA 13 responses in this very case not only reported that we 14 found some of the VETS-100 reports in some years, we 15 didn't find them in others; but with respect to the 16 VETS-100 reports that were attached, they actually made redactions, because those redactions were compelled 17 18 according to the Chief of Compliance and Investigations 19 by the Privacy Act.

JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: Mr. Reiss, assuming that the government did all of the steps you took, how does it promote the purposes of FOIA --

23 MR. REISS: Very --

JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: -- to find a document created by a third party, under duty or not, that is

43

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submitted and contains false statements. How does it promote the government's interests to bar an individual who has personal knowledge about the falsity from being a qui tam action?

5 MR. REISS: Well --

JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: Doesn't that seem illogical, meaning the -- the report filed by the employer is not screaming out, "I filed a false report." You need some outside knowledge from that statement by the employer to prove the falsity. So how is your rule promoting FOIA's purposes?

12 MR. REISS: Well, Justice Sotomayor, in that hypothetical the relator actually is bringing 13 14 independent information, and the public disclosure bar 15 would not be invoked -- not because the FOIA response 16 isn't a report; it wouldn't be invoked because the allegations and transactions in the qui tam complaint 17 18 were not based on; they were not disclosed in the FOIA 19 response.

It furthers the purpose of the statute, our interpretation furthers the purpose of the statute because the purpose of the public disclosure bar was to stop qui tam suits from being brought by members of the public based on information equally accessible to anyone in the public.

44

1	JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: I'm still not sure I
2	understand. Here the relator is saying, the statement
3	says we complied with the military act, and he says they
4	didn't. I have personal information they didn't because
5	I know they didn't do X, Y, and Z. Why did we even
6	reach the questions we did if what he's claiming is that
7	he was an original that he has original knowledge not
8	not reflected in the reports?
9	MR. REISS: And what I'm saying, Justice
10	Sotomayor is if that's the case, a court can evaluate
11	certainly can evaluate whether he is in fact the
12	original source, which would take him out from under the
13	public disclosure bar. The court below, the district
14	court did that, and found that he wasn't. Or even
15	before reaching that inquiry, if a relator can say my
16	qui tam complaint is not based upon the public
17	disclosure of allegations and transactions and reports,
18	the bar doesn't drop.
19	Our position is the appropriate place for
20	the inquiry that you're worried about is in determining
21	whether there is a disclosure of the relator's
22	allegations or transactions. Whether
23	JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: I still don't understand
24	how it promotes the purposes of a qui tam action
25	MR. REISS: Because of

45

JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: -- to put any kind of bar on a relator who is challenging the creation of a document that's submitted by an independent party to the government.

5 MR. REISS: Well, one of the purposes of the public disclosure bar was to stop -- and this Court 6 7 recognized it in Graham County -- parasitic lawsuits by relators with no real significant independent or 8 9 valuable information to contribute. What we're 10 suggesting, as I understand the question --JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: In fact that's not true. 11 12 We have -- that -- because the Government's right;

13 Congress changed the -- the law from anything that was 14 in the government's possession and narrowed the scope of 15 the bar.

MR. REISS: Exactly, Justice Sotomayor, but 16 our position does not resurrect the government knowledge 17 18 standard that Congress changed in 1986, and it doesn't 19 do so for some very good reasons. First of all, the 20 government -- the government knowledge standard that the 21 Court -- that the Congress changed in 1986 didn't allow a relator who is actually the original source of the 22 information to bring suit. That was one of the major 23 things that prompted the congressional change in 1986. 24 25 Secondly, and it's clear from the

46

1	legislative history in the Senate report, one of the
2	primary concerns of Congress in enacting the statute in
3	1986 was the fact that there was a sense that government
4	employees themselves who were knowledgeable about
5	potential contracting fraud were not coming forward. In
6	fact, the Senate report cites a 1983 survey in which 73
7	percent of 5,000 government employees responded they
8	would not come forward with evidence of contractor
9	fraud. That was a major concern with Congress under the
10	old government knowledge standard, the pre-1986
11	government knowledge standard. Those if those
12	employees came forward, the suit would still be barred
13	because the government by definition would have known
14	about the fraud.
15	Under the new statute, not only do you have
16	the original source exception, but if government
17	employees come forward, they are not barred from
18	bringing those qui tam suits. It's a major change and
19	it's not the resurrection, Justice Sotomayor, of the
20	government knowledge standard.
21	If there are no further questions.
22	CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Thank you, counsel.

23 The case is submitted.

24 (Whereupon, at 12:12 p.m., the case in the 25 above-entitled matter was submitted.)

47

Α	32:6 33:2,4,5,8	allegation 9:9	41:9,10,11	B
abide 25:15	39:8,9	allegations 4:10	42:14	back 3:25 36:10
ability 42:15	adopt 18:20	4:17 5:6,14	appropriate	band 7:17
able 43:5	22:10,22	9:13 33:1 44:17	45:19	
	advanced 13:15	45:17,22	ARBUS 1:19 2:9	bar 3:13,18,22
above-entitled	14:1	alleged 4:3 9:7	32:16	4:16 5:3,8,9
1:11 47:25	advantage 21:10	27:23	argue 7:2	14:3,5 15:21,24
Absolutely 13:2	41:7	allow 24:19	argued 19:15	17:18 34:1 35:8
abstract 32:24	adversary 19:7	46:21	31:9	35:10,16 42:2
accept 10:5	advocating 22:7	allows 3:14	argument 1:12	42:13,14,16
access 33:23	0		U	44:2,14,22
accessible 44:24	agencies 10:4	amended 16:2	2:2,5,8,12 3:3,7	45:13,18 46:2,6
accidentally	18:24 22:18	25:2 30:11	15:15 31:2	46:15
30:14	34:25 42:23	Amendment	32:16 42:7	barred 47:12,17
account 18:1	agency 6:14,21	16:17	articulated 32:1	based 4:11,17
accounting 12:20	6:25 7:6,22 8:3	amendments	asked 8:1 13:10	5:6 9:7 18:17
accurate 24:22	8:16,17 10:7,11	41:15,24	37:5	39:24 43:9,9
27:14	10:11,13,14,16	amicus 1:21 2:11	asking 8:5 11:2	44:18,24 45:16
acknowledge	10:20 11:7,15	32:17	15:19 18:19,23	bases 38:25
39:17	12:10 13:22	amount 26:3	asks 37:9	basically 19:23
act 3:13 6:2	21:4 25:20,21	analysis 5:10	aspect 25:8	basis 9:12 27:5
13:23,25 14:11	25:22 26:23	33:19 34:3,5,22	assembling 21:5	29:15 32:11
16:1,2 17:16	28:18,19 29:4,9	35:25 36:1,7	assertion 17:7	41:25 42:1
19:10,13 22:25	30:16 31:19,24	annual 34:17	Assistant 1:19	bear 24:16
24:11 26:6 29:5	33:17,21,23	annually 19:9	assuming 43:20	bearing 41:16
29:9 34:17,18	34:7 36:25	answer 22:16	attached 13:11	behalf 1:15,17
35:13 42:12,18	37:10 38:7 40:1	23:12 24:8 36:9	43:16	1:21 2:4,7,10
43:10,19 45:3	40:12,18,23	39:7	attachment 13:6	2:14 3:8 15:16
action 8:7 35:6	agency's 7:8	answered 28:6	attachments	32:17 42:8
44:4 45:24	30:4 31:13 35:6	37:13	24:5	belied 42:25 43:1
actions 24:20	39:10	answers 36:6	attorney 25:1	believe 22:11
41:6	ago 30:11	antitrust 11:18	34:23	23:7,8 31:7
activities 12:10	agree 24:2	anymore 17:3,4	audit 33:3,8	better 21:19 23:4
13:23	ahead 39:2	apart 29:7	36:16 39:9	beyond 33:9
activity 12:7	Aircraft 16:5	appeal 7:10,10	41:18	blacked 16:11
added41:20	ALAN 1:15 2:3	16:22	audits 31:20 42:1	breach 26:3
additional 25:7	2:13 3:7 42:7	appeals 7:10	authority 29:24	breached 25:13
address 42:20	Alito 12:16 13:2	appear 22:8	authorized 18:2	BREYER 37:3
administrative	14:25 17:24	APPEARANC	automatic 42:15	37:16,19 38:1
5:18,18 6:1,5,6	18:5,10 19:6,12	1:14	42:23	38:13,16,21
6:12,14,18	19:20 22:5,22	appears 14:2,5	automatically	39:12,19 40:4,8
12:20 15:20	23:5 28:7 30:24	appended 12:24	32:4	brief 21:19 22:10
	31:4,12 33:11	applies 16:10	available 6:22	
18:24 19:2	34:2,13 35:11	apply 15:21,23	10:19 30:19	23:6 24:3 32:1
22:15,17 23:15	35:22	28:14 34:9 41:8	a.m 1:13 3:2	33:12
24:6,7 30:14	55.22	20.17 37.7 71.0	a.111 1.15 5.4	bring 20:7 24:19

39:2 46:23	challenging 46:2	clearly 9:13 12:8	concede 12:23	contributed 3:15
bringing 44:13	change 42:17	12:9 13:11	concern 47:9	corporate 32:9
47:18	46:24 47:18	15:10	concerns 47:2	corporation 1:3
broad 21:11	changed 46:13	client 25:23 27:4	concluded 5:7	3:4 25:10
broader 18:21	46:18,21	27:9	conduct 18:7,11	correct 16:7 18:8
36:20	chief 3:3,9 7:21	close 19:1,4	18:13 28:4	26:20 28:5
broadly 15:20	8:2,6,10 9:15	closer 7:4	confirm 3:25	correctly 34:22
brought 32:22	9:18 12:6 15:11	collect 27:13,21	Congress 16:2	correspondence
44:23	15:13,17 16:6	come 7:15,22	19:18 25:2	30:22
build 30:5	17:6,10 29:13	18:19 47:8,17	30:11,12,17	counsel 15:13
building 12:5	29:18 32:14,19	comes 7:23	35:7,14,17	24:19 26:12
button 7:15	42:5,10 43:18	18:16	36:14,17,20	32:14 42:5
	47:22	coming 20:10	37:2 41:12	47:22
C	choice 36:13	47:5	46:13,18,21	count 30:25 31:1
C 2:1 3:1	37:2	commission 10:3	47:2,9	31:6,16,18
calculates 34:15	chose 30:17	commission's	congressional	County 14:21
call 25:1	36:15,16	32:5	12:20 33:2,6	41:22 46:7
called 13:16,21	Circuit 17:21	Common 7:20	40:18 46:24	course 8:13
13:24 35:9 37:9	28:21,23,23	communicated	conjures 33:8	16:16 22:17
case 3:4,11 4:19	29:3	9:6	constitute 14:13	23:19 27:1
5:1,23 6:20 7:4	Circuits 5:23	communication	constitutes 7:8	29:17,22 32:7
8:24,25 9:25	Circuit's 18:20	9:10 36:23	12:8	court 1:1,12 3:10
10:24 13:4	21:17,23,24	company 26:10	construction	3:14 4:25 5:1
14:21 16:5 17:3	23:2,9 28:8	37:24	15:24	7:11 14:21 15:6
19:1,4 20:2	circumstance	compelled 43:17	construe 15:19	15:8,18,19 16:4
23:12 25:5,6,8	37:13,14,18	compilation	contains 44:1	16:16 18:20,23
28:1 30:9 31:8	40:5	19:23	contend 5:11	23:10 25:8 28:9
31:9,20 32:3	circumstances	complaint 4:17	content 15:22	30:10 32:20
35:4,6 42:3	35:1 39:25 40:3	5:5,15 9:7	20:13 34:12	40:14,15 41:21
43:13 45:10	40:7,8	38:25 44:17	context 19:4	42:3 45:10,13
47:23,24	cites 47:6	45:16	22:19 32:23	45:14 46:6,21
cases 16:17 29:8	claim 4:20 27:11	complete 13:8	33:3 34:6 41:21	courts 6:9 7:11
29:24 39:21	claimed 19:25	completely 12:4	contract 25:13	22:18
categorical 24:4	claiming 45:6	complex 12:11	26:3	cover 20:11
category 41:23	claims 3:13 4:20	compliance 12:4	contracting	30:16
cause 32:12	5:10 14:10	12:7 13:20,24	25:11 47:5	covered 29:21
certain 9:3 12:24	15:25 17:16	27:1 28:12 31:5	contractor 30:23	30:14 32:2 36:4
13:4,5 14:13	19:12 24:11	31:13 34:24	47:8	covers 22:14
26:15 33:9 36:3	26:6 42:12,18	43:18	contracts 26:11	23:9
37:6	clear 6:17 10:16	complicated	30:5	crabbed 15:5
certainly 7:18	46:25	16:17	contractual	created 15:23
11:17 18:22	clearing 31:19	complied 45:3	25:14	43:25
34:7 35:15	clearinghouses	component 33:25	contribute 3:20	creates 13:13
40:17 45:11	42:24	computer 32:5	46:9	creation 46:2
challenge 14:9		rr		

credence 37:1	11:21 12:2,22	44:18	13:6,6,11 14:15	encouraging
critical 3:15,18	13:18,18 19:8	discloses 34:16	14:19 15:22,23	20:7 34:24
5:13 25:8	22:24,24 31:13	disclosing 36:8	16:8,14 17:5,12	ends 30:25,25
cry 7:3 8:23	31:14 34:20	disclosure 3:13	17:17,22 19:16	enforcement
curiae 1:21 2:11	43:2,5,6	3:18,22 4:16	20:4,7,9 25:4	24:12
32:17	departments	5:3,8,8,9,25 6:3	25:22,24 27:3	engage 36:1
cursory 26:24	19:8	10:6 14:3,5	28:18 29:6,10	engaging 33:18
cursory 20.24	dependent 4:21	15:21 17:18	29:11 30:3,8,15	34:8,21,21 36:7
D	depending 14:14	33:22,25 34:1	30:19,21 32:2,3	enlightened
D 3:1	describe 36:18	35:7,8,12,13	32:9 36:2 38:2	39:15
da 38:2,2,3	described 17:15	35:16,17 36:11	38:23 41:23	enlightenment
damaged 26:9,9	description	36:12,25 42:13	DOJ 34:14	39:20
Daniel 1:6 3:5	13:10	42:16 44:14,22		enormous 32:12
data 33:19 34:11			drastically 11:18	entire 41:11
34:21	detailed 12:11	45:13,17,21	drop 45:18	
dealing 24:25	detailing 13:19	46:6	due 8:9	entity 33:18
29:14	13:23	disclosures 4:21	duty 43:25	35:21
decided 11:22	determine 11:22	4:22 33:1	D.C 1:8,20	enumerated 20:8
41:21	12:19 28:13	discovery 28:3	<u> </u>	30:18 35:18
define 21:16	30:24 36:2	dislocations	e 2:1 3:1,1 12:19	36:15 41:12
41:20	determining	13:14	e 2.1 5.1,1 12.19 earlier 22:16	equally 44:24
	45:20	disposal 36:22		escape 4:15
defined 24:13	dictated 6:13	dissemination	easy 41:8,8,9,10	ESQ 1:15,17,19
28:21	dictionary 18:16	35:20	41:11	2:3,6,9,13
defining 23:21	18:17,19 20:20	distinct 35:3	eat 22:4	essentially 33:25
definition 13:14	21:9,11,15,20	distinction 33:20	effectively 14:19	evaluate 45:10
14:1,5 15:5,6	22:7,8,13	37:15 40:16	effort 35:18	45:11
18:18,20 20:19	difference 10:1	distinguish21:7	either 27:25	evaluation 17:12
20:20,23 21:1,1	11:3 20:1,3	29:4 30:2 31:22	element 5:2 14:2	everybody 12:23
21:9,11,20,24	21:21	39:22	14:3 28:15	evidence 25:5,7
21:24 22:6,8,12	different 8:25	district 5:1 45:13	Elevator 1:3 3:4	47:8
22:14,23 23:2,3	10:8 19:19 26:4	divided 26:13	37:6	ex 1:6 3:5
23:6,9,11 28:22	26:7,19,22	Division 12:3,7	eloquently 31:25	exactly 11:24
34:20 35:23	29:24,25 31:3	document 11:1	employed 26:9	21:18 37:19
39:14,16 47:13	34:25 35:8	16:10 17:15,19	employees 47:4	46:16
definitions 18:17	difficult 39:18,20	19:2,7,17 32:8	47:7,12,17	examination
defrauded 38:7	digitized 7:13	34:12 36:22	employer44:8	17:22
degree 11:18	directly 31:14	39:8 43:24 46:3	44:10	examine 11:10
delivered 12:5	41:18	documented 4:3	enacted 35:8	example 17:2
demonstrate	disallow 3:17	documents 6:22	enacting 47:2	24:10 25:12
4:16	disclaim 42:13	7:16,23,25 8:4	encompasses	34:6,23 40:20
demonstrates	disclose 40:2	8:4,5,11,11,12	15:10	41:2
35:5	disclosed 4:9,18	8:13 10:18	encourage 16:3	exception 39:3
denied 43:8	5:6,15 7:6	11:10,20 12:17	25:3	47:16
department 1:20	14:15,25 15:23	12:24,25 13:5,5	encouraged	exemption 16:10
6:18 9:11 11:20	17.10,20 10.20	12.27,23 13.3,3	24:24	

29:21	37:6,24	17:1,3,3,4,18	31:23	good 18:17,18
exemptions 17:8	filed 9:9 10:5,17	19:15,22 20:2	further 15:11	22:12 46:19
19:25 28:14	11:4,15,23	20:11,14 22:19	27:2 41:20	government 3:17
34:9 36:4 43:9	19:24 26:23	23:13 24:5,13	47:21	4:4 10:2,4 11:5
exercised 7:1	27:3,5,10,22	25:8,17 26:14	furthers 44:20	11:12,14 13:13
explain 37:15,22	38:2 44:7,8	27:6,24 28:8,12	44:21	13:15 14:1,23
explaining 21:19	files 6:21 7:13	28:12 29:2,7		15:1,24 16:3
explanation 24:3	10:19 17:19	30:16,20 31:2,5	G	17:19 20:5,6
explicit 18:21	20:5 25:5 29:6	31:7,10,17 32:2	G 3:1	21:2,3 25:4,11
extent 29:3	29:10,12 40:1	33:21,22 34:6	games 41:5	26:9 28:10,11
extra 35:17	filing 10:11 32:10	34:15,24 35:3,6	GAO 33:2,7	28:17 29:2 30:4
	filings 4:3 11:4	36:1,24 37:6,23	40:17,20,25	30:7,23,25,25
<u> </u>	32:3,4	37:25 39:6,10	41:1	31:5,6,15 32:10
fact 4:25 26:23	fill 3:25	39:10 40:11,19	General 1:20	35:9 36:11
37:2 39:6 43:12	filled 6:10	40:21,23 42:4	34:23	42:13,15,15,22
45:11 46:11	financial 5:25 6:3	42:23 43:6,12	generals 25:1	43:21 46:4,17
47:3,6	10:6	43:22 44:15,18	genuinely 3:16	46:20,20 47:3,7
facts 8:7 9:6	find 8:20 9:3 13:4	FOIA's 30:2	getting 23:21	47:10,11,13,16
33:20 34:4,6	13:5,8 14:6	31:16 44:11	30:8,20	47:20
35:4,25 36:2,8	24:7 26:23	following 8:3	Ginsburg 3:24	governmental
38:14,14	35:23 41:8 43:5	25:14	4:6,7,19,24	28:24,25 33:18
failed 27:22	43:15,24	form 16:20	5:24 6:7 10:1	35:19,21
failure 27:21	finding 17:4	formal 18:1	10:15,23 11:2	government's
fair 31:22	finish42:1	forth 19:25	11:16 14:6,12	5:12 39:4,5
fairly 13:13	fired 27:19	forward 41:23	14:16 21:22	42:18 44:2
fall 36:2	first 5:23 9:1	47:5,8,12,17	22:3 41:14	46:12,14
falling 39:3	16:17 17:17,20	found 5:22 13:6,7	42:11	Graham 14:21
false 3:13 4:20	20:3 26:13	13:9,9 16:22	give 20:8,18,18	41:21 46:7
14:10 15:25	39:11,17 46:19	26:17,18,19	24:1 37:1 40:20	granted 43:7
17:16 19:12	fiscal 34:14	38:24 43:14	43:12	grants 33:23
24:11 26:6,20	five-part 17:18	45:14	given 18:2	group 18:2
27:22 42:12,18	focused 21:1	fraud 4:1,2 14:4	gives 12:9 21:9	
44:1,8	28:10,14	18:22 20:24	glean 8:7	<u> </u>
falsity 44:3,10	FOIA 3:11,24	37:9 38:6,17	go 4:13 6:23 8:15	hand 11:21
far 7:3 8:23	4:8,10,12,13	39:1 47:5,9,14	10:19 25:1 27:2	handing 8:10
12:11,11 15:20	4:18,21,22 5:4	fraudulent 4:3	27:19 29:12	happen 5:11
favor 42:18	5:7,16 6:17 7:5	18:7,11,12 26:8	33:12,15 39:2	happened 37:5
FCA 21:25 41:14	7:7,7,8 8:24,25	freedom 6:2	goes 17:15 19:17	37:20,23
Federal 5:25 6:9	9:1,1,16,19,21	13:22,25 19:9	29:20 31:12	happening 28:17
6:14,19 7:10	10:18 11:6,25	22:25 34:17,17	33:9	happens 22:8
41:21,22	12:12 13:3,24	35:12	going 4:1 5:17	hard 11:13 18:15
Fifth 5:23	14:9,13 15:1,10	frequently 25:9	7:24,25 11:7,8	36:17
figure 10:19	15:21 16:7,14	full 43:7,8	11:9,10 22:13	harm 32:12
file 13:19,22	16:15,17,19,20	function 31:22	26:4,8 27:25	heading 31:24
25:23 27:14,23			38:12 41:23	hear 3:3 29:25
	ļ			

heard 15:7 42:21	8:16	44:21	job 31:19	7:12 28:20
hearing 33:2	incorrect 5:20	interview 11:9	Joe 37:9	key 9:6 25:14
36:16 41:18	28:23,24	investigate	JONATHAN	kind 11:18 14:4
hearings 31:21	incorrectly 37:14	10:12 11:7,22	1:17 2:6 15:15	22:19 24:11
heavily 4:21	independent	18:11	Jones 38:5	29:25 31:3 37:7
held 6:9 30:10,10	44:14 46:3,8	investigating	Judge 5:2	46:1
helpful 19:4 23:8	indicate 15:3	10:2	judges 5:25	kinds 10:9 23:9
history 47:1	indicates 15:1	investigation	Justice 1:20 3:3	Kirk 1:6 3:5,17
hold 38:22	31:10	3:12 4:14 5:5	3:9,24 4:5,6,7	9:7 12:9 13:15
holding 21:18	individual 17:22	5:16,19,22 6:19	4:19,24 5:24	14:1 25:4,11
holds 42:3	37:5 44:2	9:20 10:21	6:7,20,25 7:12	26:2 42:22
Honor 16:13	information 3:16	11:19 12:3,8,13	7:21 8:2,6,10	Kirk's 5:5,10,13
17:15 18:8,15	3:20,25 4:9 6:2	14:14 18:2,5,22	8:14,19 9:15,18	11:25
19:14 20:3	6:13 7:6 8:6	20:13,25 21:25	10:1,15,23 11:2	know 7:12 21:8
21:14,18 22:2	12:2 13:23,25	24:8,10,12,12	11:16,20 12:16	21:15 24:1
22:12 23:1,8	18:12 19:10	24:14 25:2 27:1	13:2 14:6,12,16	27:10 28:4
24:2,23 25:18	21:5 22:25	28:9 31:11 33:3	14:25 15:12,13	35:19 36:13
26:1 27:8 28:2	24:20,21,25	33:5,7 35:24	15:17 16:6 17:6	45:5
31:8	25:10,21 27:6,7	36:16,19 38:12	17:10,24 18:5	knowledge 26:3
host 3:19	27:13,21 33:19	40:10,12,15,17	18:10 19:6,8,12	27:20 35:10
house 31:18,19	34:9,11,17	40:17,18,25	19:20 20:16,18	44:3,9 45:7
42:24	35:13,20 36:11	41:19	20:22 21:8,15	46:17,20 47:10
Hughes 16:5	39:6 44:14,24	investigations	21:22 22:3,5,22	47:11,20
hypothetical	45:4 46:9,23	11:5,17 12:7,14	22:24 23:5,17	knowledgeable
38:19 39:25	infused 14:22	16:4 20:24	23:20,25 24:15	47:4
44:13	innumerable	23:15 24:6	25:16,19 26:12	known 47:13
	15:7 22:14	43:18	26:18 27:4,9,15	knows 25:12,12
	input 10:7	investigators	28:7,20 29:13	25:16 27:12
illogical 44:7	inquiries 5:14	11:9	29:18 30:24	
image 33:9	inquiring 33:13	invoked 5:3	31:4,12 32:14	
imagine 37:3,4,8	33:16	44:15,16	32:19 33:11	labeled 22:24
implement 30:4	inquiry 21:2	involve 18:12	34:2,13,20	Labor 6:18 9:11
implies 28:9	28:10 33:18	19:21	35:11,22 37:3	11:22 12:2,22
important 9:2	34:8 45:15,20	isolation 32:23	37:16,17,19	13:19 22:24
21:21 29:5	inside 26:3 28:18	issue 3:18 8:24	38:1,13,16,21	43:2,5
30:21 41:12	31:19	9:1,8 10:12	39:12,19 40:4,8	Labor's 13:18
imposition 42:16	insiders 24:24	13:20 18:24	41:4,14 42:5,10	lack 25:6
include 16:8	25:3	19:3,9 22:18,19	42:11 43:20,24	language 31:10
41:13	instance 6:12	23:10 26:18,22	44:6,12 45:1,9	40:24
included 12:18	intended 3:22	43:6	45:23 46:1,11	large 21:19
35:18 36:14	interested 38:8	issued 12:23	46:16 47:19,22	law24:12 31:13
41:19	interesting 6:8	issues 16:17,18		46:13
including 5:4,5	interests 44:2	26:13	$\frac{\mathbf{K}}{\mathbf{k}}$	lawsuits 3:19
15:7	interpretation	J	keep 29:9	46:7
incorporating		J	Kennedy 6:20,25	lead 3:19
1	•		•	•

Г

legislative 47:1	33:13 38:19	39:1	obviously 5:22	oversight 13:20
legitimate 4:8	47:25	move 20:4	29:1	oversignt 15.20
length 34:16	matters 38:20	moves 17:19	office 6:1,5,6	P
letter 16:19,21	mean 10:8 18:18		12:2,20	P 3:1
20:11 26:14	19:18 21:9	Ν	officer 17:1 29:7	page 2:2 21:23
Let's 10:23	24:17 29:22	N 2:1,1 3:1	36:7 37:9 38:6	33:12
24:15	35:11 41:7	name 38:17	38:17	paper 10:5 38:20
liability 26:6	meaning 3:12	narrow24:9	officers 25:11	paragraphs
limited 17:4	9:22 12:14 15:9	30:17	29:8	16:21
28:21	15:9 20:8 32:24	narrowed46:14	official 7:9 18:6	parasitic 46:7
line 18:15 29:15	33:5 36:21	narrowly 41:20	officially 7:19	pardon 28:23
29:24 35:19	40:11 44:7	national 16:18	Oh 40:6	parlance 7:22
list 20:8	meaningful 3:20	natural 10:9	okay 38:3,25	part 4:22 8:17
little 31:19	means 8:14	nearly 15:23	39:1	13:7,11 17:21
located 12:4	33:22 35:7,12	necessarily	old 47:10	21:19 27:11,11
log 16:9	35:13 41:20	14:10	once 23:20	partial 43:11
long 19:24	mechanical 11:6	need 23:10,21	ones 26:19	particular 7:14
look 8:15,23	19:22	25:5 30:2 44:9	on-the-trail	17:12 19:3 35:5
16:25 19:4 20:9	meet 13:10	needed 27:13	14:20	35:18 36:2,15
20:11 27:2 35:4	MELISSA 1:19	needs 25:7	open-door 10:16	particularly
looked 40:1	2:9 32:16	never 5:13 9:9	operation 15:25	30:21
looking 8:20	members 44:23	40:14	32:12	party 4:3 43:25
14:23 15:2	merit 25:6	new 1:15,15,17	operationally	46:3
18:16,18 23:3	met 5:8	1:17 42:12,18	25:12	passed 22:20
34:10,11	method 33:23	47:15	opinion 5:2	pattern 27:8
looks 15:8 20:3	Mickey 38:25	news 9:23	opportunity 28:3	pending 34:16
29:19	39:1	nexus 41:22	opposed 10:3	people 10:6 11:8
lot 20:17 22:23	middle 27:20	Ninth 28:22	42:14	24:19,24 25:3
lower 6:8	military 45:3	noncompliance	opposing 42:17	29:11,15
low-level 16:15	millions 11:19,19	21:5	oral 1:11 2:2,5,8	percent 43:7,8,8
	mind 39:13	nongovernmen	3:7 15:15 32:16	43:9,10 47:7
<u> </u>	minimal 4:22	6:11	order 20:8 24:8	period 27:18
major 46:23 47:9	ministerial 29:5	non-FOIA 32:2	27:14	person 6:11 7:23
47:18	minutes 42:6	normal 7:22	ordinary 5:21	10:10 18:2
making 29:10	misread 22:10	notification 7:19	9:22 12:14 15:6	29:13,14 35:25
manuscripts	missing 28:15,16	9:23 26:5	15:8,9 41:3	37:9 38:4,6,22
31:20	mission 29:25	notion 14:20,23	original 45:7,7	38:22 39:1
map 36:24	31:3,14	42:22,24	45:12 46:22	personal 24:22
March 1:9	mistake 30:13	number 30:15	47:16	27:20 44:3 45:4
margin 39:18	misunderstood	34:15 36:21	ought 5:11	personnel 10:12
Mary 38:5	38:18	0	outside 22:19	Petitioner 1:4,16
material 18:15	morning 32:22		28:19 38:22	2:4,14 3:8
42:17	motion 28:2	O 2:1 3:1	44:9	21:20 42:8
materials 36:4	Mouse 38:25	objective 16:5	overarching 23:3	Petitioners 21:10
matter 1:11		obtained 39:6		Petitioner's
	l	l	l	l

Г

24:18 41:7	Privacy 43:10,19	35:16,17 36:12	quite 35:3 36:24	referred 19:7
phone 29:20	private 25:1 32:3	36:25 38:5	39:14	40:14
phrase 33:4,4	32:8	40:22 42:13,16	quote 28:9	refers 20:13,14
piece 25:9 38:20	privilege 16:9	44:14,22,24,25	quoting 18:16	40:13
pieces 9:2 10:5	privileges 17:8	45:13,16 46:6		reflected 45:8
place 20:14	probe 18:6	publication 31:23	R	regardless 15:22
45:19	problem29:19	publicly 5:15	R 3:1	regular 15:8
plain 31:10	30:1 39:13	10:18	rarely 5:17	29:14
plainly 5:20	41:16	publishing 31:18	raw 11:3	regulation 40:21
play 41:5	procedures 30:5	42:24	reach 3:14 6:15	regulations 29:2
please 3:10	process 4:12	pulling 34:7	45:6	regulatory 23:14
15:18 32:20	17:3 19:21,24	pulls 34:14	reaching 3:18	Reiss 1:15 2:3
38:1	32:9 42:23,25	purpose 16:24	45:15	2:13 3:6,7,9 4:5
point 17:2 21:22	processed 43:6	20:6 24:16,18	read 14:8,8	4:7,24 6:7,25
24:3 26:2 30:2	processes 35:25	24:19 26:10	20:22 22:6	7:18 8:2,9,18
32:1	produced 42:4	30:7 44:20,21	24:17,17	8:22 9:18 10:15
points 14:25	program 21:6	44:22	reading 6:23,23	10:25 11:16
policies 21:3	programmatic	purposes 14:10	7:2	13:2 14:12,18
30:5	29:8	24:8 31:16	reads 41:11	42:6,7,9 43:20
policy 10:17 21:6	prohibit 3:22	43:22 44:11	real 46:8	43:23 44:5,12
position 3:14,16	promote 43:22	45:24 46:5	really 17:7	45:9,25 46:5,16
5:12,13,22 6:16	44:2	push 7:14	reason 17:5	rejected 14:21
9:15,19 13:12	promotes 45:24	put 7:1,16 11:8	21:12 35:14	rel 1:6 3:5
14:7,9 22:6	promoting 44:11	46:1	reasonable	related 31:14
36:10 45:19	prompted 46:24	puts 10:12	18:18 26:25	relator 3:15 4:1
46:17	prong 5:7 17:20	p.m 47:24	40:13	4:12,15,16
possession 33:24	proper 37:25		reasonably 18:6	30:21 44:13
46:14	propose 17:25	Q	reasons 24:1	45:2,15 46:2,22
possibility 16:25	proposed 23:6	qualify 5:17 6:12	31:8 46:19	relators 3:20
possible 23:24	prospective	15:3 31:15 35:2	REBUTTAL	25:9 30:9,19
41:3	41:17,25 42:1	36:12	2:12 42:7	46:8
posted 32:4	prospectively	question 3:11,15	received 34:15	relator's 5:14
potential 47:5	41:16	4:8,12 6:8	recognized 16:4	45:21
practices 21:4	prove 25:7 44:10	12:16 22:16	46:7	release 17:17
precisely 3:21	provision 25:14	23:12 24:9 26:1	record 16:20	32:10
4:24,25 5:10	public 3:13,17,21	27:21 28:6 30:1	36:23	released 17:13
preexisting	3:22 4:15 5:3,8	36:6,9 39:7,20	records 16:4	17:16,23 34:10
33:24	5:9 14:3,5	46:10	26:24,25 28:13	34:10
premise 42:20	15:21 17:18,20	questions 15:11	30:16 33:10,24	releasing 17:5
press 6:2	20:5 29:7,10,12	39:18 45:6	34:7 36:8,25	relying 24:21
prevail 6:16	30:3,8 31:21	47:21	40:2,14	remaining 42:6
prevented 5:9	32:9,25 33:22	qui 4:11 9:7	redactions 43:17	remembering
pre-1986 47:10	33:23,25 34:1	24:20 39:2 41:6	43:17	34:22
primary 47:2	35:7,8,12,13	42:2 44:4,17,23	refer 40:12	repeatedly 42:21
_		45:16,24 47:18	reference 27:23	
	I	I	I	I

repeating 39:12	18:25 19:10	Respondent 1:18	right 18:3,4	30:22 31:25
reply 32:1	20:23 22:17,25	1:22 2:7,11	20:21 33:11	32:5 37:6
report 3:12 4:14	23:10,15 24:6	13:13 15:16	37:16 38:21	Schindler's 28:4
5:4,15,18,21	25:20 26:14,17	32:18	39:2,4,14 46:12	scope 36:3 46:14
6:4,5,10,10,13	27:10,14,22	responding	roads 30:5	screaming 44:8
6:19,24 7:3,14	31:20 32:6,8	19:22 28:11	Robert 12:6	search 10:19,22
7:15,18,19,25	38:8,10,24 42:2	response 3:12	ROBERTS 3:3	14:4 20:14
8:3,8,12,17,22	43:14,16 45:8	4:10,13,18 5:4	7:21 8:6 9:15	24:13 27:5
9:13,14,17,20	45:17	5:7,16 6:17 7:7	15:13 16:6 17:6	28:13 31:11
9:21,22 10:2,3	repositories 10:4	7:8,9 8:1,10,19	17:10 29:13,18	33:9 40:13
10:10,12,21	request 4:8 6:2	9:16,19,21	32:14 42:5	SEC 32:3,3
11:8,11,12,13	7:8,9 10:18	10:18,21,22	47:22	second 17:21,21
11:14 12:9,13	11:25 12:1,5,12	11:25 12:5,12	room 6:23,23 7:2	18:20 21:17,23
12:18,21,23,25	14:16 16:21	13:3 14:9,13	10:17	21:24 23:2,9
13:1,7,7,8,11	28:12 36:1,3	15:1,10 16:14	rubber7:17	28:8,21,23 29:3
13:14,21,22,24	37:6,23,25 38:5	16:16,19,20	rule 18:23 24:4	36:9 37:13,14
13:25 14:10,14	38:6,23 39:7,10	19:16 24:5	44:10	38:11 41:23
14:16,17,22,24	40:19,23 42:4	25:17 27:6,24	runs 27:18	secondhand
15:1,2,4,5,6,9	42:12	28:8 31:10		24:25
15:20 16:12,14	requested 8:13	33:10,21 37:25	<u> </u>	Secondly 46:25
17:11,25 18:10	requests 19:24	38:23 39:10	S 2:1 3:1	section 13:21
18:13 19:3,3,10	34:15 40:22	40:19,23 41:1	sanctioned 7:19	security 16:18
19:17,20,22	require 9:20	42:4,11 44:15	satisfies 17:20	see 6:3 20:12
21:24 22:15,24	11:19 14:2,3	44:19	satisfy 28:8	21:23 27:2 40:1
22:25 23:22	required 5:3 9:10	responses 7:5	satisfying 29:1	sees 29:18
24:7 25:21	13:19 19:9	8:24,25 9:1,1,6	saying 8:3,11	selectivity 7:1
30:14 31:11,12	26:25 35:14	14:13 16:7	11:3,7 22:9	Senate 47:1,6
32:25 33:2,4,7	36:10 41:22	23:13 43:2,7,11	26:7 45:2,9	sending 29:6
34:18,18,19,24	requirement	43:11,13	says 7:24 10:22	sense 8:3,22
35:2,11,13,24	14:22,22 18:21	responsibilities	13:3,4 25:23	24:4 47:3
36:16,18 37:7	26:5	29:15	28:9,24 29:20	sent 12:3
37:11,24 38:9	requirements	responsive 33:10	38:1,2 42:14	separate 12:4
38:12 39:8 40:3	29:2	34:7 40:2,13	45:3,3	29:7,11,14
40:10 41:1,18	requires 17:22	result 3:21	SCALIA 20:16	serious 13:14
44:7,8,16 47:1	26:11 34:23	results 12:8 18:1	20:18,22 21:8	22:21
47:6	35:16	resurrect 46:17	21:15 23:17,20	seriously 15:25
reported 43:13	reserve 15:12	resurrection	23:25 24:15	set 14:7 30:18
reporting 8:23	resolving 22:19	14:20 47:19	25:16,19 27:4,9	Sherry 1:19 2:9
reports 9:4,10,11	23:11	retroactive	27:15 37:17	32:15,16,19
9:14,23,24,24	respect 7:5 8:9	41:15	41:4	33:15 34:5,19
9:25,25 10:5,14	43:15	return 10:6	scheme 26:8	35:15 36:5
10:20 11:17,24	respects 23:13	reveals 4:10	Schindler 1:3 3:4	37:12,21 38:11
12:13,17 13:16	respond 40:21	review 24:14	6:16 9:9 11:4	38:15,18 39:5
13:17,19 18:24	responded 47:7	26:24,25	11:14,23 15:19	39:16,24 40:6,9
			25:13 27:12,22	
L	1	1	1	1

41:10,17	speak 29:23 33:6	strong 20:6 30:7	32:23,24,25	thorough 5:1
shipped 7:17	33:7,8	structure 23:14	36:18 41:2	thought 12:18
show 39:13	special 20:2 31:7	struggling 35:23	tam 4:11 9:7	24:18 41:12
side 20:25	specific 7:7	subject 7:9,10	24:20 39:2 41:6	three 8:25 16:21
sign 17:1 30:5	24:11	40:20 42:2	42:2 44:4,17,23	time 15:12 18:24
signed 38:24	specifically 16:3	submit 24:6	45:16,24 47:18	22:4 34:16 41:5
significant 40:11	30:9,18 36:14	submitted 5:24	tax 10:6	times 9:17 15:7
46:8	spent 21:18	37:23 44:1 46:3	tell 4:20 8:15	today 15:8 19:16
signing 38:19	staff 19:3	47:23,25	16:11 26:14	told 23:2
signs 38:17	stage 28:1	subset 41:11	30:12 38:2	traffic 9:24
simple 33:9	standard 16:19	substance 35:5	telling 8:20 38:13	transactions
simply 10:16,22	18:23 22:17	38:20	term 14:21	4:10,18 5:6
11:14 22:7	46:18,20 47:10	substantive	termed 19:9	33:1 44:17
23:12 25:6 32:9	47:11,20	20:12 21:2 29:4	terms 7:1 15:9	45:17,22
32:11 42:17,23	standing 20:19	31:23 33:18,19	23:16 43:2	transformed
site 8:15	start 32:21	34:3,5,12 35:24	test 14:18 17:16	32:7
slippery 31:25	started 12:1	36:1,7 40:16	17:17,18,20,22	transmission
slope 31:25	State 42:1,1	sufficient 28:1	17:25 22:9 28:8	28:18
Shipe 31:23 Smith 37:9	statement 6:3	suggesting 20:5	33:11,14 34:2,3	tried 30:20
sole 9:12	37:7 44:9 45:2	46:10	Thank 15:13	triggers 26:5
Solicitor 1:19	statements 6:1	suit 4:11 46:23	32:13,14 42:5	trouble 22:13,21
solution 41:7	25:25 44:1	47:12	47:22	23:4
somebody 28:12	States 1:1,6,12	suits 44:23 47:18	thing 6:17 11:6	true 17:9 22:23
somebody's	1:21 2:10 3:5	support 25:5	31:16,17 32:21	26:21 35:16
17:11	32:17	supporting 1:22	38:4	46:11
somewhat 42:21	statistics 19:23	2:11 32:18	things 13:8,9,9	truth 33:13
sorry 20:17	43:1,5	suppose 3:24	13:15 16:9,10	trying 21:6 26:2
37:12 40:6	statute 4:14	6:20 7:14 12:22	17:10 19:19	29:3 30:2 39:13
sort 17:11 34:8	13:16,20 19:5	Supreme 1:1,12	22:23 46:24	39:15,19
39:9	22:20 24:13,16	sure 22:1 45:1	think 5:20 6:15	Tuesday 1:9
Sotomayor 8:14	24:24 25:3	surely 10:8 24:16	8:10 11:16	turned 12:17
8:19 26:12,18	30:11 32:11,12	survey 47:6	13:12 15:5	turning 16:8
43:20,24 44:6	42:25 44:20,21	suspects 4:1	20:12 26:12	two 8:4 9:1,2
44:12 45:1,10	47:2,15	sustained 21:2	28:5 31:22 32:5	10:9 24:3 26:13
45:23 46:1,11	statutes 43:10	28:10,15	33:15,16,17	36:5 38:22,23
46:16 47:19	statutory 23:14	·	34:19,22 35:1,2	39:21
sought 6:13	43:9	T	36:5,6,10,17	type 36:18,19
sound 7:21	Stein 5:2	T 2:1,1	37:1 39:24	types 36:21
source 45:12	steps 43:21	tail 27:18	40:10,23,24,25	typical 16:15,20
46:22 47:16	STEVEN 1:15	take 10:23 11:20	42:9,21	
sources 20:9	2:3,13 3:7 42:7	18:14 31:20,21	thinks 4:2	<u> </u>
30:18 35:19	stop 42:16 44:23	45:12	third 5:23 7:6	uncover 17:1
36:15 41:12	46:6	taken 3:16 13:12	43:25	uncovering 21:5
so-and-so 37:24	strange 40:24	talk 17:24 24:15	Thirty-two 43:8	33:13
		talking 19:16		underlying 14:14
		I	ļ	I

14:19 39:8	15:20 39:4,5	19:14 20:2,17	years 9:3,5,8,8	3 2:4
42:20	violation 27:25	20:21,25 21:14	9:12 11:20	32 2:11
undermine 15:25		21:17 22:1,11	22:20 25:13,20	
undermined	W	23:1,7,19,23	25:23,24 26:4,8	4
26:10	want 7:13,23	24:2,23 25:18	26:15 27:10,16	4 11:20 12:19
understand	11:3,4,4,5	25:25 26:16,21	30:11,12 43:14	40 43:10
11:12,13 30:1	16:22 22:4 29:9	27:7,12,17	York 1:15,15,17	42 2:14
37:17 45:2,23	29:11 32:21	28:16 29:1,17	1:17	
46:10	37:22 39:20	29:22 31:2,7,17		5
understanding	41:4	Wilson 12:6	Z	5 25:20,22,24
7:20 10:10	wanted 22:15	withdrawing 23:5	Z 45:5	5,000 47:7
understood 18:6	36:20	witnesses 11:9		
19:18 22:5,9	Washington 1:8	word 9:22 19:15	1	6
unique 23:13	1:20	19:17 21:13,16	1 1:9	6 9:8,8
United 1:1,6,12	wasn't 27:15	24:10 26:16	10 6:21 26:8 43:8	7
1:21 2:10 3:5	39:3 45:14	30:13,15 32:24	10-188 1:4 3:4	73 47:6
32:17	way 7:6 21:12,16	33:3 38:4,4	11:20 1:13 3:2	1341.0
usage 41:3,3	23:11 27:25	words 5:21 12:15	12(b)(1) 28:2	9
use 4:8,12 16:3	28:20 33:16	19:18 24:17	12:12 47:24	9 9:8
21:10 40:24	40:22	32:23 36:15,17	1354 13:21	
42:9	ways 20:17 22:14	36:19,21 37:2	14 42:6	
useful 16:24 19:1	weather 9:23	40:11 41:18	15 2:7 25:13 26:8	
uses 5:21 19:15	Web 8:15	work 17:14 29:4	30:10,10 38:24	
19:17 21:20	Webster's 18:19	30:4 31:23	17,000 43:6,11	
usually 18:1	went 5:2 12:1	39:14	1943 35:8	
23:25 24:1	weren't 26:14	works 10:3	1983 47:6	
utterly 42:25	27:5	worried 38:7	1986 16:2 25:3	
43:1	we'll 3:3 6:22	45:20	30:12 35:9	
	11:10 14:6	wouldn't 12:24	46:18,21,24	
V	we're 11:7,8,9	18:14 37:24	47:3	
v 1:5 3:4	18:19 19:16	44:16	1999 27:18	
valuable 3:16	20:5 21:6 23:21	wrapped 26:1	2	
46:9	23:21 28:2	write 39:21		
vary 11:17	32:24,25 36:10	wrong 14:24 15:2	2003 27:20	
vast 26:2 30:15	41:2 46:9	22:10	2005 27:19	
version 42:12	we've 19:15 31:9	wrongdoing 14:4	2008 43:4	
veterans 26:9	42:21	17:2 33:14,16	2009 41:15	
veteran's 7:14	whistleblower	wrote 37:5	2010 41:24	
7:16	25:7		2011 1:9	
VETS-100 9:3	whistleblowers	X	21 33:12	
9:10,25 11:23	16:3 20:7 30:9	x 1:2,7 8:15 45:5	22 43:9	
32:8 43:14,16	Willens 1:17 2:6		25 22:20 30:12	
VEVRRA 13:20	15:14,15,17	Y	28 43:7	
26:11	16:13 17:9,14	Y 45:5	3	
view 5:16,20	18:4,8,14 19:11	year 34:14 43:4		