1	IN THE SUPREME COURT OF THE UNITED STATES	
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3	JEFFREY J. HEFFERNAN, :	
4	Petitioner : No. 14-1280	
5	v. :	
6	CITY OF PATERSON, NEW :	
7	JERSEY, ET AL. :	
8	x	
9	Washington, D.C.	
10	Tuesday, January 19, 2016	
11		
12	The above-entitled matter came on for ora	al
13	argument before the Supreme Court of the United States	
14	at 10:03 a.m.	
15	APPEARANCES:	
16	MARK FROST, ESQ., Philadelphia, Pa.; on behalf of	
17	Petitioner.	
18	GINGER D. ANDERS, ESQ., Assistant to the Solicitor	
19	General, Department of Justice, Washington, D.C.; for	or
20	United States, as amicus curiae, supporting	
21	Petitioner.	
22	THOMAS C. GOLDSTEIN, ESQ., Bethesda, Md.; on behalf of	
23	Respondents.	
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Τ	PROCEEDINGS
2	(10:03 a.m.)
3	CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: We'll hear argument
4	first this morning in Case 14-1280, Heffernan v. City of
5	Paterson, New Jersey.
6	Mr. Frost.
7	ORAL ARGUMENT OF MARK FROST
8	ON BEHALF OF THE PETITIONER
9	MR. FROST: Mr. Chief Justice, and may it
10	please the Court:
11	Public employees have a right not to be
12	demoted on patronage grounds. It does not matter if you
13	are affiliated with a specific party or that you are
14	nonaffiliated. It does not matter if you are mistakenly
15	perceived by your employer or supervisor that you're
16	engaged in political association to be protected by the
17	First Amendment.
18	JUSTICE KENNEDY: How would you define the
19	right at issue in this case?
20	MR. FROST: The the issue here is
21	JUSTICE KENNEDY: How would you define the
22	right that your client wishes this Court to vindicate?
23	MR. FROST: I'm defining the right in that
24	pursuant to Elrod and its progeny, that there it is
2.5	not necessary to have any affirmative acts, that by

- 1 virtue of being a public employee, he has the right not
- 2 to engage in political association.
- JUSTICE KENNEDY: Well, that's just a
- 4 restatement of -- of Elrod. I -- I -- would -- would --
- 5 would it be fair to the proposition that you are putting
- 6 before the Court to say that you're asserting the right
- 7 to be free from government inquiry into an oversight of
- 8 your views? Would that be a fair statement?
- 9 MR. FROST: That would be a fair statement,
- 10 Justice Kennedy.
- 11 JUSTICE KENNEDY: Because -- look, do we --
- 12 it sounds to me from the way you began your argument
- 13 that we take this case on the assumption that, if he had
- 14 picked up the sign, that if he had been supporting the
- 15 candidate for chief of police who was challenging the
- 16 incumbent, if he had been engaged in the activity, that
- 17 would be protected. He could not have been demoted.
- 18 If -- you want us to take the case on that -- do we have
- 19 to accept that proposition for you to prevail in this
- 20 case?
- MR. FROST: No, you do not have to accept
- 22 that proposition. Proposition is just clearly that, as
- 23 a public employee, he has a right to either associate or
- 24 nonassociate, and he doesn't have to commit an
- 25 affirmative act in support, in this case, of the mayor's

- 1 opponent, which was Chief Spagnola.
- 2 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Well, but the -- the
- 3 First Amendment talks about abridging freedom of speech,
- 4 and I thought the case came to us on the proposition
- 5 that he wasn't engaging in speech at all. That he was
- 6 not engaging in association, he was not engaging in
- 7 trying to convey a message, he was just picking up a
- 8 sign for his mother. And if that's the basis on which
- 9 the case comes to us, I'm not sure how he can say his
- 10 freedom of speech has been abridged.
- MR. FROST: In this case, Mr. Chief Justice,
- 12 the case comes to us with respect to association. With
- 13 respect to speech, speech is governed by a different
- 14 doctrine than association. There is no need to do a
- 15 Pickering analysis in this case.
- 16 JUSTICE SCALIA: He wasn't associating with
- 17 anybody any more -- any more than he was speaking. He
- 18 was doing neither one.
- 19 MR. FROST: Justice Scalia --
- JUSTICE SCALIA: He was associate --
- 21 associating with his mother, I suppose, in picking up
- 22 the sign for her. But he was not expressing any
- 23 political view. He was not associating with a political
- 24 party.
- 25 What case of ours vindicates the right

- 1 that -- that Justice Kennedy described to you and which
- 2 you readily agreed with? What -- what case of ours
- 3 vindicates that --
- 4 MR. FROST: Elrod would stand for that
- 5 proposition.
- 6 JUSTICE SCALIA: Elrod --
- 7 MR. FROST: Elrod --
- 8 JUSTICE SCALIA: Elrod says you have a First
- 9 Amendment right to favor a political party or not favor
- 10 a political party, and you cannot be fired for doing so.
- 11 That's not what happened here.
- MR. FROST: But he was not favoring a
- 13 political party.
- 14 JUSTICE SCALIA: Exactly. He was not
- 15 expressing any First Amendment view whatever. I mean,
- 16 he was fired for the wrong reason, but there's no
- 17 constitutional right not to be fired for the wrong
- 18 reason. If he was fired because his -- his -- his --
- 19 his government employer thought he had committed a
- 20 felony and he hadn't, he might -- he might have a cause
- 21 of action under some statute. But there -- there --
- 22 there's no constitutional right not to be fired for the
- 23 wrong reason, and that's what happened here.
- MR. FROST: There's a constitutional right,
- 25 Justice Scalia, to be able to be free from patronage

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1 decisions and to be discharged or demoted on patronage
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- 2 grounds. And in Elrod --
- JUSTICE SCALIA: Where do we say that? We
- 4 never said that. Elrod and -- and Branti are -- are
- 5 cases decided under the First Amendment. The First
- 6 Amendment guarantees the right to freedom of speech and
- 7 freedom of association. Your client was neither
- 8 speaking nor associating. So how could he possibly have
- 9 a cause of action under the First Amendment?
- MR. FROST: He doesn't need to speak, and he
- 11 doesn't need to take a position. The Rutan plaintiffs,
- 12 they didn't take a position with respect to promotion or
- 13 transfers. They took -- the fact of the matter is,
- 14 is -- is that since they were not affiliated with the
- 15 Republican party or supporting the Republican party or
- 16 endorsed by the Republican party, none of those
- 17 individuals would have been promoted or transferred.
- 18 They didn't take any affirmative acts.
- 19 JUSTICE ALITO: I don't understand -- I
- 20 don't understand your answer. What -- what expressive
- 21 activity did he engage in? He wasn't -- he was not
- 22 allegedly demoted for failing to support the mayor. He
- 23 was allegedly demoted for seemingly supporting the
- 24 mayor's opponent.
- 25 MR. FROST: In -- in Waters this Court

- 1 looked at the motive of the employer, the motive of
- 2 government. If government perceives that you are
- 3 engaging in a political activity and the motive is to
- 4 suppress one's beliefs and associations or
- 5 nonassociations, then you look at it through
- 6 government's analysis, and it's their basis of their
- 7 facts that you are evaluating.
- 8 Here they evaluated the facts that he was
- 9 engaged in campaigning.
- 10 Officer Heffernan went to a political
- 11 gathering. He went and picked up a sign. What was
- 12 misperceived by his employer was the fact of his intent.
- 13 He said that, I'm not intending to support Spagnola, but
- 14 he is doing all those incidents that are core First
- 15 Amendment activities.
- 16 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Well, let me just --
- 17 to clarify what I -- how I thought the case was
- 18 presented. Let's say the employer comes in to Smith and
- 19 says, you know, Smith, I saw you getting a -- a -- a
- 20 political sign, and you're -- and you're -- you're
- 21 fired.
- 22 And Smith says, it wasn't me. I was off,
- 23 you know, in a different town then.
- In other words, it's a pure mistake of fact.
- 25 Your answers, it seems to me, you try to get

- 1 advantage of the fact that there -- you could perhaps
- 2 have argued this was expressive activity. Say, oh, he
- 3 was at a meeting, a political event. He was getting a
- 4 sign. But your theory, I thought, didn't depend on that
- 5 at all.
- 6 MR. FROST: It -- it --
- 7 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: It was simply a
- 8 mistake of fact.
- 9 And then -- now, can the person who wasn't
- 10 even there, can he bring a First Amendment challenge to
- 11 his dismissal?
- MR. FROST: Yes, Mr. Chief Justice.
- 13 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Okay.
- 14 MR. FROST: And the point that I was
- 15 making --
- 16 JUSTICE KENNEDY: And then again -- but it's
- 17 still not clear to me: What is the right that he's
- 18 asserting?
- 19 And -- and I'll back up while you're
- 20 thinking about that.
- 21 Is -- can a local government say that all
- our employees must be neutral in campaigns and must not
- 23 take part in campaigns?
- 24 MR. FROST: Well --
- 25 JUSTICE KENNEDY: They can vote, but they

- 1 can't take part in campaigns? Like the Hatch Act?
- MR. FROST: Well, there are Hatch Acts.
- 3 There was no provision here.
- 4 JUSTICE KENNEDY: Can the government insist
- 5 on neutrality?
- 6 MR. FROST: I think the government can have
- 7 a policy after balancing the interests between that of
- 8 the employer and that of the position.
- 9 JUSTICE GINSBURG: Is that an issue --
- 10 MR. FROST: I was not saying --
- 11 JUSTICE GINSBURG: Is that an issue -- is
- 12 that an issue in this case? Is there any allegation
- 13 that there was such a policy of neutrality that no
- 14 employee could engage in political activity?
- MR. FROST: Okay. Justice Ginsburg, there
- 16 was no such policy in this case involving --
- 17 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: I'm sorry. I thought
- 18 there was an unwritten policy.
- MR. FROST: There -- there was a policy that
- 20 Chief Wittig said that existed with respect to members
- 21 of his staff only. However, with respect to that
- 22 policy, there's no testimony regarding that policy. In
- 23 other words, the people that worked in the Chief's
- 24 office -- there were four individuals who were
- 25 officers -- none of them ever heard of that policy.

- 1 Also, that policy was never raised below in any of the
- 2 motions for summary judgment or the motion before the
- 3 Third Circuit twice. So we believe that that motion is
- 4 waived.
- 5 But to answer your question, Your Honor, is
- 6 the fact that no one knew of this policy. So -- so he
- 7 could say he had a policy and he could make reference to
- 8 it, but it's just not supported by any evidence in this
- 9 case.
- 10 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Is there a remedy
- 11 for your client, apart from this action under the First
- 12 Amendment? Does he have civil service protections of
- any kind or -- or -- I don't know -- collective
- 14 bargaining?
- MR. FROST: Your Honor --
- 16 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Let's just say:
- 17 What would happen if the boss comes in and says, you
- 18 know, for the -- you didn't turn off the lights last
- 19 night. You're fired.
- 20 Can he -- is there a way for him to say, I
- 21 was on leave yesterday. It wasn't me.
- MR. FROST: Well, that's not a
- 23 constitutional violation for --
- 24 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: No, no. My point is
- 25 that maybe this shouldn't be a constitutional violation

- 1 if there are adequate remedies to address what may or
- 2 may not be a First Amendment issue.
- 3 MR. FROST: Mr. Chief Justice, there are --
- 4 there were no other remedies.
- 5 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Okay.
- 6 MR. FROST: There is a -- State of
- 7 New Jersey has a State Civil Rights Act which mimics
- 8 1983. Just because there is a -- such a right, doesn't
- 9 mean that you can diminish the First Amendment and give
- 10 up your First Amendment rights. So clearly, we
- 11 proceeded with the fact that there was a violation of
- 12 the First Amendment just because it was created by the
- 13 State. There is no civil service --
- 14 JUSTICE SCALIA: What -- what is the New
- 15 Jersey Act? That's a strange act. It protects State
- 16 employment only against First Amendment violations?
- 17 MR. FROST: No, it -- it mimics --
- 18 JUSTICE SCALIA: I can't imagine that. It
- 19 must -- it must have other protections for State
- 20 employee -- employees.
- MR. FROST: With respect to the New Jersey
- 22 statute, it's just identical to a 1983 cause of action,
- 23 so it doesn't give you any additional rights.
- 24 Officer Heffernan --
- 25 JUSTICE SCALIA: How does it read? You have

- 1 to violate the Federal constitution to get relief under
- 2 New Jersey law?
- 3 MR. FROST: Do you have to?
- 4 JUSTICE SCALIA: Yeah. That's what 1983
- 5 says.
- 6 What is -- what does New Jersey law say?
- 7 MR. FROST: He proceeded in Federal court.
- 8 He has every right to proceed in Federal court for a
- 9 First Amendment violation.
- JUSTICE SCALIA: What does the New Jersey
- 11 law say? You brought it up. I didn't bring it up.
- 12 What does it say?
- MR. FROST: New Jersey law, the statute just
- 14 mimics a 1983 cause of action.
- 15 JUSTICE SCALIA: So it says -- it says if
- 16 you violate -- you can't fire a State employee in
- 17 violation of the Federal constitution. That's what the
- 18 New Jersey law says. What a strange law.
- 19 JUSTICE GINSBURG: You don't have the text
- 20 of it, do you?
- MR. FROST: I'm sorry.
- 22 JUSTICE GINSBURG: The text of the
- 23 New Jersey law, so we can know what we're talking about.
- MR. FROST: Sure. I mean, this was --
- 25 New Jersey law can't create substantive rights. So with

1 respect to this matter, he's also not protected by civil

- 2 service, either.
- JUSTICE ALITO: Well, Mr. Goldstein's brief
- 4 says New Jersey law provides a statutory right of action
- 5 for an attempt to violate an individual's civil rights.
- Is he wrong?
- 7 MR. FROST: An attempt to violate?
- JUSTICE ALITO: Yeah.
- 9 MR. FROST: It -- it is included in there,
- 10 but -- but that doesn't give you an exclusive right.
- 11 You can't diminish his First Amendment rights.
- 12 JUSTICE ALITO: No. The question is not
- 13 whether the New Jersey law somehow abrogates First
- 14 Amendment rights. The question is whether he has a --
- 15 an independent remedy under State law. That's the
- 16 question, I think, that's being asked.
- MR. FROST: He could have a remedy under
- 18 State law. But it -- in this instance, he pursued it,
- 19 his First Amendment rights.
- JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: How could he? If we say
- 21 there's no First Amendment right, what civil right has
- 22 he -- was violated if -- if what Mr. Goldstein says is
- 23 the --
- MR. FROST: The civil right --
- 25 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: -- is the state of the

- 1 law attempting to violate civil rights? What right, if
- 2 we say there isn't the First Amendment?
- 3 MR. FROST: The right not to associate.
- 4 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: Well, if we say it
- 5 doesn't exist. You lose this case.
- 6 MR. FROST: If what doesn't exist,
- 7 Justice Sotomayor?
- 8 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: Just that, the right
- 9 you're claiming.
- 10 MR. FROST: He has every right to bring this
- 11 claim in Federal court as --
- 12 JUSTICE ALITO: He may have broader
- 13 substantive rights under New Jersey law. I would be
- 14 somewhat surprised if that were not the case. The civil
- 15 rights to which this -- the New Jersey statute refers
- 16 may refer to rights under the New Jersey constitution or
- 17 other New Jersey laws.
- 18 MR. FROST: There are New Jersey laws.
- 19 But -- but just because -- again, it doesn't abrogate
- 20 your First Amendment rights. So the fact -- it
- 21 shouldn't matter whether or not he --
- 22 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Just --
- MR. FROST: -- engaged -- there could have
- 24 been a violation of any type of New Jersey statute. It
- 25 wasn't alleged in this case. It was never brought up by

- 1 Respondents in this case during -- during any of the
- 2 arguments in any of the briefs.
- And -- and therefore, with respect to this
- 4 matter, it's our position that he has every right to
- 5 maintain this litigation with respect to violation of
- 6 his First Amendment right. And here, he is alleging
- 7 that he has the right not to associate. And that right
- 8 really stems from the fact that we have -- that this
- 9 Court has considered in Elrod and its progeny.
- 10 Furthermore, the Third Circuit makes its
- 11 mistake in requiring Heffernan to actually engage in
- 12 some type of political activity, campaigning. That's
- 13 not necessary, as I've indicated, with respect to Elrod
- 14 and the Rutan plaintiffs.
- 15 Additionally, the Third Circuit's decision
- 16 in this case is actually -- lacks common sense. I mean,
- 17 if you take a hypothetical with two police officers
- 18 going to pick up a sign, and when they go to pick up the
- 19 sign they're at a campaign gathering, and one police
- 20 officer states to his employer, yeah, I was supporting
- 21 Spagnola, and Mr. Heffernan would say, no, I'm -- I'm
- 22 not supporting it. I'm doing this to pick up a sign for
- 23 my mother, should make no difference.
- The outcome is still the same in the sense
- 25 that they're both engaged in that activity. The only

- 1 difference is, is that the employer perceived
- 2 Mr. Heffernan as engaging in protected activity. They
- 3 went to stifle and squash his rights of association or
- 4 nonassociation. Their motive was to suppress that. And
- 5 clearly, that has a chilling effect on other employees.
- I mean, it's just very clear from the
- 7 testimony in this case. And if you go to the Appendix,
- 8 page 50, what is very telling about this case is the
- 9 fact that when he went to pick up the sign, there was a
- 10 councilman there who was a chairperson of the election.
- 11 And he says to Heffernan, says, boy, you better be
- 12 careful. Maybe you should come back later while
- 13 we're -- because we're hanging up these signs. And that
- 14 clearly shows the chilling effect that it would have not
- only in this police department or in the City of
- 16 Paterson, but other employees in different jurisdictions
- 17 and different areas would have the same issues. You
- 18 would have to think twice before you did something.
- 19 If you went to a political gathering or a
- 20 campaign, or you went to hear a speaker speak and you
- 21 picked up a pamphlet and put it on your desk, the -- if
- 22 your employer saw that and they didn't like that
- 23 candidate and they took action against you, you would
- 24 see that that is action based on a motive to suppress
- 25 one's rights.

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1 JUSTICE SCALIA: All of those things would
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- 2 be true if the mayor gave a speech saying I am going to
- 3 fire anybody who's not a Republican. All of those
- 4 things would be true. Would it chill people -- blah
- 5 blah blah -- would there be a cause of action? Would
- 6 anybody have a cause of action because of that speech?
- 7 MR. FROST: Because of the speech itself?
- 8 JUSTICE SCALIA: Yeah, just the speech. He
- 9 hasn't fired anybody. He's just said I am going to fire
- 10 anybody who's not a Republican, or anybody who's not a
- 11 Republican will not get promoted.
- 12 MR. FROST: Justice Scalia --
- JUSTICE SCALIA: Does anybody have a cause
- 14 of action for that?
- 15 MR. FROST: There would be no claim, because
- 16 no action was taken. So -- so part -- you have the
- 17 perception that they engaged in an activity.
- 18 JUSTICE SCALIA: Exactly. So -- so what
- 19 counts is whether action was taken for a particular
- 20 reason, not whether you chilled -- whether you chilled
- 21 people, which you're arguing to us is this is
- 22 unconstitutional because it chills other people.
- 23 That -- that doesn't -- that just doesn't carry water.
- MR. FROST: Justice Scalia, what carries
- 25 water is the fact that in this instance, Heffernan was

- 1 denoted on the employer's mistaken perception that he
- 2 was engaged in activity, and you don't need to engage in
- 3 that activity.
- 4 JUSTICE GINSBURG: Would you -- would you
- 5 say that he was demoted because he gave the appearance
- 6 of exercising his First Amendment rights?
- 7 MR. FROST: Yes. Because they perceived it
- 8 that he was exercising his rights, and the fact that he
- 9 actually was not engaged in any political activity
- 10 should make no difference with respect to the motivation
- 11 outcome of what took place with Mr. Heffernan. The
- 12 issue was clearly that it was ill will. It was because
- 13 it was against the administration, and they took that
- 14 action to suppress that belief, and it chills other.
- Mr. Chief Justice, may I reserve the
- 16 remaining time --
- 17 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: You may.
- 18 MR. FROST: -- if there are no other
- 19 questions? Thank you.
- 20 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Ms. Anders.
- 21 ORAL ARGUMENT OF GINGER D. ANDERS
- FOR UNITED STATES, AS AMICUS CURIAE,
- 23 SUPPORTING THE PETITIONER
- MS. ANDERS: Mr. Chief Justice, and may it
- 25 please the Court:

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1 I'd like to start with Justice Kennedy's
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- 2 question about how we define the right here.
- We think that Petitioner has a First
- 4 Amendment right not to have adverse action taken against
- 5 him by his employer for the unconstitutional purpose of
- 6 suppressing disfavored political beliefs. He was
- 7 directly injured --
- JUSTICE KENNEDY: And what's your best case
- 9 for that proposition?
- 10 MS. ANDERS: Well, we think that there are
- 11 -- there are two aspects of this -- this Court's case
- 12 law I think that support that, and then I'd like to get
- 13 back to your concern about probing of beliefs. But we
- 14 think that the way that the Court defined the right at
- issue in Branti and Rutan, and again in O'Hare,
- demonstrates that an employee doesn't have to
- 17 affirmatively exercise his First Amendment rights first.
- So in those courts -- in -- in those cases
- 19 the court said that the plaintiff can show a
- 20 constitutional violation of the First Amendment simply
- 21 by showing that the employer acted for the
- 22 unconstitutional purpose of suppressing disfavored
- 23 political --
- JUSTICE GINSBURG: And those cases,
- 25 Ms. Anders -- I missed what you said those cases were.

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1 MS. ANDERS: That was Branti -- this is at
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- 2 445 U.S. at 517 -- again in Rutan, and then in -- in
- 3 O'Hare, which is the government contract --
- 4 JUSTICE SCALIA: You say in all of those
- 5 cases, no First Amendment right was being exercised,
- 6 right?
- 7 MS. ANDERS: No.
- JUSTICE SCALIA: Is that your point?
- 9 MS. ANDERS: Well, I think actually in the
- 10 Rutan case there were -- there were three plaintiffs,
- 11 and it wasn't clear, actually, whether they had engaged
- 12 in any affirmative exercise of their First Amendment --
- JUSTICE SCALIA: Was it clear that they
- 14 hadn't?
- 15 MS. ANDERS: So what the court said was that
- 16 they had --
- JUSTICE SCALIA: Was it clear that they
- 18 hadn't?
- MS. ANDERS: It was not clear whether they
- 20 had or hadn't, and the court didn't inquire into that.
- 21 So what had happened there was that the -- the
- 22 plaintiffs had been -- had adverse action taken against
- 23 them because they had lacked the support of the correct
- 24 Republican party officials. That's all the court says
- 25 about their allegations.

- 1 There are any number of reasons they could
- 2 have lacked that support. They could have affirmatively
- 3 refused, obviously, to seek the support, which would be
- 4 an exercise of First Amendment rights. But on the other
- 5 hand, they may simply have not had the time to seek the
- 6 right support, or they may have been ignorant of the
- 7 requirement in the first place. Those wouldn't have
- 8 involved an affirmative exercise.
- 9 JUSTICE SCALIA: Yeah. I thought in all of
- 10 these cases up to now, whenever anybody's fired,
- 11 demoted, or even not promoted, it hurts and -- and you
- 12 want to bring a lawsuit sometimes. Up to now, those
- 13 lawsuits would have to show I was asserting a First
- 14 Amendment right, and it's for that reason that I was not
- 15 promoted.
- But what you're saying is, you don't have to
- 17 show that at all. All you have to assert is that the
- 18 reason I was not promoted was that the -- the employer
- 19 believed that I was thus and so or not thus and so. You
- 20 don't have to show any assertion of a First Amendment
- 21 right. You just show that the -- the employer liked
- 22 Republicans, and that's enough.
- 23 MS. ANDERS: Well, I think in the employment
- 24 context, I think there's no question that the plaintiff
- 25 was directly injured by the unconstitutional condition.

- 1 But to respond directly to your point, I think -- I
- 2 don't think there's a serious concern here that there
- 3 will be a meritless -- a flood of meritless lawsuits or
- 4 anything like that, and that's primarily for two
- 5 reasons.
- I take your point that -- that, you know,
- 7 this will expand the universe of -- of litigation
- 8 somewhat, but we already know in the statutory context,
- 9 the courts have recognized suits based on a mistaken
- 10 perception, and -- and in that context we haven't seen
- 11 any flood of meritless lawsuits.
- 12 And with respect to Elrod claims
- 13 specifically, I think it's always been fairly easy for
- 14 plaintiffs to allege that a particular affiliation of
- 15 belief, I was in the Republican party --
- 16 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: How do you know we
- 17 haven't seen a flood of meritless lawsuits in that
- 18 context?
- 19 MS. ANDERS: Well, we -- we haven't in the
- 20 statutory context.
- 21 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Yeah, the one that
- 22 you were just referring to.
- 23 MS. ANDERS: Well, we looked at this, it --
- 24 it doesn't come up very much. And when it does, it --
- 25 it looks to us that -- that courts have been able to use

- 1 the standard technique to --
- 2 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: You're looking at
- 3 the reported decisions rather than -- you haven't done
- 4 any survey to see how many complaints have been filed in
- 5 -- in this type of case?
- 6 MS. ANDERS: No. But when you looked to
- 7 reported decisions, what you see is that courts are able
- 8 to use Twombly and Iqbal and summary judgment in order
- 9 to get rid of claims where the allegations aren't
- 10 plausible or there's no evidence.
- But I also think if the plaintiffs are going
- 12 to have to allege that -- that they actually held the
- 13 beliefs in question, this is going to raise exactly the
- 14 concern that Justice Kennedy mentioned earlier about
- 15 oversight of beliefs, probing into beliefs. So this
- 16 will affect all Elrod cases. So every time an Elrod
- 17 case is brought, the defendant will have the incentive
- 18 to say --
- 19 JUSTICE KENNEDY: So are you saying there's
- 20 a right to be secure from government oversight of your
- 21 beliefs?
- MS. ANDERS: Well, I think the Court
- 23 recognized in O'Hare that is a particular concern
- 24 in the affiliation context. We -- we don't want courts
- 25 to have to -- to examine the nature and extent of the

- 1 plaintiff's beliefs or associations.
- JUSTICE SCALIA: I mean, that's a good idea,
- 3 maybe. And maybe -- maybe it should be in some civil
- 4 service act, but where do you find it in the First
- 5 Amendment?
- 6 MS. ANDERS: Well, I think the right -- the
- 7 right in question is the right not to be subject to a
- 8 test of political affiliation --
- 9 JUSTICE KENNEDY: Is -- is that because
- 10 you're concerned with a chill, or is there some other
- 11 right that is -- is somehow affected that's a First
- 12 Amendment right of the individual?
- 13 You turn around and you say the government
- 14 cannot act for an unconstitutional purpose, but we
- 15 usually ask how is the defendant hurt? What is his
- 16 right? That's still a little unclear to me.
- MS. ANDERS: We think the defendant has
- 18 been hurt in the constitutional sense because the way
- 19 that the court has defined the right in question is the
- 20 right not to be subject to a test of political
- 21 affiliation when it's not a reasonable job requirement.
- 22 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: I don't know why --
- 23 MS. ANDERS: And I do think what the Court
- 24 said in --
- 25 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Please.

- MS. ANDERS: What the Court said in O'Hare,
- 2 essentially, was that -- we're not necessarily talking
- 3 about a separate right not to be subject to probing of
- 4 beliefs, but I think the Court was suggesting that we
- 5 shouldn't have First Amendment tests, if we can help it,
- 6 that lead the Court to have to probe into a plaintiff's
- 7 beliefs. And that is exactly what will happen.
- 8 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: I don't know why the
- 9 right isn't the right to be free from arbitrary
- 10 employment action based on a mistake. That's his
- 11 objection here. You made a mistake; you thought I was,
- 12 you know, being politically active. I wasn't.
- I mean, isn't -- is there such a right under
- 14 New Jersey law, you can't be fired for an arbitrary
- 15 reason, or you can't be fired for a mistaken reason?
- 16 MS. ANDERS: I think with, at least with
- 17 respect to some job actions, there -- there would be
- 18 such a right under New Jersey law, and that's -- I'm not
- 19 sure whether it would apply here, but I think the
- 20 gravamen of -- of plaintiff's complaint here is not that
- 21 he was fired for an inaccurate reason; it's that he was
- 22 -- he was demoted because -- for an improper purpose,
- 23 the perception that he was engaging in protected First
- 24 Amendment activity. And --
- 25 JUSTICE GINSBURG: You've brought up in your

- 1 brief, I think, that -- that the employer might have had
- 2 a contract-type policy. I think you said we should
- 3 remand to determine whether this employer said nobody
- 4 engages in political activity.
- 5 MS. ANDERS: Well, I think -- I think if you
- 6 rule for the Petitioner here, there would be a remand
- 7 anyway because the Court hasn't --
- 8 JUSTICE GINSBURG: Is it based on the facts
- 9 up till now to think that there was such a policy?
- MS. ANDERS: Well, so there -- there is, I
- 11 think, a factual dispute about this. So if you look at
- 12 the -- the summary judgment filings, this is document
- 13 No. 189 on Pacer, there -- there are, in -- in the
- 14 Respondents' statement of undisputed facts, some
- 15 assertions that this was in fact a neutrality policy.
- 16 Now you definitely have a dispute about that
- 17 coming back from the other side. Petitioner says that
- 18 nobody knew about that policy. So we think that is one
- 19 thing that potentially the lower courts would have to
- 20 look at, decide whether it was preserved and -- and
- 21 resolve the dispute in that sense.
- But I do want to get back to another concern
- 23 that I think Respondents' position raises. You know, we
- 24 do think that -- that Petitioner has his own First
- 25 Amendment right here. That was violated.

- 1 We do think that when an employer acts
- 2 against an employee based on a mistaken perception of
- 3 his beliefs, that creates exactly the same chilling
- 4 effect with which the Elrod cases are concerned.
- 5 So the other employees will know that the
- 6 employer expects political orthodoxy and will be chilled
- 7 in their -- in their own association as a result.
- 8 And I think there's another concern here
- 9 that deepens the chilling effect, and that is that the
- 10 logic of Respondents' position applies not only in cases
- of honest mistake, it also applies in cases in which the
- 12 employer acts to exploit a loophole, essentially.
- 13 You can imagine a situation in which the
- 14 employer knows that some people have engaged in
- 15 political affiliation. The employer wants to send a
- 16 message, and it does that by acting against the employee
- 17 it thinks didn't actually engage in that association.
- 18 And so I think that is one of the dangers of
- 19 Respondents' rule here, that it will create a loophole.
- 20 And so what we are saying, essentially, is
- 21 that it's just a narrow corollary to the Elrod right
- 22 that the Court has already recognized. When the
- 23 employer acts with the exact same intent that -- that is
- 24 already impermissible under Elrod, and it injures the
- 25 employee in his employment as a result, then the

- 1 employer should be equally liable. It shouldn't get a
- 2 free pass simply because it -- it's ill-motivated and
- 3 wrong.
- If there are no further questions.
- 5 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Thank you, counsel.
- Mr. Goldstein.
- 7 ORAL ARGUMENT OF THOMAS C. GOLDSTEIN
- 8 ON BEHALF OF THE RESPONDENTS
- 9 MR. GOLDSTEIN: Mr. Chief Justice, and may
- 10 it please the Court:
- 11 The doctrinal fight in the briefing is over
- 12 whether the plaintiff in a case like this has to assert
- 13 a constitutional right. And I think the questions so
- 14 far have indicated an understanding that the plaintiff
- 15 would have to. And the real question, then, is, is
- 16 there actually a constitutional right here, one that we
- 17 might define in other terms, including the one that
- 18 Justice Kennedy identified as the right not to have your
- 19 political views inquired in.
- 20 And this is actually discussed in the
- 21 Court's opinion in O'Hare in describing Elrod and
- 22 Branti. And so I want to start there because we have to
- 23 recognize that this right has never been recognized in
- 24 any other political association case whatsoever. And
- 25 there's no logical reason why it would occur

- 1 specifically in the public employment context, which is
- 2 an unconstitutional --
- JUSTICE GINSBURG: Can you explain,
- 4 Mr. Goldstein, what sense it would make to say there are
- 5 two people, the example Mr. Frost gave. One of them is
- 6 a big supporter of Spagnola, and he gets demoted. And
- 7 the other is politically neutral, and he gets demoted
- 8 because the employer thinks he's a supporter of the
- 9 rival mayoral candidate.
- 10 What -- how could you make sense to a person
- of ordinary reason that one of them, the one who was in
- 12 fact engaging in political activity, can't be demoted
- 13 but the other one, who just was innocent, didn't do
- 14 anything?
- MR. GOLDSTEIN: I'm sorry.
- I have to focus on, really, the precise
- 17 wording of your hypothetical, but I think you may
- 18 actually have something slightly different in mind,
- 19 because you identify this, the second employee, one who
- 20 is politically neutral. And the Court has said, in
- 21 cases like Elrod and Branti, that the decision to remain
- 22 neutral -- that is, I see this candidate, I see that
- 23 candidate. I'm going to just not choose between them,
- 24 because I -- you know, for any individual reason, that
- 25 that's protected. That's a political choice. And in

- 1 your precise hypothetical, both of those employees would
- 2 have a claim.
- 3 This case is different, and critically
- 4 different. The other side has quite consciously,
- 5 throughout the case, made only two arguments. The first
- 6 is that he was a supporter of Spagnola. And he's given
- 7 up on that.
- 8 And the second is that he had no association
- 9 whatsoever. He didn't have any more association than I
- 10 did. He was politically oblivious.
- 11 And so, Justice Ginsburg, if you were to ask
- 12 me that question, which is what difference -- what --
- 13 what sense does it make? The sense that it makes is one
- 14 is exercising a constitutional right, and one doesn't --
- 15 JUSTICE KAGAN: So just to make sure I
- 16 understand what you're saying, suppose there's somebody
- 17 who comes into office, and it's a Democrat. And he says
- 18 I want as many Democrats as possible in my office, no
- 19 matter what jobs they're doing.
- Now, what you're saying is he can't demote
- 21 or fire Republicans. He can't remove, demote, or fire
- 22 people who have other political views, neither Democrat
- 23 or Republican. But what he can do is he can get rid of
- 24 anybody who is just politically apathetic.
- Is that your view?

- 1 MR. GOLDSTEIN: If that was actually the
- 2 policy, then technically, the answer to your question is
- 3 yes under the First Amendment. And I'd like to explain
- 4 why. I know it sounds anomalous.
- 5 The reason is that those people -- there is
- 6 nothing in the First Amendment that says that the
- 7 government can't encourage people to be politically
- 8 active. And that is entirely the point of Elrod and
- 9 Branti.
- 10 JUSTICE KENNEDY: So you -- you encourage
- 11 the person to be politically active and then fire him or
- 12 her because they're politically active the wrong way?
- 13 (Laughter.)
- MR. GOLDSTEIN: No, sir.
- 15 JUSTICE KENNEDY: Suppose the employee says,
- 16 you know, I don't like the evening news. I -- I -- I
- 17 like fiction. I -- I don't -- I don't know if I'm
- 18 Republican or Democrat. I don't care.
- 19 MR. GOLDSTEIN: Right.
- JUSTICE KENNEDY: He -- he cannot be
- 21 fired? What is his right?
- MR. GOLDSTEIN: My point, Justice Kennedy,
- 23 is that he may have a State law right; he does have a
- 24 collective bargaining agreement right, but he doesn't
- 25 have a First Amendment right, because he's not engaging

- 1 in First Amendment-protected activity.
- 2 I do --
- JUSTICE KAGAN: See, I --
- 4 JUSTICE KENNEDY: The -- the government has
- 5 -- excuse me.
- 6 MR. GOLDSTEIN: Sorry.
- 7 JUSTICE KENNEDY: The -- the -- the
- 8 government has a right to compel him to declare one way
- 9 or the other?
- 10 MR. GOLDSTEIN: No -- Justice Kennedy, and
- 11 that -- that brings us back to your question. And that
- 12 is does he have a right not to have an inquiry into his
- 13 political views. And that is, of course, not a right
- 14 that's been recognized in any other political
- 15 association context.
- When the Court discussed it in O'Hare, it
- 17 did it in a very specific and really important way, and
- 18 that is it looked at cases like Elrod and Branti, which
- 19 are general policies. And what the Court has said
- 20 there, is that when it's a sweeping policy, it's not
- 21 necessary into -- to inquire into individual political
- 22 beliefs.
- 23 And what those cases ought to be understood
- 24 as is applications of First Amendment overbreadth
- 25 doctrine.

- 1 It is commonplace in First Amendment law
- 2 that if you have a general rule, and the general rule
- 3 will be unconstitutional as applied to some people, and
- 4 the other people involved weren't asserting First
- 5 Amendment rights, the policy can be facially
- 6 unconstitutional, and we don't inquire into the
- 7 individual standing of the plaintiff.
- And that's what happens in Elrod and Branti.
- 9 It's not necessary to inquire into the -- each
- 10 individual employee. It is an entirely different --
- 11 JUSTICE KAGAN: See, I had always thought
- 12 that the -- the idea behind those cases is a different
- one. That the idea has to do with why the government
- 14 acted. And once we say that the government acted for an
- impermissible purpose, which is to -- let's say in my
- 16 hypothetical, get as many Democrats as possible into the
- 17 government, once we say that's an impermissible purpose,
- 18 it matters not at all whether the person is a
- 19 Republican, an -- an independent, or somebody who has
- 20 never thought about politics in his life, because the
- 21 government is acting in a way that's wrongful,
- 22 irrespective of that.
- 23 MR. GOLDSTEIN: And we just disagree. It's
- 24 called an individual right, not a government wrong. The
- 25 individual has to be engaging in -- whether it's

- 1 expression or association, I actually thinks it's not
- 2 contested, Justice Kagan, any more on the free speech
- 3 side, that with cases like Waters, an employee cannot
- 4 bring a First Amendment free speech claim that says, you
- 5 know, I didn't actually engage in speech, but my
- 6 employer thought I did. There is no First Amendment
- 7 right not to have this individual inquiry.
- 8 And Justice Kennedy, remember that our
- 9 position, in particular --
- 10 JUSTICE KAGAN: So does that mean that the
- 11 government can compel speech of a person if the person
- 12 really just doesn't care one way or the other?
- MR. GOLDSTEIN: No. It's a very important
- 14 distinction. So let me give a hypothetical that ought
- 15 to be hard for us, and that is Heffernan is asked by the
- 16 chief of police, you know, do you support the mayor.
- 17 He's completely agnostic, and he refuses to support the
- 18 mayor, and he's transferred.
- The decision not to support or to be
- 20 subjected to your hypothetical is a political choice.
- 21 This case was framed by the plaintiff in a
- 22 very specific way on purpose, and that is he disclaimed
- 23 any such influence, any such pressure, any such choice
- 24 that he was having to make.
- Now, the important piece about -- on this

- 1 question of inquiry is that our position only applies to
- 2 a party that doesn't claim anything other than being
- 3 politically apathetic. So Justice Kennedy, there is no
- 4 inquiry.
- 5 Justice Kagan is quite right that if you
- 6 have somebody who is an Independent or a Democrat or
- 7 Republican, the First Amendment doesn't care. But if
- 8 the plaintiff is going to pursue a claim that says I'm
- 9 not engaged in association or speech, there is nothing
- 10 to inquire into --
- 11 JUSTICE GINSBURG: Mr. Goldstein, let's take
- 12 a Title VII case, and the employer fires a woman because
- 13 he thinks she's pregnant. She brings a sex
- 14 discrimination case and alleges, well, I wasn't
- 15 pregnant. I just was gaining weight.
- 16 So she has no sex discrimination claim,
- then, because she wasn't pregnant?
- 18 MR. GOLDSTEIN: Justice Ginsburg, the courts
- 19 are divided. The position of the EEOC is that she would
- 20 have a claim. I just think it's a good point for us
- 21 that Congress can write laws that recognize such,
- 22 regarded as claims.
- 23 JUSTICE SCALIA: Those -- those statutes
- 24 focus on the employer. The employer cannot discriminate
- 25 on the basis --

- 1 MR. GOLDSTEIN: Right.
- 2 JUSTICE SCALIA: -- of sex.
- 3 MR. GOLDSTEIN: Right.
- 4 JUSTICE SCALIA: And that employer was doing
- 5 that.
- 6 The First Amendment does not focus on the
- 7 government; it focuses on the citizen. The citizen has
- 8 a right to free speech and free association.
- 9 MR. GOLDSTEIN: So --
- 10 JUSTICE SCALIA: That's the difference
- 11 between the two cases.
- MR. GOLDSTEIN: Well, it will not surprise
- 13 you that I agree, Justice Scalia.
- 14 The -- Justice Kagan, if -- if we could just
- 15 take this outside the public employment context. And
- 16 the reason I want to do that is that we ought to be able
- 17 to agree that the First Amendment rights aren't
- 18 greater association of rights there. The Court has
- 19 pointed out that there is a greater Federalism interest
- 20 in managing the public employment workforce, and also
- 21 that this is an unconstitutional conditions case.
- But just imagine the following simple -- you
- 23 know, hypotheticals that relate just to this case.
- 24 Imagine that the chief of police, with the same
- 25 motivation, went up to Heffernan as he went to pick up

- 1 the sign, grabbed the sign, and tore it up. Or imagine
- 2 that Heffernan was trying -- was stopped from entering a
- 3 parade in favor of Spagnola, but what he was actually
- 4 trying to do was just cross the street. Or he went to
- 5 the building where it is that Spagnola had the -- his
- 6 headquarters, and the chief of police stopped him from
- 7 going in, but he was actually going to his lawyer's
- 8 office.
- 9 Those are all the exact same motivation.
- 10 And there -- I don't think there's any way the Court
- 11 would recognize such a claim.
- It's a very sympathetic claim. Okay? I get
- 13 the fact that we are very concerned that public
- 14 employees not be transferred or demoted, but we have
- 15 other laws and other regimes that are -- that fill that
- 16 gap.
- 17 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: What is -- what is
- 18 the other law here? What -- what relief does he have?
- 19 MR. GOLDSTEIN: He has two forms of relief.
- 20 The first is the collective bargaining
- 21 agreement. I will tell you that it is not in the
- 22 record, but it is judicially noticeable. It is a public
- 23 document. It's available on the government Web sites of
- 24 the State of New Jersey, and it is exactly what you
- 25 would expect. In fact, it's a little bit broader. It

- 1 says that if you are -- you have an employment action
- 2 that is inequitable, it is -- you -- it is grievable.
- 3 The second thing is the attempt provision,
- 4 which was discussed, and Justice Alito is right, that
- 5 there are broader civil rights under New Jersey law.
- And this just makes sense. The Court, in
- 7 cases --
- 8 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Well, do -- do you
- 9 agree that the Petitioner is entitled to relief under
- 10 that provision of the collective bargaining agreement?
- 11 MR. GOLDSTEIN: If -- if he -- his
- 12 allegations of the facts are correct, yes.
- JUSTICE KENNEDY: In your hypothetical about
- 14 stopping the person from crossing the street, or, they
- 15 think, entering the parade, the individual is -- has no
- 16 right to insist that the government doesn't make a First
- 17 Amendment judgment about his activities?
- 18 MR. GOLDSTEIN: That's correct.
- Justice Kennedy --
- JUSTICE KENNEDY: In -- in other words,
- 21 the -- the -- the individual in the -- in -- in --
- 22 the citizen of the United States, have no right, have --
- 23 have -- have no -- have no injury, have no interest in
- 24 making sure the government doesn't evaluate everything
- 25 they do from a political standpoint?

- 1 MR. GOLDSTEIN: I think they have an
- 2 interest, Justice Kennedy. I'm not saying that. We are
- 3 concerned that people be able to have conscience, that
- 4 they be able to make their own personal, private
- 5 judgments. But what we're talking about here in the
- 6 context in which there is a real concern that I would
- 7 like to talk about, about whether it will interfere with
- 8 the management of local government, that it's an
- 9 affirmative constitutional right, it's a violation of
- 10 the First Amendment.
- Now the reason you ought to be concerned,
- 12 Justice Kennedy, is there is another side of the coin.
- 13 Take it from the perspective of the supervisor. If this
- 14 right is recognized, which is to say the plaintiff need
- 15 not have engaged in any association, then the
- 16 supervisor's expression of political views may well be
- 17 chilled because he has to worry that any employee can
- 18 say, look, I was regarded as politically active.
- 19 If I could just give you this case again,
- 20 and that is, take the sign out of it.
- The plaintiff says he was well known as a
- 22 Spagnola friend and supporter. Okay? Imagine that
- 23 that's discussed in the chief of police's office, but
- 24 the chief of police thinks that -- that Heffernan really
- 25 should be transferred. Okay? The chief -- if the

- 1 Petitioner is right, he really has to worry because if
- 2 it's discussed, then there's every reason that Heffernan
- 3 can just bring a lawsuit saying, look, I wasn't actually
- 4 involved in the campaign, but you did it because he was
- 5 my friend. And that is a very significant consequence
- 6 for the individual rights.
- Now, if we didn't have other protections
- 8 that get to the concern about conscience, I could see
- 9 the case being even stronger.
- 10 JUSTICE KENNEDY: We know that you can't --
- 11 let's assume in this particular position you can't be
- 12 fired because you're a Republican or a Democrat and
- 13 that's what they -- that's what -- what they do. But
- 14 that -- the person did not engage in that activity.
- 15 He's still -- he still is in the position of the
- 16 government ascribing to him a political belief that he
- 17 does not have.
- 18 MR. GOLDSTEIN: Justice Kennedy, that's
- 19 right. The government thinks a lot of things about me,
- 20 okay? Some of them are not very nice, I imagine, but --
- 21 and some are about my politics and that sort of thing.
- 22 But there is not a constitutional right to have the
- 23 government not think something about you. Just remember
- 24 as well --
- 25 JUSTICE KENNEDY: Here, they thought and

- 1 they acted.
- 2 MR. GOLDSTEIN: Okay. Or to act,
- 3 Justice Kennedy.
- 4 JUSTICE GINSBURG: It's not just something.
- 5 MR. GOLDSTEIN: Oh.
- 6 JUSTICE GINSBURG: It's -- the government is
- 7 taking action against a person because the government
- 8 thinks that that person is exercising First Amendment
- 9 rights.
- 10 MR. GOLDSTEIN: Just --
- JUSTICE GINSBURG: And I thought -- and
- 12 unlike Justice Scalia -- that the thrust of the First
- 13 Amendment is operating on government. It says
- 14 government, thou shalt not -- thou shalt not act on the
- 15 basis of someone's expression, speech or belief.
- MR. GOLDSTEIN: Well, essentially all of the
- 17 rights, individual rights in the Constitution, other
- 18 than the antislavery provision, requires State action.
- 19 They all talk about what the government can't do. But
- 20 the government --
- JUSTICE GINSBURG: Yes, so here, the
- 22 government acted. No question they demoted the person.
- 23 This was a detective, and they put him back on the beat.
- 24 So the government acted. Why did they act? Because
- 25 they thought that this person was engaging in political

- 1 activity.
- 2 MR. GOLDSTEIN: Well, Justice Ginsburg, let
- 3 me just say that I don't think it's -- it's contested
- 4 after the Petitioner's reply brief. You described this
- 5 in First Amendment terms, that if this was a speech
- 6 case, which it used to be, rather than an association
- 7 case, he would lose. It is well settled in this Court's
- 8 precedents that the threshold inquiry under Pickering is
- 9 did the individual engage in the constitutionally
- 10 protected activity?
- 11 This actually is at issue, I should say, in
- 12 the Court's other associational case, public employment
- 13 association case, this sitting, where there is a
- 14 significant issue of is there a different rule that
- 15 applies -- when we're talking about a policy, Justice
- 16 Kennedy -- that applies broadly to a lot of employees
- 17 versus an individual, one-off employment action which is
- 18 what is at issue here?
- 19 We think that's a critically important
- 20 distinction, whether you look at this as kind of a
- 21 Pickering standard case, where the first thing that has
- 22 to happen is that the individual has to assert at least
- 23 that they engaged in the constitutionally protected
- 24 activity. If you have an Elrod and Branti-type case,
- 25 which is what's discussed in that part of O'Hare, it's

- 1 an entirely different kettle of fish because there, you
- 2 do have a general policy. You could see people being
- 3 chilled. You could see the government taking a broad
- 4 view of its employees.
- 5 JUSTICE KAGAN: I guess I'm not sure how
- 6 that works. It just seems to break down very easily, if
- 7 you can't have a broad rule that says that you can fire
- 8 everybody but Democrats. But you're saying that you are
- 9 going to allow somebody to come in and fire people one
- 10 at a time.
- 11 MR. GOLDSTEIN: Justice Kagan, that's, of
- 12 course, not what I'm saying. What I'm saying is that
- 13 under First Amendment Overbreadth Doctrine, when you
- 14 have a general policy -- and this is what we think
- 15 happened in Elrod and Branti -- the fact that you
- 16 don't -- you do not inquire into the individual person's
- 17 political views because the policy is facially
- 18 unconstitutional. But it has never been the case in any
- 19 context.
- 20 And the other side has had every opportunity
- 21 in the world. We cannot find any First Amendment case
- 22 that says, you know what? You don't have to engage in
- 23 constitutionally protected activity so long as the
- 24 government thinks you did. And it's really a problem if
- 25 that's the rule because it is the threshold thing that

- 1 stops plaintiffs with meritless cases from getting out
- 2 of the box. In all of these cases, if the plaintiff no
- 3 longer has to say, I engaged in --
- 4 JUSTICE KAGAN: But you're saying -- and --
- 5 and I think you said this straight out -- you're saying
- 6 I can come into an office -- I'm a Democrat. I can -- I
- 7 can identify every person without a well-known political
- 8 view, every couch potato out there, just fire one after
- 9 another, after another, after another. Replace them all
- 10 with Democrats, change the entire character of the
- office, do it for a reason that I prefer one political
- 12 view to any other, and that that will not be a violation
- 13 of the First Amendment.
- MR. GOLDSTEIN: That will -- two things.
- 15 First, I think it is practically impossible because you
- 16 would have to somehow magically pluck out the people who
- 17 are politically apathetic from those that are
- 18 politically neutral. I just don't think you can do it.
- 19 But the second is that's right. The
- 20 Constitution doesn't fix everything.
- JUSTICE KENNEDY: You want this Court to
- 22 hold that the government of the United States has a
- 23 right to ascribe to a citizen views that he or she does
- 24 not hold.
- MR. GOLDSTEIN: Justice Kennedy, I think

- 1 that that is not a First Amendment violation. I don't
- 2 think the other side thinks it's a First Amendment
- 3 violation. Remember that there's the materiality
- 4 requirement.
- 5 JUSTICE KAGAN: See, I had always thought
- 6 that the First Amendment running through all our cases
- 7 is an extremely strong strand. That part of the reason
- 8 we have these protections is because we worry that
- 9 government is doing things for impermissible reasons.
- 10 That the government wants to create a world of speech in
- 11 which everybody agrees with it and nobody opposes it.
- 12 And that's a fundamental tenet of what the
- 13 First Amendment and all our cases are about. And you're
- 14 saying, oh, no. The government's motive doesn't really
- 15 matter as long as you can't point to somebody who is
- 16 holding up a sign.
- 17 MR. GOLDSTEIN: Justice Kagan, I think you
- 18 are right. It is an important thread of this Court's
- 19 decisions. And the Court has said that it is a
- 20 necessary but not sufficient condition. Waters makes
- 21 very clear, which is a First Amendment public employee
- 22 case, that the individual has to have engaged in the
- 23 constitutionally protected activity. Every one of --
- 24 Garcetti says the same thing. You have to have an
- 25 individual --

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1 JUSTICE BREYER: Can I just approach the
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- 2 same thing from a different perspective? Suppose can
- 3 Congress pass a law or a legislature pass a law that
- 4 attempts to abridge the freedom of speech. Is that a
- 5 violation of the First Amendment? It's an attempt.
- 6 MR. GOLDSTEIN: What would the attempt --
- JUSTICE BREYER: Well, let's say there
- 8 doesn't have to be a thousand examples.
- 9 MR. GOLDSTEIN: The Court --
- 10 JUSTICE BREYER: You say that's the law. No
- one can espouse in a public place the political
- 12 philosophy of Ruritanianism, okay?
- MR. GOLDSTEIN: No.
- JUSTICE BREYER: Okay. I mean, I doubt that
- 15 they'll pass such a law --
- 16 (Laughter.)
- JUSTICE BREYER: -- but I just -- substitute
- 18 any one that you want for that. They pass it. And by
- 19 the way, the six people who hold that philosophy all
- 20 leave on a boat before the effective date, but -- or
- 21 what's more likely, they bring a declaratory judgment
- 22 action, and the law never takes effect. And therefore,
- 23 it had no impact. And that happens every day of the
- 24 week. I'm just wondering if such a law, which is an
- 25 attempt -- it's right on the books as blatant as you

- 1 want -- whether that violates the First Amendment.
- 2 That's a serious question. I'm not taking a point of
- 3 view. I want to know what you think.
- 4 MR. GOLDSTEIN: Justice Breyer, the reason
- 5 that we allow --
- JUSTICE BREYER: Well, I just want to know,
- 7 is it yes or no? Does it -- in your opinion, does it
- 8 attempt to -- a clear attempt to violate the First
- 9 Amendment in a statute? It has general application.
- 10 Does it violate the First Amendment? Does it abridge
- 11 the freedom of speech?
- MR. GOLDSTEIN: If it's only going to be an
- 13 attempt and it's not going to succeed, no. The statute
- 14 you describe is unconstitutional.
- 15 JUSTICE BREYER: It is unconstitutional.
- 16 MR. GOLDSTEIN: That's right. There are all
- 17 kinds of times --
- 18 JUSTICE BREYER: It will have a lot of bad
- 19 effects. It will have all kinds of chilling effects all
- 20 over the place.
- MR. GOLDSTEIN: If it's defined, Justice
- 22 Breyer, as not going to succeed, if the statute doesn't
- 23 say --
- JUSTICE BREYER: No, no, by chance it
- 25 happens not to succeed.

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1 MR. GOLDSTEIN: Oh, no, Justice Breyer. If
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- 2 the person --
- JUSTICE BREYER: It's my hypothetical.
- 4 (Laughter.)
- 5 MR. GOLDSTEIN: I know. I'm just -- I'm
- 6 just trying to keep up with it. The -- in -- in the one
- 7 that you just described, Justice Breyer, if it is the
- 8 case that the law is going to go into effect, we do
- 9 allow, including under First Amendment overbreadth
- 10 grounds, an effort to bring a declaratory judgment
- 11 action.
- 12 JUSTICE BREYER: Of course. And I'm just
- 13 asking you if, in fact, they think it will succeed, they
- 14 want it to succeed, that's why they passed it, and
- 15 through a fluke it fails, does the fact that it fails
- 16 mean that it doesn't violate, it doesn't -- does it not
- 17 -- does it or does it not violate the First Amendment?
- MR. GOLDSTEIN: It doesn't.
- 19 JUSTICE BREYER: It does not.
- 20 MR. GOLDSTEIN: And here would be an
- 21 example.
- 22 JUSTICE BREYER: And he fails -- if it fails
- 23 --
- MR. GOLDSTEIN: If I could just finish,
- 25 Justice Breyer, just so -- I really do want to help. If

- 1 Congress at the same time passed a law that said no
- 2 Federal funds shall be used to implement the ban on
- 3 talking about the political views of Ruritania, that is
- 4 to say the law won't go into effect -- we tried, but the
- 5 money was taken away from us -- it's not
- 6 unconstitutional.
- 7 JUSTICE SCALIA: Or -- or you could say that
- 8 the law is passed by Congress but vetoed by the
- 9 President, is there a violation of the Constitution?
- 10 MR. GOLDSTEIN: There would not be. But in
- 11 my hypothetical vote in which -- or Justice Breyer's
- 12 where it actually goes into effect --
- 13 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: We're off on a tangent
- 14 because there's no injury in this situation when the law
- 15 doesn't go into effect. But coming back to what
- 16 Justice Breyer, I believe, is attempting to say --
- 17 (Laughter.)
- JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: I don't know,
- 19 Mr. Goldstein, that I understand either. And I think
- 20 Justice Kagan asked you this. Why does it matter -- and
- 21 we don't care whether someone is a Republican or not in
- 22 Elrod and Branti and those cases -- and you say it's
- 23 only because it's a policy. The intent of the
- 24 government is to say I'm not going to promote anybody
- 25 who is not a Democrat or not a Republican.

- 1 MR. GOLDSTEIN: More than a policy, it will
- 2 actually have adverse consequences for someone trying to
- 3 exercise their constitutional rights.
- JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: Well, someone, they have
- 5 come along and not promoted people.
- 6 MR. GOLDSTEIN: Yeah.
- JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: All right? So you have
- 8 to have someone come in and say I'm not a Democrat?
- 9 MR. GOLDSTEIN: Justice --
- 10 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: I'm not a --
- MR. GOLDSTEIN: Sorry.
- 12 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: -- Republican? Or you
- 13 need someone to tell you what they are?
- 14 MR. GOLDSTEIN: No. No. Common sense does
- 15 not leave the courthouse, and that is if I have a policy
- 16 that says, I will not hire Democrats, I think a court
- 17 would understand that there are going to be Democrats
- 18 who would apply for jobs. And there doesn't need to be
- 19 an inquiry. But the --
- JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: So why isn't it simple
- 21 to say, I'm not hiring you, or, I'm demoting you because
- 22 you politically associated? And doesn't that chill the
- 23 person from even walking by a campaign? Doesn't it
- 24 chill others who do want to associate marginally?
- MR. GOLDSTEIN: No. It's a real --

- 1 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: I'm assuming there's no
- 2 policy in place, or that there's not --
- 3 MR. GOLDSTEIN: Justice --
- 4 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: There's nothing to
- 5 prevent this otherwise, like the Hatch Act.
- 6 MR. GOLDSTEIN: I think it's a really
- 7 important point on the question of chilling because
- 8 Elrod and Branti and the rules that also -- and O'Hare,
- 9 which is a one-off case, do say that you can't do this
- 10 for political purposes if the person is actually
- 11 exercising a constitutional right.
- 12 So that we all agree that if the plaintiff
- 13 here was a supporter of Spagnola, or even of the mayor,
- 14 or had decided to remain politically neutral, this is a
- 15 bizarre case that comes to you on the assumption that he
- is completely politically apathetic.
- 17 JUSTICE SCALIA: It -- it is bizarre. And
- 18 do -- do you really believe, Mr. Goldstein, that the
- 19 Constitution does not solve all problems? You -- you --
- 20 (Laughter.)
- JUSTICE SCALIA: -- made a statement to that
- 22 effect. You really believe that?
- MR. GOLDSTEIN: No, but I -- I --
- JUSTICE SCALIA: It doesn't solve every
- 25 problem.

- 1 MR. GOLDSTEIN: No. But I do think that
- 2 there is a concern that comes into play. And so I do
- 3 not mean to demean the concern about the government
- 4 having a sense of what individuals' political views are.
- 5 But I'm saying that that happens, Your
- 6 Honors, in all kinds of cases, whether it's
- 7 redistricting, whether it's campaign finance. There's
- 8 lots that we do to ascribe political views to people in
- 9 this country. And adopting that doctrine is going to
- 10 have pretty widespread consequences when it's not
- 11 necessary.
- I do think that it should be common ground
- 13 that there are multiple layers of protections for these
- 14 employees. The basic rule -- and Justice Kennedy,
- 15 remember, under the basic rule, the plaintiff has always
- 16 come in and said, I'm a Democrat, right? The Elrod
- 17 Branti rule when it's involved, one-off cases. The
- 18 opinion in O'Hare describes the political views of the
- 19 tow truck company there. And it has never been regarded
- 20 as a First Amendment problem when you don't actually
- 21 exercise any First Amendment rights.
- 22 JUSTICE BREYER: But that is a First
- 23 Amendment problem for the reason that lots of other
- 24 people will have their speech chilled. And normally in
- 25 the law there is a doctrine where the person who does

- 1 the bad thing makes a mistake, he's held anyway. That's
- 2 true of transferred intent. You shoot A, but you meant
- 3 to shoot B. It's true of -- of attempts generally.
- 4 MR. GOLDSTEIN: It's not true of the
- 5 Constitution.
- JUSTICE BREYER: Why not?
- 7 MR. GOLDSTEIN: Well --
- 8 JUSTICE BREYER: That is to say I would
- 9 think that a statute that has a chilling effect on the
- 10 speech of millions of people but is directly aimed at A,
- 11 B, and C, if because of some fluke A, B, and C are not
- 12 themselves injured, nonetheless everybody else is, and
- 13 it would violent the First Amendment.
- MR. GOLDSTEIN: Under --
- JUSTICE BREYER: That, I think, is what you
- 16 have here, which is why I raised my point.
- 17 MR. GOLDSTEIN: Great. Justice Breyer --
- 18 and if you would just contrast in your own mind the
- 19 statute that affects millions of people versus the beat
- 20 cop who talks to one person in terms of its chilling
- 21 effect, because First Amendment overbreadth doctrine was
- 22 born because of your hypothetical.
- 23 The concern that a broad policy or statute
- 24 will have widespread effects. That is not anything like
- 25 this. We have a guide --

- 1 JUSTICE SCALIA: Do you know of any case in
- 2 which we have relied on chilling effects where what was
- 3 at issue was a one-off like this one as opposed to a --
- 4 a general policy which had a chilling effect? I don't
- 5 know of any case.
- 6 MR. GOLDSTEIN: To the contrary, I can tell
- 7 you that in -- in both Waters and Garcetti v. Ceballos,
- 8 the Court said, look, we recognize the rule that's being
- 9 proposed to us. So in Waters it was the idea that the
- 10 public -- the employer's views wouldn't matter; it would
- just be whether the speech was protected.
- 12 In Garcetti it was the question of whether
- 13 it was the public employer's speech. And the public
- 14 employee's argument in both those cases is that, look,
- 15 these rules are going to chill speech because they are
- 16 of uncertain boundaries. We need to have wide-ranging
- 17 expression. If I have to bring my case, there will be
- 18 inquiries into my speech views or whatever, and the
- 19 Court said we just have to balance things here.
- 20 There is a real concern that is rooted in a
- 21 history of the United States involving political
- 22 patronage. We have -- the Court has never tried to
- 23 extinguish politics from local government. And if you
- 24 try to do that in New Jersey, we are going to be here a
- 25 lot.

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1 JUSTICE KAGAN: And the --
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- 2 (Laughter.)
- 3 JUSTICE ALITO: And the question in this
- 4 case seems to me to be highly artificial. It's sort of
- 5 -- it's like a law school hypothetical.
- 6 MR. GOLDSTEIN: I agree.
- 7 JUSTICE ALITO: How often will it be the
- 8 case that an employee will be unable to allege any
- 9 expression or any association that is protected by
- 10 the -- the First Amendment? It seems to me quite rare.
- And it may be that this case comes to us the
- 12 way it does because the plaintiff was dealing with two
- 13 things, one was the First Amendment, and the other -- I
- 14 mean one was the issue that's -- the question of his
- 15 motivation, and the other was this alleged policy
- 16 prohibiting any kind of political activity.
- 17 Even in the -- the person who is just
- 18 apathetic, is there not a -- a First Amendment right to
- 19 be -- say, I don't -- I don't like politics, I don't
- 20 want anything to do with politics, I'm not going to
- 21 register, I'm not going to vote?
- 22 MR. GOLDSTEIN: All right. So Justice
- 23 Alito, the Third Circuit has a rule discussed in the
- 24 brief -- brief in opposition adopted in a case called
- 25 Ghaly that says you do have the right to be politically

- 1 apathetic. The reason the case is so bizarre is that
- 2 the other side, for its own reasons, decided not to
- 3 assert that right.
- 4 Now, I will say that it does nonetheless
- 5 matter because there are going to be other kinds of
- 6 cases where you have a public employee that just is not
- 7 asserting any rights at all, and is not involved, say,
- 8 in environmentalism or gun rights or whatever. And the
- 9 public employer, if it's thought just to have perceived
- 10 the employee as having been involved in some
- 11 association, then is subject to a claim.
- 12 And our real --
- JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: I'm sorry. You have
- 14 to -- you have to show some facts to draw that
- 15 inference.
- MR. GOLDSTEIN: Well --
- JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: I mean, you just can't
- 18 say, I'm involved in this and the employer fired me
- 19 because of that.
- MR. GOLDSTEIN: Well, Justice Sotomayor --
- 21 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: To show some connection
- 22 between the firing and --
- MR. GOLDSTEIN: Right.
- JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: -- the political belief.
- 25 MR. GOLDSTEIN: I would just take you back

- 1 to my hypothetical of getting rid of the sign. And his
- 2 political view -- his support of Spagnola is discussed
- 3 in -- in the chief's office, right? And then he has to
- 4 be reassigned. And the chief has to really worry that
- 5 he's going to be sued.
- 6 The -- my point is this: The set of cases
- 7 that you have to be concerned with, there have been no
- 8 other cases we've been able to identify like this one.
- 9 It's very small.
- 10 JUSTICE KAGAN: Well --
- 11 MR. GOLDSTEIN: But the downside risk is
- 12 significant.
- 13 JUSTICE KAGAN: Mr. Goldstein, I mean, if
- 14 somebody had come in to me before today's argument and
- just said, does the First Amendment prevent the
- 16 government from punishing a person because that person
- 17 does not share the government's views, I would have
- 18 said, why, yes, of course the First Amendment protects
- 19 that. That's the whole point of the First Amendment.
- And now you're telling me, no, the First
- 21 Amendment does not prevent the government from punishing
- 22 a person because that person doesn't share the
- 23 government's views, unless that person is actively
- 24 opposed to the government's views.
- 25 But if that person just really could not

- 1 care less, which a lot of people in this country could
- 2 not care less; they don't vote, they don't pay
- 3 attention, they wouldn't know who was running. But the
- 4 government can punish that person because that person
- 5 doesn't share the government's views. And I would have
- 6 said, that is one strange doctrine.
- 7 MR. GOLDSTEIN: It -- it may be that I have
- 8 not persuaded you in this case.
- 9 (Laughter.)
- 10 MR. GOLDSTEIN: The -- the -- I will say,
- 11 Justice Kagan, what you ask is, can the government do
- 12 it? The government cannot because there are lots of
- 13 other protections. And remember, if the person is
- 14 politically neutral, it is the case that -- the right of
- 15 political association is the right of political
- 16 association. If you aren't engaging it, you aren't
- 17 actively pursuing the right in any way, or even if you
- 18 aren't active about it.
- 19 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Thank you, counsel.
- 20 Mr. Frost, you have a minute left.
- 21 REBUTTAL ARGUMENT OF MARK FROST
- ON BEHALF OF THE PETITIONER
- 23 MR. FROST: Thank you, Mr. Chief Justice.
- A couple points that I want to make with
- 25 respect to declaring one as a neutral.

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1 If Heffernan was engaged in political
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- 2 activity and said, I'm supporting Spagnola, of course he
- 3 would be protected by the First Amendment. What I'm
- 4 hearing is that if he said, I'm neutral, he would be
- 5 covered; he would be protected. I see little difference
- 6 between being a neutral and being agnostic in the sense
- 7 that I'm not taking a position.
- 8 So -- so --
- 9 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: I'm -- I'm so totally
- 10 confused. I know it's the way it was presented to us,
- 11 but I thought he testified that he had made a choice not
- 12 to get involved in the campaign but that Spagnola was
- 13 his friend and he supported him. So he wasn't neutral;
- 14 he just wasn't engaging in associational conduct by
- 15 choice. That's what I thought.
- MR. FROST: That's correct, Justice
- 17 Sotomayor. And the point that I was trying to make was
- 18 the fact that in this case he was not going to be
- 19 exercising his right to vote or campaign for him, but --
- 20 but clearly he engaged in what we would consider core
- 21 First Amendment activity by picking up that sign.
- The mistake that the employer made was
- 23 actually one that they perceived him as actually
- 24 campaigning on behalf of Spagnola. And that should make
- 25 no difference for the simple reason that with respect to

Τ	that activity, it's because the Court sees that the
2	government is acting for an impermissible purpose, and
3	that was the press
4	CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Thank you, counsel.
5	Thank you, counsel.
6	The case is submitted.
7	(Whereupon, at 11:02 a.m., the case in the
8	above-entitled matter was submitted.)
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