1 IN THE SUPREME COURT OF THE UNITED STATES 2 - - - - - - - - - - - - x CRST VAN EXPEDITED, INC., : 3 4 Petitioner : No. 14-1375 5 v. : 6 EQUAL EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITY : 7 COMMISSION, : 8 Respondent. : - - - - - - - - - - - - - x 9 10 Washington, D.C. 11 Monday, March 28, 2016 12 13 The above-entitled matter came on for oral 14 argument before the Supreme Court of the United States 15 at 10:05 a.m. 16 **APPEARANCES:** 17 PAUL M. SMITH, ESQ., Washington, D.C.; on behalf of 18 Petitioner. 19 BRIAN H. FLETCHER, ESQ., Assistant to the Solicitor 20 General, Department of Justice, Washington, D.C.; on 21 behalf of Respondent. 22 23 24 25

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1 PROCEEDINGS 2 (10:05 a.m.) 3 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: We will hear 4 argument first this morning in Case 14-1375, CRST Van Expedited v. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. 5 6 Mr. Smith. 7 ORAL ARGUMENT OF PAUL M. SMITH ON BEHALF OF THE PETITIONER 8 9 MR. SMITH: Mr. Chief Justice, and may it 10 please the Court: 11 On the issue we initially asked this Court 12 to resolve in the petition for certiorari, the parties 13 are now in complete agreement. That issue, of course, 14 was whether a prevailing defendant in a Title VII case 15 is barred from seeking attorneys' fees if it hasn't 16 prevailed on the merits. As we showed in our opening 17 brief, such a rule, which exists only in the 18 Eighth Circuit, makes little sense. It doesn't -- it is certainly not compelled by the statutory language and 19 20 doesn't serve any rationing statutory policy to take away the power of work fees in a -- in a case of a 21 22 non-merits disposition. The EEOC, having staunchly defended that 23 24 rule in its brief in opposition, executed an about-face in its merits brief and now agrees with us that a 25

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1 non-merits disposition can be the basis of a defendant 2 attorneys' fee award under Title VII. 3 Now, for that reason and for all the reasons in our opening merits brief, which the government 4 apparently found convincing, at least, we would suggest 5 6 that the Court should reverse the Eighth Circuit's 7 ruling and resolve the circuit conflict and rule that prevailing defendants can seek fees as long as they meet 8 9 the Christiansburg standard, whether or not the 10 disposition was on the merits. 11 If there are no questions about that, the 12 second issue is, what do we do --13 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: Isn't the standard 14 whether the EEOC's actions were frivolous, unreasonable, or without foundation? 15 16 MR. SMITH: That's the Christiansburg 17 standard, yes, Your Honor. JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: So what difference does 18 it make on what ground it was dismissed? 19 20 MR. SMITH: I couldn't agree more. JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: I've been reading these 21 22 briefs, and with or without prejudice, merits, 23 non-merits, I don't know that even if a judge gets to 24 that point of deciding whether it was on the merits or not, that's not enough. You always have to decide the 25

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bottom line. 2 MR. SMITH: Right. But the Eighth Circuit's 3 ruling was that even if it was frivolous or unreasonable 4 or without foundation, if the reason it was frivolous or unreasonable or without foundation was the fact that it 5 6 was res judicata, or was time-barred or something like 7 that --8 JUSTICE GINSBURG: There wasn't the 9 slightest suggestion of any frivolity or groundlessness 10 to this complaint. 11 MR. SMITH: Your Honor, there certainly is. As the case turned out, they never had any foundation 12 13 whatever for bringing this class claim. They never had 14 any pattern of practice that they could identify and --15 and prove. 16 JUSTICE GINSBURG: They -- the claim was 17 that many women had been harassed by lead drivers, not 18 one, but many. 19 MR. SMITH: That was -- that was the 20 allegation, Your Honor. But in order to bring a class claim -- a collective claim under Title VII, what the 21 22 EEOC needs is a pattern or practice, which means either 23 an express policy that's discriminatory or some 24 unexpressed standard operating procedure. That's the term the Court used in the Teamster's case. In the 25

1 absence of that, what you have is a --2 JUSTICE GINSBURG: I thought that was the 3 whole thing, that the -- the -- that the company was not 4 giving the lead drivers adequate training. To put it 5 bluntly, they were not taking sexual harassment 6 seriously. 7 MR. SMITH: Your Honor --8 JUSTICE GINSBURG: That was -- that was the 9 complaint about the employer, that there were complaints about these lead drivers, and the -- and the employer 10 11 just didn't take them seriously. 12 MR. SMITH: But what became clear as the 13 case proceeded is that, A, the EEOC never investigated 14 any kind of pattern or practice at the investigatory 15 phase. They only investigated two cases. And then when 16 it -- when they started alleging that they had a pattern 17 of practice and telling the Court they wanted to go to trial on a pattern of practice, we -- we filed a motion 18 for summary judgment and said, what is your evidence 19 20 that there's a consistent policy of disregarding these complaints, that there is a consistent failure? 21 22 And -- and the -- and as Judge Reed found, 23 the evidence didn't remotely support that. The 24 evidence --25 The EEOC, when it was JUSTICE GINSBURG:

investigating this case, asked CRST, tell us about complaints you've gotten of sexual harassment. And initially, the company came out with two names. MR. SMITH: Your Honor --JUSTICE GINSBURG: There were well over a hundred.

7 MR. SMITH: Your Honor, the -- the EEOC's suggestion that we did not answer their question 8 9 completely was looked at in detail both by the district 10 court and by the Eighth Circuit, and they both concluded 11 that the only -- the question at issue was a question 12 about people who had complained about the conduct at 13 issue in this case, meaning Ms. Starke -- Ms. Starke's 14 harassment. The -- the suggestion that we had not 15 answered that question completely was rejected by the 16 district court on Pages 168 and 69 of the Petition 17 Appendix. It was rejected by the Eighth Circuit as 18 factually baseless on Page 92 of the Petition Appendix. 19 They simply didn't ask a question that called for that 20 until later in the investigation. And what the -what -- all the judges below, the -- the district judge 21 22 and the majority in the Eighth Circuit, concluded is we 23 answered every question in the investigation fully and 24 accurately. So that is not a basis for what --25 JUSTICE GINSBURG: Is it so that, when you

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1 were initially asked how many complaints have you gotten 2 or tell us the names of the people who have complained, 3 they came up with two people? 4 MR. SMITH: It is true that they named two 5 people. And as Judge Reed concluded --6 JUSTICE GINSBURG: That wasn't accurate, was 7 it? 8 MR. SMITH: Well, that wasn't the question. 9 The question that we were answering was people who had 10 complained about the particular issue in the charge. 11 And so as Judge Reed concluded, we gave them more 12 information than the EEOC requested. That's on page 169 13 of the Cert Petition Appendix. 14 When they later on asked for all the people 15 who had filed charges of discrimination, we gave them 16 all that information. That was about eight more people 17 that they got. 18 Finally, at the end of the investigation 19 phase, they said, Give us the names of all the women who have driven for you in the last several years with their 20 contact information. We gave them that. They didn't do 21 22 anything with it. 23 They then filed their -- their class finding 24 of reasonable cause, having investigated Ms. Starke's complaint and one other with -- and did no sort of 25

1 systematic look at how things were done at the company. 2 And then when they put together this case in 3 court, they listed 270 people who were so-called class 4 members; and it turns out most of those claims washed 5 They simply were non-meritorious. And we file a out. 6 motion for summary judgment saying they don't have any 7 evidence of a systematic problem here of a -- of a pattern of practice. And Judge Reed looked at this 8 wealth of information, which has developed 154 9 10 depositions, accepted the truth of everything that those -- those women said in those depositions, and 11 12 concluded that, in fact, by and large the policies 13 exist. The policies are followed. People -- complaints 14 are followed up. Remedies are -- are put in place. 15 Women are protected.

16 And she said if -- assuming the truth of 17 everything that's in these depositions, there may be 18 examples of sporadic exceptions to that where the managers could have done a better job. Maybe they 19 20 didn't act fast enough. Maybe they could have been more severe in their sanction or whatever, but that that's --21 22 that no rational finder of fact could conclude on this 23 record that there is any kind of pattern of neglecting 24 sexual harassment complaints, any kind of problem with the policies that existed, any kind of problem with the 25

1 training. That was all factually not true. 2 It is true that there were some complaints 3 which, of course, when you read them are -- are quite 4 serious, but that doesn't mean the company is liable, 5 certainly not liable on a class basis where -- for 6 claims which were never investigated, never conciliated. 7 The whole policy of the statute, of course, is to have a reasonable investigation, have a reasonable cause 8 9 finding, have conciliation. And here that became 10 meaningless, except with respect to one claimant. 11 JUSTICE GINSBURG: Well, you're here 12 complaining about a threshold question. That is, you 13 said that the investigation and conciliation efforts 14 were inadequate. But you said that after 18 months of 15 heavy litigation. MR. SMITH: No, Your Honor. Here's what 16 They come in October 15, 2008, with their 17 happened. list of 270 people. They -- we said -- we then say to 18 the Court, well, they can't possibly have investigated 19

20 270 claims, and how are we going to adjudicate this, 21 anyway? They respond and say, This is a pattern of 22 practice case. We're going to -- we're going to 23 litigate it the way we litigate pattern of practice 24 cases. We're going to have bifurcation. We are going 25 to have an initial phase of the trial where we prove

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1 that it is their de facto policy to neglect sexual 2 harassment, and then we're going to have a damages phase 3 where individual claimants will come in.

4 And so we had a class claim which they said 5 was a pattern of practice claim. And there was no way 6 at that point for us to say, well, you -- you can't 7 litigate these individual claims, because they were 8 classifying these people as class members, and they were 9 going to use them as witnesses to establish this supposed -- this policy of neglect of sexual harassment. 10 11 We then do 154 depositions of all of these 12 people, except for the ones who didn't show up at all, 13 the other 99. And most of those claims turned out to be 14 non-meritorious, even accepting the truth of everything 15 that the -- the complainants said. 16 We then file a motion that says, You don't 17 have a pattern of practice case. This is not a class case. You can't litigate this case because there is no 18 systematic policy that has been identified. 19 20 And we have this wealth of factual information from these 154 depositions, 154 different 21 22 stories involving different drivers, different charges,

24 reads thousands of pages of testimony and concludes

25 there isn't any evidence that would allow a rational

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different conduct, different responses. And Judge Reed

1 trier of fact to conclude that there is a -- a
2 systematic --

3 JUSTICE KENNEDY: So that all gets to the reasonableness or unreasonableness point. And we --4 5 this Court need not reach that, I take it, if we -- we 6 address the -- the prevailing party argument. And it 7 is -- as you understand the government's position -- we can, of course, ask them in a few minutes -- in what 8 9 cases, where there is not an adjudication on the merits, 10 would the government agree that there is a prevailing party, that the defendant can be a prevailing party? 11 12 MR. SMITH: I think they have -- they've 13 said the merits issue is not really relevant. They 14 have -- as I understand it, what they've said certainly 15 is, you know, if it was -- they -- they would say if 16 it's a disposition with prejudice, whether it's based on 17 a merits issue or some other merits, non-merits issue, like statute of limitations or something else, that 18 19 appears to be their position.

And I think the problem with the without prejudice/with prejudice distinction, which they -- they brought out in their merits brief, is that's the first time in this litigation that that argument has ever been made by the EEOC. They have never in the lower courts ever argued that, A, the disposition here was without

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prejudice or, B, that that's a basis on which CRST was
 not a prevailing party.

JUSTICE KAGAN: Mr. Smith, understanding that you think that, but if we could just go on from that, what is wrong with that position? And do you have a substitute test, or -- or is there no substitute test, in your view?

8 MR. SMITH: Well, Your Honor, as -- as to 9 the first question, the first problem with the argument 10 is it's factually not true. The -- the disposition here 11 was with prejudice.

JUSTICE KAGAN: Right. Let's just assume that it were.

MR. SMITH: Okay. Leaving aside the waiver and the fact that there's no factual predicate for the argument here, on the merits, we didn't have an opportunity to brief this issue because it's not in the case until we're writing our reply brief. So we have about a paragraph on the issue.

I think that it's a -- there's -- there is a circuit conflict on the question whether or not a district judge ought to have the power, in the suitable circumstances when dismissing a case for failure to do something like pre-suit petitions, where there was a sufficient level of abusiveness by the plaintiff, he

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should have known -- he or she should have known that this case was not ready for suit, and it has cost the -the defendant money that shouldn't have had to be spent; that even in a without prejudice dismissal situation, there ought to be the power of a court to exercise its discretion --

JUSTICE KAGAN: Even if the -- even if the reason for the dismissal -- for the dismissal is completely curable?

10 MR. SMITH: Well, it's curable perhaps, but 11 there are going to be situations -- and this case is a 12 good illustration -- where you can't get rid of the fact 13 that you've spent lots and lots of money litigating 14 claims which, if they'd been -- been investigated and 15 had to make reasonable cause findings and been 16 conciliated, likely would never have seen court to begin 17 with. 87 of these claims were -- where summary judgment was granted after the women were deposed, 99 never 18 showed up for their deposition. 19

JUSTICE KAGAN: But -- but then you're suggesting that whatever the reason for the dismissal is, with prejudice, without prejudice, for any reason whatsoever, curable or not, it's up to the discretion of the Court?

MR. SMITH: I -- I guess I would -- given

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1	- the severity of the Christiansburg standard, I'm it's
2	not clear to clear to me that that you can't trust
3	district judges in those situations. It's not clear to
4	me that we need to have a categorical bar that turns on
5	this issue of with prejudice or without prejudice.
6	JUSTICE KENNEDY: In in this case as to,
7	I guess, the 67 women that the Court before it goes
8	to the court of appeals on round number one, says the
9	Court bars the EEOC from seeking relief.
10	MR. SMITH: Yes, sir.
11	JUSTICE KENNEDY: Is that a phrase district
12	courts use often, "bars"?
13	MR. SMITH: You know, I think it was
14	invented by the judge here because she's dealing with a
15	rather peculiar animal, which is a one-count complaint
16	which says Ms. Starke was sexually harassed and it was
17	not appropriately handled, and a class of people were
18	sexually harassed and it was not appropriately handled.
19	And they start bringing these things in, and to the
20	extent that at that point in the case, they're trying
21	to litigate them as individual claims.
22	And the so rather than dismiss the the
23	claims, she said individuals when they were
24	litigating on their own behalf, she would dismiss the
25	the claim with prejudice, but she would tell the EEOC,

You're barred from litigating this claim, this claim, and this claim. And there were six or seven different categories of claims where she went through and said, You can't do these six because there was never a complaint made to the -- to management. You can't do these six because the conduct just wasn't severe enough to be sexual harassment.

8 And then she gets to the 67 and says, You 9 can't do these claims because you never investigated 10 them or conciliated them or made a reasonable cause 11 finding. And there was -- the whole class thing, which 12 led you to bring them into court --

JUSTICE GINSBURG: With respect to those 67, It hought we had held that in Mach Mining, that the remedy for inadequate conciliation, investigation and conciliation, is not dismissal, but return to continue the efforts to conciliate.

MR. SMITH: What you held in Mach Mining, Your Honor, is that where there is a failure of conciliation, the appropriate remedy is a stay so they can conciliate some more. And you cited a provision in Title VII in 706 which specifically authorizes a judge to stay a case for further conciliation.

24 What Judge Reed concluded is that a stay
25 wouldn't make sense here. She expressly considered that

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1 question and said, well, you haven't even investigated 2 the claims, and you haven't made any findings about the 3 merits of the claims, and you've put the court and the 4 parties through years of litigation. 5 In that situation, the -- the additional 6 sanction of barring you from litigating the case is appropriate, and I think that clearly ought to be within 7 the discretion of the district court --8 9 JUSTICE KAGAN: Mr. Smith, do you understand 10 her order as -- as saying that if the EEOC did engage in 11 conciliation, had made the initial findings, had 12 satisfied all the pre-suit requirements, could the EEOC, 13 do you think, have come back and brought those 14 individual claims? 15 MR. SMITH: Certainly I -- I think she was very clear that that was not available to them --16 17 JUSTICE KAGAN: Even after filing the pre-suit requirements? Even after satisfying the 18 19 pre-suit requirements? 20 MR. SMITH: Yes. Because she -- she considered whether to stay the case and let them go do 21 22 that and said, no, I'm going to do the much more severe 23 remedy of dismissing these claims. 24 And then the government --25 JUSTICE KAGAN: Why didn't she say "with

prejudice," then? 1 2 MR. SMITH: Well, she does eventually, Your 3 The -- the judgment that ends the merits case Honor. 4 in this -- in this -- the merits phase in this case in 5 2013 entered with the -- the agreement of the government 6 expressly says that the case and all the claims that 7 were litigated in this case are dismissed with prejudice. That's on page 118 of the Joint Appendix. 8 9 JUSTICE GINSBURG: Why -- why isn't it --JUSTICE KAGAN: But back in 2009, she didn't 10 11 say that. So why didn't she say that? You had asked 12 for the case, the -- all of them to be dismissed with --13 with prejudice. 14 MR. SMITH: Right. JUSTICE KAGAN: She did not include that 15 16 language. 17 MR. SMITH: She didn't use that language. 18 She said the government shall take nothing in the judgment. She said, I'm not going to stay the case and 19 20 let you go back and do it -- do a do-over. And she said it's a severe remedy that means these claims may not 21 22 ever see the inside of a courtroom. But she didn't use 23 the word -- "prejudice" language at that point. 24 But the government understood what she meant, what they complain in their brief appealing that 25

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1 order, that they had -- that the order had barred these 2 claims from ever seeing the inside of a courtroom and that the judge acknowledged that fact. They did that 3 4 again in the second appeal from the Eighth Circuit. 5 And then, most tellingly, they file a 6 Rule 60 motion after Mach Mining is decided last year in 7 which they asked the district judge to reopen the case, and say, you should have done a stay; you shouldn't have 8 9 dismissed this. And the reason you should do that is 10 because we have been prevented for the last six years 11 from litigating these claims. 12 And does Judge Reed then say, no, it was

dismissed without prejudice. I wasn't telling you, you couldn't litigate these claims. No. She said I did what I did, and I did it for good and sufficient reason because of the way you messed up this case, and you abused the process and didn't follow your obligations, and I'm -- and I'm denying the motion.

And they then appealed that to the court of appeals. And the day before they file their merits brief in this Court, they -- they pull that appeal because they recognize that the Rule 60 motion and arguments they're making is completely inconsistent with the argument they're about to make --

25 JUSTICE KAGAN: But if I understand, their

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1 motion did not say now we've satisfied all our pre-suit 2 requirements, right? So she might just have said, well, 3 you still haven't satisfied your pre-suit requirements, 4 so of course I'm not changing anything. 5 MR. SMITH: Well, Your Honor, there's --6 JUSTICE KAGAN: The question is what would have happened if the government came back and said we 7 8 have satisfied the pre-suit requirements. Would she 9 then have thought, okay, well, that's a different story I didn't -- I didn't dismiss these with prejudice. 10 now. 11 Now that the government has satisfied the pre-suit 12 requirements, it can go ahead. 13 MR. SMITH: No, Your Honor. I think it's 14 quite clear from what she did say last fall, in 15 December, actually, that -- that she knew it was with 16 prejudice, intended it to be with prejudice, and wasn't 17 going to change her mind. And I think there's no other way to read the record here. 18 19 And we ultimately have a judgment that says 20 with prejudice, which is the controlling judgment --21 JUSTICE BREYER: Where is that? There's a 22 piece of paper called "the judgment" somewhere. What 23 does it say? 24 MR. SMITH: But you see if you look at the Joint Appendix -- first of all, I'm at Joint Appendix, 25

1	Your Honors there is a judgment that appears on page
2	115 and 116 which says, "Judgment is entered in
3	accordance with the attached." And the attached is an
4	order of dismissal which was negotiated by the parties.
5	And if you look at the bottom of 118a, the
6	order of dismissal, which was incorporated in the
7	judgment, at the bottom of 118a it says, "Based on
8	EEOC's withdrawal of its claim on behalf of Tillie
9	Jones, the parties' settlement of EEOC's claim on behalf
10	of Monika Starke and the mandate issued by the court of
11	appeals on September 14, 2012, with respect to all other
12	claims asserted by the EEOC, this case is dismissed with
13	prejudice."
14	JUSTICE BREYER: That's the end of it, isn't
15	it? It was dismissed with prejudice.
16	MR. SMITH: That's the point, Your Honor.
17	(Laughter.)
18	MR. SMITH: There doesn't seem to be any
19	doubt about it. And the government knew it. It
20	actually agreed to this form of judgment. So we found
21	it rather remarkable that we were facing this this
22	argument.
23	JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: Mr. Smith, what is
24	what's what are you asking us to do in this case?
25	What's the disposition that you're seeking?

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1	MR. SMITH: Well, you should
2	JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: Are we supposed to say
3	Eighth Circuit, you're wrong, it has nothing to do
4	with exclusively with the merits? Do a do-over?
5	MR. SMITH: That's that's the issue we
6	should you should certainly reverse them on, Your
7	Honor. But there's I think we have agreement in the
8	courtroom that that's just at least on this side of
9	the of the bench that that's an incorrect ruling.
10	And then, you know, I think you should give
11	the back of the hand to this idea that the judgment here
12	was without prejudice and therefore that has some impact
13	on this case. It's just not factually true. It was not
14	preserved, and it's and it's not it's not
15	probably not the right line, anyway.
16	Then the
17	JUSTICE GINSBURG: Mr. Smith Mr. Smith,
18	will you explain why "dismiss this case with prejudice"
19	isn't talking about the case that was settled, the
20	Starke case?
21	The there were all the other women
22	were out of it; it was down to two women; one dropped
23	out; one was left. Why isn't this case the case that
24	was just settled?
25	MR. SMITH: Well, it refers to her case; it

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1 refers to the Tillie Jones case, and to all the other 2 claims asserted by the EEOC under a one-count complaint. 3 There is no separate count for each of these people. 4 And so when you dismiss that count, it expressly says, 5 "With respect to all the other claims asserted by the 6 EEOC," I think it's pretty obvious that the case is 7 dismissed with prejudice with respect to all the claims 8 asserted by the EEOC, including the 67, Your Honor. 9 That was --

JUSTICE KAGAN: All the claims that were then being litigated by the EEOC, which did not include the claims that had previously been dismissed for failure to satisfy the pre-suit requirements.

MR. SMITH: It's a basic principle that a judgment at the end of the merits phase goes back and incorporates all the -- the prior rulings of the court, and is based on the prior rulings in which --

JUSTICE KAGAN: I think that's not -- it's not right, if the prior ruling was based on a curable dismissal and the EEOC had simply done nothing with respect to that set of claims, neither cured it nor renounced the possibility that they would cure it. In 2013, the court was facing a much reduce

In 2013, the court was facing a much reducedset of claims in a different suit.

25 MR. SMITH: Your Honor, I think that -- that

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the judgment is going to go back and cover everything that happened in the case. If there was something left that could be reopened with -- that had been dismissed without prejudice, you wouldn't agree to a judgment in this form.

6 In any event, the -- the government told the 7 Eighth Circuit twice in two separate appeals that these 8 claims were dismissed with prejudice, and that was a 9 problem for them, that they were precluded. They file a 10 Rule 60 motion acknowledging that they were dismissed 11 with prejudice and asking for that dismissal to be 12 lifted. I just -- it's hard for me to believe that --13 that they're -- that this argument is available for 14 them, especially since they never made it before. 15 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: So why should we decide 16 this? 17 MR. SMITH: Well, I think it --18 MR. SMITH: Why don't we just remand it completely, and let the Eighth Circuit decide, or the 19 20 district court decide what it meant? 21 MR. SMITH: Well, you should certainly 22 decide the issue that was -- we brought you here, which 23 is the circuit conflict --24 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: Assuming we reverse, why don't we leave it to the court below to decide whether 25

1	they will, in fact, entertain the government's new
2	argument because there might be a waiver of that, or
3	whether there's a factual predicate for it at all?
4	MR. SMITH: We could do that, Your Honor. I
5	guess the the main reasons you you might want to
6	at least address it briefly is is if you're going to
7	go on and follow the government's lead and reach the
8	Christiansburg issue here, which the government asked
9	you to do at the at the end of their brief, and
10	decide that there they want you to decide that the
11	whatever positions they took on behalf of these 67 women
12	were were not without foundation; were not
13	unreasonable.
14	We're actually, in some ways, tempted to ask
15	you to go ahead and rule on that issue too, because
16	we've been doing this the issue now for six years.
17	And I think the government's conduct here was glaringly
18	unreasonable that that
19	JUSTICE KENNEDY: On that one on that one
20	issue, was the amount awarded some \$4 million. Did
21	the debt include this was was that your entire
22	bill, or did you segregate the attorneys segregate
23	out the costs for the Starke?
24	MR. SMITH: I think the Starke issue gets
25	gets separated out. It's the entire bill for all 154 of

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1	the depositions, including the ones that were
2	JUSTICE KENNEDY: But there were but
3	there in other words, this was not 100 percent of the
4	fees? There was
5	MR. SMITH: Oh, no, Your Honor.
6	JUSTICE KENNEDY: The fees were separated
7	out.
8	MR. SMITH: First of all, they were Cedar
9	Rapids rates, and we charge Chicago rates. But aside
10	from that problem, it was about there was
11	certainly the part that the government had prevailed
12	on, it was where there was a settlement. That was
13	certainly taken out. So I don't think there's an
14	argument about the amount here of any significance.
15	So so I do think that there's a there
16	may be some value in the Court reaching the
17	Christiansburg issue, if only to instruct the EEOC that
18	there's a different difference between a
19	pattern-or-practice class case where you have an actual
20	practice of policy that you're litigating, and a case
21	where you just have a bunch of individual claims which
22	you which don't add up to any kind of pattern or
23	practice.
24	If you if you allow the EEOC to use class

1 investigation that's not a class investigation in a 2 complaint for which they have no factual basis, then you 3 end up creating a great deal of litigation exposure for 4 defendants in situations where class litigation really 5 isn't appropriate. 6 JUSTICE KAGAN: Mr. Smith, do you think it's possible to have a pattern of practice appropriate class 7 claim with respect to sexual harassment? 8 9 MR. SMITH: I do, Your Honor. I think it would -- but it -- but it may be more difficult than in 10 other contexts. For example, you could have a pattern 11 12 of practice case, I think, about one work setting in 13 which the hostile work environment would affect any 14 woman working in that setting. I think that would be 15 appropriate. If -- if they had some specific policy that 16 they identified that they said has a discriminatory 17 effect such as, for example, we had a three-strikes 18 policy. You have to harass people three times before 19 20 we'll take the complaint or something like that. That could be a pattern of practice case. 21 22 But what I don't think you can do is have 23 154 individual stories involving different alleged 24 malefactors, different alleged conduct, different 25 allegations about who -- what complaints were brought to 1 management's attention and different stories about how 2 management responded.

3 JUSTICE GINSBURG: Couldn't you have a 4 pattern and practice case of saying there -- there 5 are -- all these complaints were made, and the employer 6 didn't take them seriously, he either did nothing or 7 gave the -- the driver a slap on the wrist? 8 MR. SMITH: Your Honor, I think you can have 9 a -- a standard operating procedure that you show by saying over and over again they don't do what they're 10 11 supposed to do and that their policies are not taken 12 seriously. But you have to show a consistent pattern or 13 practice in order to do that. And what Judge Reed said 14 is, by and large, that's not what they do. They do 15 exactly the opposite. There may be some situations, if we take the 16 17 testimony of the complainants at -- at face value without any -- hearing from anybody else, that where 18 some of the managers didn't do good -- as good a job as 19 20 they might have in some of these cases, but that's the sporadic exception; that's not the rule. That's not 21 22 what they do as a matter of policy. 23 If I could save the balance of my time, 24 Your Honor.

CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Thank you, counsel.

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1 Mr. Fletcher. 2 ORAL ARGUMENT OF BRIAN H. FLETCHER 3 ON BEHALF OF THE RESPONDENT 4 MR. FLETCHER: Thank you, Mr. Chief Justice, 5 and may it please the Court: 6 The question on what this Court granted 7 certiorari is not, as Mr. Smith suggested, and has been the basis for his waiver arguments, whether or not the 8 9 Eighth Circuit was correct to say that a Title VII defendant has to prevail on the merits in order to 10 secure a fee award and to be a prevailing party. 11 12 Instead, the question that petitioner framed 13 in the petition and the question on what this Court 14 granted certiorari is whether the dismissal of a Title VII case, based on the EEOC's failure to satisfy 15 its pre-suit investigations, can form the basis for an 16 17 award of attorneys' fees. 18 JUSTICE ALITO: In your brief in opposition, 19 you argued that the Eighth Circuit was correct; did you 20 not? 21 MR. FLETCHER: We did. We endorsed --22 JUSTICE ALITO: Have you abandoned that 23 argument? 24 MR. FLETCHER: We're advancing a slightly different argument that yields the same answer on the 25

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1 question presented. 2 JUSTICE ALITO: Have you abandoned the 3 argument that there must be an evaluation of the merits? 4 MR. FLETCHER: We are -- we're making a 5 slightly different argument, yes. 6 JUSTICE BREYER: You have abandoned it, was 7 the question. 8 MR. FLETCHER: Well --9 JUSTICE BREYER: Yes or no? 10 MR. FLETCHER: We have abandoned the Eighth Circuit's view that you need a disposition on the 11 12 merits. 13 JUSTICE BREYER: Thank you. 14 MR. FLETCHER: But I think in explaining --15 I don't think that the change in our argument and -- the change in our argument to a different argument that's 16 still within the scope of the question presented 17 constitutes a waiver. I'd like to talk about two 18 reasons why, because I understand Mr. Smith to have 19 20 argued that we're waiving the version of the argument that we're presenting now at two stages --21 22 JUSTICE BREYER: I don't care if it -- I 23 mean, that's up to you, what you want to argue. But I 24 would like -- look, it says, can the dismissal, based on the failure to satisfy form the basis for an attorney's 25

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1 fees? I take that to mean, is the defendant -- can the 2 defendant in such a case be a prevailing party? 3 MR. FLETCHER: Yes. 4 JUSTICE BREYER: He has to meet the other 5 standard, too. 6 MR. FLETCHER: Yes. 7 JUSTICE BREYER: I would think the answer is 8 obviously yes. They won. Okay? So if they won, why 9 isn't that the end of it? It says judgment -- it 10 says -- it says the -- the case is dismissed with prejudice. Therefore, they won. So why aren't they the 11 12 prevailing party? 13 MR. FLETCHER: Sir, I'd like to talk about 14 the dismissal with prejudice, which is a -- a 15 case-specific issue here that I -- I do want to address. But I think first, I want to talk about the 16 17 broader question, which is what makes a party a prevailing party? Because this Court addressed that in 18 its Buckhannon decision. It said prevailing party is a 19 20 term of art. In the fee-shipping statutes, including 21 Title VII, it means a party that has secured an order 22 that materially alters the legal relationship between 23 the parties. 24 JUSTICE BREYER: Can't a plaintiff be a prevailing party? I don't know the answer, but I 25

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thought the plaintiff brings a suit charging, you know, serious discrimination. After lots of litigation, the parties decide to settle, and they settle on terms very favorable to the plaintiff, really because of the litigation. I thought in such cases, the plaintiff was the prevailing party. A.m. I wrong?

7 MR. FLETCHER: Well, under Buckhannon, it 8 depends. What this Court says that under Buckhannon, if 9 the Court incorporates the settlement agreement into a consent decree or the lower courts have held if the 10 11 settlement agreement is approved by the court or 12 incorporated into the judgment such that it's 13 enforceable by the court, then yes. But the courts have 14 generally said that private settlement agreements, or 15 the particular issue in Buckhannon, if the defendant 16 just voluntarily changes its conduct and the plaintiff 17 gets what it wants, the plaintiff is not a prevailing party because it has not secured an order that 18 materially changes the party's legal relationship. 19 20 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: You see, I found --21 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: I suppose that the 22 settlement agreements often take into account liability 23 for attorneys' fees --24 MR. FLETCHER: Yes.

25 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: -- how they are going

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1 to apportion those.

2	MR. FLETCHER: Very often, yes.
3	JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: Why do we apply the same
4	standard to a defendant? The plaintiff is seeking a
5	change of the status quo, but a defendant is actually
6	all they want is the status quo. They want just to
7	stay not to be found liable. So why do we apply the
8	question of whether there's been a legal change between
9	the parties? The defendant was never seeking that.
10	MR. FLETCHER: So what the defendant was
11	seeking, though, was a judicial declaration that
12	essentially ratifies the status quo, that that ends
13	the dispute. And so after this Court's decision in
14	Buckhannon, the circuits have looked at this question.
15	And eight of them, which we cite at Pages 26 to 28 of
16	our Brief, as far as we can tell, every court to
17	consider this question has said that the same rule
18	applies to the defendant. And if the defendant obtains
19	a dismissal because the plaintiff voluntarily withdraws
20	or because it's in the wrong forum or something like
21	that, something that allows the underlying dispute to
22	continue, then the defendant hasn't prevailed in the
23	litigation in the sense in which the fee-shifting
24	statutes have used
25	CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: I don't know where

that -- where that artificial line comes from. I mean, the defendant wants to win. And I don't know -- it's getting pretty -- when I was practicing that -- parties didn't come in and say, I want to win, and I want to win on this ground. They said, I want to win. I want the case thrown out.

7 MR. FLETCHER: Well, I -- I think that's --8 that's right, but I think that what the defendant 9 wants -- and I think this is perhaps expressed best, of 10 all the cases we cite, in Judge Easterbrook's opinion in the Steel Co. case. The defendant wants to win, but the 11 12 defendant wants to win in a way that definitively ends 13 the litigation. And if the defendant wins on a ground 14 that makes clear that the plaintiff can come back to 15 court the next day, or in a different district, or after 16 satisfying a precondition to suit, I don't think the 17 defendant has won in the way that the defendant wants to 18 win.

JUSTICE ALITO: There is a material alteration in their relationship, is it not? I mean, it's not as big a one as the defendant would like. A defendant would like to have a -- a win that precludes future litigation. But don't you think a defendant who secures a dismissal of a complaint, and, therefore, doesn't know whether the -- the complaint is going to be

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1 filed again is going to celebrate? Isn't that a -- an 2 alteration in the relationship between the parties? 3 MR. FLETCHER: I'm sure the defendant would 4 be happy about that, in much the same way a party would 5 be happy if they secured the reversal of a directed 6 verdict on appeal or if they defeated a motion for 7 summary judgment. And you could, in some sense of the 8 words, say that all of those things materially changed 9 the party's legal relationship because they settle certain issues and they alter the course of the future 10 11 litigation. 12 But what this Court has said in Buckhannon 13 and in the cases that it ascribed there is that those 14 sorts of interlocutory wins don't count. 15 JUSTICE BREYER: Oh, well, this is not 16 interlocutory. This ended the litigation. So, I mean, 17 I have the same question the Chief Justice had, where a 18 defendant secures the end of a case, dismissed, goodbye, 19 you win. Now, maybe they can bring another case 20 tomorrow; that's another case. But they won this case. That's going to be pretty hard for them to get 21 22 attorneys' fees anyway because there's a very tough 23 standard. But why isn't a simple rule the best rule? 24 If the case is over, the defendant won, he is the prevailing party for purposes of that case. 25

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1	Then we could go on to take all the things
2	you wanted to into account when we consider what kind of
3	fee is reasonable and when we consider whether it's
4	based on frivolousness. I mean, the the plus of
5	that, to me, is the simplicity. And and I don't see
6	how it would work any unfairness or serious harm to the
7	objective of this statute. So I'd appreciate it if you
8	would address what could be my benighted view.
9	MR. FLETCHER: I wouldn't go that far, but I
10	do think it's a different view, and a very different
11	view, than the one that all of the courts of appeals
12	that have considered
13	JUSTICE BREYER: Well, then they might I
14	mean, unfortunately, I a.m. in the position of having to
15	decide it.
16	(Laughter.)
17	JUSTICE BREYER: So I put the question to
18	you. And I'd say at first blush, the simplicity of this
19	approach, its consistency with the language, its ease of
20	administration, and so forth, in terms of prevailing
21	parties has that to recommend it. So now what is you
22	don't like it, so tell me why.
23	MR. FLETCHER: So I think because when a
24	defendant prevails on this sort of round because the
25	plaintiff, say, withdraws the claim voluntarily or

1	secures a dismissal with prejudice, the dispute really
2	isn't over. And it certainly isn't over in the sense
3	that this Court used the term in Buckhannon, which
4	requires a judicially sanctioned, material alteration of
5	the legal relationship of the parties. And I this Judge
6	Easterbrook put this well in Steel Co. If the plaintiff
7	can come back the next day or if the plaintiff can sue
8	in a next district or if the dispute is going to
9	continue, that really doesn't hasn't changed the
10	legal relationship of the parties.
11	CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: What if they don't?
12	What if they don't come back the next day? What if they
13	don't sue in the next district? Then it seems to me the
14	purposes of this fee-shifting provision have not been
15	served.
16	MR. FLETCHER: Well, I I don't think
17	that's quite right. I think you're right, as Your
18	Honor's question alludes to. I think the purpose of the
19	fee-shifting statute and this is what the Court said

19 fee-shifting statute -- and this is what the Court said 20 in Fox versus Vice and Christiansburg -- is to protect 21 defendants who are forced to bear factually or legally 22 unjustified suits. I think, first of all, there's some 23 reason to question whether that purpose is served, where 24 the reason why this suit is defeated is a failure to

25 satisfy a procedural precondition. I'm not sure it's

1 fair to say that that's a factually or legally 2 ungrounded suit. It's a suit where the plaintiff failed 3 to take a step that it was supposed to take before 4 coming to court, but a curable step. 5 I think in those sorts of circumstances to 6 say that those defendants can't recover for whatever 7 fees they secure in resolving that initial procedural question doesn't really get at the core of what the 8 9 statute was. JUSTICE BREYER: Well, there -- because --10 11 now, there's much to recommend what you're saying, 12 saying at least if you come back the next day, at least 13 if you could sue in another district. But have you 14 heard of the Hatfields and the McCoys? You see -- you 15 see why I bring them up? Because they're going to be 16 fighting each other for 30 years. And if you tell them 17 they can't sue in this district, they'll change the 18 complaint slightly and go to a different district. 19 So if I adopt the standard you're just 20 suggesting, I will discover a whole host of questions: Is this really the same suit? What about the 21 22 possibility that they could have sued in Tasmania? And 23 what about the possibility -- you -- you see where I'm 24 going. And so I'm back, again, to that kind of concern, 25 an administrative concern --

1 MR. FLETCHER: Yes. 2 JUSTICE BREYER: -- versus the simplicity of 3 saying, well, that ended this case. If they bring another case and it's frivolous, we'll consider 4 5 attorneys' fees in that one. 6 MR. FLETCHER: So, I guess, to the -- to the 7 administrative point, I do think the -- the views that the circuits, and the views that the circuits have been 8 9 applying for 16 years, in some cases more now, ought to 10 be persuasive? Not just because that's what the 11 circuit --12 JUSTICE BREYER: I didn't say that. I 13 haven't read them yet. 14 MR. FLETCHER: But -- but just in -- in the 15 notion that if the sort -- if our rule was going to 16 cause problems of administration like you suggest, you 17 would expect to see it in the circuits, and I don't 18 think you're seeing that in the circuits. I think they're applying this rule; has the plaintiff been 19 20 barred from pursuing this claim permanently? If so, then the defendant is a prevailing party. If not, if 21 22 it's a different ground, if it's a precondition to suit, 23 if it's the wrong forum, if it's a dismissal without 24 prejudice, then the defendant hasn't been precluded. I -- I don't think you can hypothesize cases. I don't 25

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1 think we've seen them in --

2 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Wouldn't it be an 3 adequate response to your concern if fees were awarded 4 solely on the ground in which the case was dismissed? 5 That would be -- in other words, the judge would have 6 the discretion to do that. If the judge looks at this 7 and says, okay, it's clear you're in the wrong venue, 8 you know, and hours of research would have showed you 9 that. So, you know, it's frivolous on that ground, and I'm throwing the case out because the -- the defendant 10 11 prevails on that ground.

12 Now, the defendant may have spent a lot of 13 other money with depositions and everything else. But 14 the judge could say, well, you can file the -- the case 15 again tomorrow. You probably will. You just have to go 16 into the next district. So I a.m. going to award fees. 17 They're going to be equal to the amount of time the defendant had to spend defending against your frivolous 18 venue assertion. 19

It doesn't have to do that. I mean, you know, if you have the wrong venue, and they spend five years doing depositions because you have the wrong venue, they should probably get fees for all of it. But if it's just, you know, a small portion, easily disposed of, is that a possible remedy?

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1	MR. FLETCHER: Sir, I think that's a better,
2	a more sensible rule. Certainly I'll I'll say a
3	little bit about why I think it may be a little tricky
4	to fit into the doctrine, but just to illustrate its
5	application in this case, for instance, a petitioner got
6	a fee award on the order of 4.6, \$4.7 million, as we
7	explain in our brief. The amount of those fees that are
8	attributable to actually litigating about this ground
9	here, whether or not we satisfied the preconditions to
10	suit, is a little more than \$100,000.
11	CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Well, then that may
12	be a case contrary to the proposal where it's that
13	discreet. In other words, your frivolity on that
14	particular point compelled them to incur \$4.6 million
15	over many years. It's not their fault that that issue
16	didn't come up until later in the litigation.
17	MR. FLETCHER: Well, first of all
18	CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: It's sort of
19	intertwined with the merits. It's not a venue
20	objection.
21	MR. FLETCHER: Well, I I'm not sure
22	that's that's right, Mr. Chief Justice.
23	First of all, we we disagree that we were
24	frivolous in thinking we satisfied our pre-suit
25	obligations. That's an issue that hasn't been resolved

1 by the Eighth Circuit yet, and we think for some of the 2 reasons that Justice Ginsburg suggested and that Judge 3 Murphy suggested on the merits in the Eighth Circuit. 4 Actually, we very much were not frivolous on thinking we 5 had satisfied these preconditions. 6 But to get to the -- the heart of your 7 question, I do think, actually, that it is a very 8 discreet issue. It's -- Title VII says before you come 9 into court, you have to do an investigation. There has 10 to be a reasonable-cause determination and you have to 11 attempt to conciliate --12 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Yeah. Well, it may 13 be a discreet issue, but it's a cause in fact for all 14 the other fees. MR. FLETCHER: Well, I -- I'm not sure 15 16 that's right, in that if Petitioner had raised this 17 early on -- and I -- I do want to be clear, that from the outset in this litigation, I disagree a little bit 18 with what Mr. Smith said about what the EEOC looked into 19 20 in its investigation. But from the outset, everyone 21 knew that we had told them in conciliation, we think you 22 have a problem here; we think you're engaged in sexual 23 harassment against a class of women. We tried to 24 conciliate that class claim; they declined to do that. 25 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Wait. Wait. Т

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1	suppose whether the issue we're debating may not be
2	directly pertinent, my question is whether or not that
3	could be a factor that the district courts could look at
4	in deciding the amount of fees and so on.
5	MR. FLETCHER: Yes, I take that point.
6	If if you resolved the question against us, you say a
7	defendant could be a prevailing party when it prevails
8	on this sort of ground that doesn't foreclose for
9	litigation, then I absolutely agree with you that it
10	would be perfectly appropriate and and indeed, I
11	think a good idea for the district court to engage in
12	this kind of inquiry. But, I I guess, I think the
13	main question
14	JUSTICE KENNEDY: So so as I understand
15	your answer, let's assume a hypothetical case, not this
16	case. For five years there's litigation, and the
17	litigation is finally dismissed because the EEOC has not
18	followed its obligations. It's a frivolous or an
19	unreasonable suit. The trial judge said you are barred
20	from proceeding further in this case.
21	MR. FLETCHER: Yes.
22	JUSTICE KENNEDY: Doesn't say with prejudice
23	or without.
24	MR. FLETCHER: Yes.
25	JUSTICE KENNEDY: Could fees be awarded in

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1 that case? 2 MR. FLETCHER: I believe, no. I believe that is this case, but -- but I believe no. 3 4 JUSTICE KENNEDY: Because he didn't say 5 with -- with prejudice? 6 MR. FLETCHER: Because that sort of 7 dismissal under principles of res judicata, under this Court's interpretation of Federal Rule of Civil 8 9 Procedure 41, when you have -- even after extended 10 litigation --11 JUSTICE KENNEDY: Incidentally, is it clear 12 that after this time that there was no time bar if they 13 had come back again? 14 MR. FLETCHER: That's right. The EEOC does 15 not have a statute of limitation that's applicable to --16 to suits brought by the commission. 17 JUSTICE KENNEDY: So then, your position that no matter how unreasonable the plaintiff has been, 18 no matter how costly it's been, no matter how long it's 19 20 taken, that you cannot award fees unless the case -- and then the case is dismissed, and the judge says you're 21 22 barred from bringing this claim in this suit, no fees; 23 that's your position. MR. FLETCHER: That's correct. And I 24 understand that in some cases -- I don't think this is 25

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such a case -- but in some cases, that might have
 unappealing consequences.

3 JUSTICE ALITO: Well, and that's -- in a 4 case like that, what if the -- the EEOC after that 5 dismissal goes back and looks at these cases and says, 6 you know what, we really have nothing here, and 7 therefore, chooses not to bring the case, you would say that because the -- because the first case was dismissed 8 9 without prejudice, there could be no fees? MR. FLETCHER: I -- I would, and I think 10 that follows --11 12 JUSTICE ALITO: What sense does that make? 13 MR. FLETCHER: I think it follows from 14 Buckhannon. Remember, that -- the issue in Buckhannon 15 was you have a plaintiff that brings a suit. By hypothesis, let's assume it's a meritorious suit, and 16 17 there's some litigation and the plaintiff incurs fees, and then at some point the defendant sees the writing on 18 the wall and voluntarily recedes from the conduct and 19 20 gives the plaintiff exactly what they want. I think the Court recognized that there is a 21 22 really strong policy argument for allowing courts to 23 award fees to plaintiffs in that case, because they're 24 doing what Title VII and the Civil Rights Act intended to -- to encourage plaintiffs to do. And they're sort 25

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of left, you know, out of pocket for all the fees if
 they're not eligible for fee awards.

3 This Court still said they're not entitled 4 to get fee awards because they haven't secured a court 5 order that materially alters the party's legal 6 relationship. I think the same thing is true of the --7 JUSTICE ALITO: I quess I just don't see what functional sense that makes. If -- if the 8 9 defendant has wasted a huge amount of litigation resources and caused the -- I'm sorry, the plaintiff 10 11 has -- has caused -- imposed a great and unjustified 12 burden on the defendant, I don't -- I don't see why, as 13 a functional matter, unless this is foreclosed by a 14 prior decision, there shouldn't be a possibility of fees in that situation. 15

MR. FLETCHER: Well, I do think it's pretty close to foreclosed by Buckhannon. Obviously, Buckhannon dealt with whether or not a plaintiff is prevailing. Our argument is that the Court's rationale was "prevailing party" is a legal term of art. It means a party that secured a material alteration in the legal relationship of the parties.

And the court in Buckhannon stuck to that, despite very strong policy arguments, saying that those sorts of plaintiffs ought to get fee awards. And I

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1 think it ought to do the same thing here when it's 2 presented with essentially the converse --3 JUSTICE BREYER: Then what is the argument? 4 I take it your argument now is what's sauce for the 5 goose is sauce for the gander. 6 Buckhannon says that a plaintiff can't 7 recover, even if he litigates to death and they find --8 give up and pay him a billion dollars. Unless there is 9 a judicially sanctioned change in legal relationship, he can't recover fees. And if he can't recover it, why 10 should the defendant recover, unless there is a 11 12 judicially sanctioned change in relationships and the 13 only candidate for such a thing is a dismissal with 14 prejudice of some form. 15 MR. FLETCHER: Yes, that's correct. 16 JUSTICE BREYER: Okay. Got the argument. 17 So if that's the argument, and that argument is correct, why don't we have the situation here? 18 Because you heard the judgment being read. It says 19 20 "with prejudice." 21 MR. FLETCHER: Yes. So there's two 22 judgments in this case, the one that's entered after the 23 district court resolves the issue that's before you 24 now -- the 67 claims that are before you now is found at pages 216 to 217 of the Petition Appendix. And what the 25

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1	district court says is the EEOC has asked me to stay
2	this to allow it to go conciliate. I'm not going to do
3	that. I'm going to dismiss instead. And it drops a
4	footnote this is a few pages earlier on, pages 213
5	to 14 and it cites another case that dismissed a
6	claim under the same circumstances. That earlier case
7	that the district court cited as precedent for the
8	dismissal was expressly a dismissal without prejudice.
9	The district court then goes on to say
10	and this is language that you've referred to, Justice
11	Kennedy that the EEOC is barred from further
12	litigation on the claims. But it says barred from
13	further litigation in this case. It cannot pursue
14	relief in the trial in this case.
15	And I think most importantly, when the
16	district court says it's dismissing, and then when it
17	ultimately enters a judgment of dismissal, it does not
18	specify that the judgment is with prejudice.
19	And we actually have a Federal Rule of Civil
20	Procedure, Rule 41(b), that is particularly and
21	expressly designed to address this situation to ensure
22	that parties and courts don't have to engage in the kind
23	of inquiry that Mr. Smith was engaged in, in the first
24	half of the argument, of trying to figure out what does
25	the judge mean, what do the parties think that the judge

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1 means. 2 This is at -- Rule 41(b) is at page 17a at 3 Petition Appendix, and it says, "An involuntary dismissal" -- it establishes a default rule. It says, 4 "Ordinarily, if you have an involuntary dismissal by the 5 6 court, unless the court specifies otherwise, it operates 7 as an adjudication on the merits." Ordinarily dismissal with prejudice. 8 9 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Now, so what you're 10 saying is in -- the judge said they cannot precede again in this case? 11 12 MR. FLETCHER: They cannot seek relief on 13 behalf of these 67 women in this case. 14 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: And why -- why isn't that prevailing? Why aren't they prevailing? What --15 they may not prevail in another case or -- that's your 16 argument? 17 18 MR. FLETCHER: So that -- that's my 19 argument. 20 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Because they have engaged in -- under your theory, they have engaged in an 21 22 illegal practice. But they -- they prevailed in this 23 case, but they may be sued by somebody else in another 24 case? 25 MR. FLETCHER: They -- they may be sued by

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1	us in another case. They may be sued by the Commission
2	in another case. They've they've secured a dismissal
3	that said the EEOC didn't satisfy the preconditions that
4	it had to satisfy before bringing these claims.
5	But our view is and and we think we're
6	right about this, and we we think it's supported by
7	Costello that leaves the EEOC free to satisfy the
8	precondition
9	CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: What
10	MR. FLETCHER: and come back to court.
11	CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: What do you yeah,
12	I what do you think the significance of Mach Mining
13	is on this issue?
14	MR. FLETCHER: So our view is that Mach
15	Mining suggests that this issue shouldn't come up again
16	in future cases. As we read Mach Mining, it suggests
17	that the appropriate remedy for a failure of
18	conciliation like the one here is a stay rather than a
19	dismissal. I don't think
20	CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Then why isn't
21	that I mean, if if the EEOC doesn't do anything at
22	all I mean, under Mach Mining, if they don't
23	conciliate, the remedy is go conciliate.
24	MR. FLETCHER: Yes.
25	CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Wouldn't

wouldn't you think if the reason they're -- didn't -- it was frivolous for them to bring the suit without conciliation, you know, if somebody said, Well, we've got to conciliate, and they said, Oh, forget about it, go ahead, why wouldn't fees be a perfectly appropriate sanctions?

In other words, there's no -- under some sense, there's no incentive for them to conciliate, because if it turns out they didn't, they have to go conciliate. But if they were subject to fees because they ignored their duty to conciliate, it seems to me that might give them some incentive to get it right the first time.

14 MR. FLETCHER: So I think I -- I'd like to 15 quibble with the premise. I -- I think, as we explain 16 in our brief, the EEOC has a great incentive to 17 conciliate because it gets a massive number of 18 complaints each year or charges each year. It finds a reasonable cause to believe that there's been a 19 20 violation of Title VII in a huge number of cases, and 21 has very limited resources. And so it really does, try 22 and actually does, resolve far more cases by 23 conciliation than by litigation; it doesn't rush into 24 court.

25 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: So you're not likely

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to be subject to this sanction in many cases, which is a 1 2 good thing. 3 MR. FLETCHER: Right. 4 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: But sometimes --5 okay. 6 MR. FLETCHER: But I take your point, that then the question is, so if the EEOC -- let's -- by 7 hypothesis, should -- unreasonably fails to satisfy its 8 9 conciliation obligation, and the court finds that to be 10 the case, and then it stays, pursuant to Mach Mining, and sends them off to conciliate, could the court award 11 12 fees, I take it to be the question. 13 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Right. 14 MR. FLETCHER: I think the answer is it 15 couldn't do it under this provision because everyone 16 agrees that you have to be a prevailing party to get 17 fees under this provision. And I don't think even Mr. Smith would argue that if all the defendant gets is 18 a stay, the defendant has prevailed. Now, I'll argue 19 that it is dismissal without prejudice to allow for 20 conciliation and then the potential for coming back to 21 22 court isn't that different from a stay to allow for 23 conciliation as to the same --24 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: It's hard to imagine

that the district court didn't consider this a dismissal

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1 with prejudice when it announced in this very decision 2 you're pointing to that the -- that the Petitioner was a 3 prevailing party entitled to attorneys' fees at the end 4 of the case.

5 Certainly the district court thought it was 6 imposing a sanction. It was barring you from trying 7 these cases, at least at this trial.

MR. FLETCHER: At -- at least at this trial, 8 9 I -- I agree with that. And the district court did say 10 in the same order that that made Petitioner a prevailing party. It didn't explain what test it was applying, and 11 12 it certainly didn't say "dismissed with prejudice." And 13 this gets back to the point that I was making to Justice 14 Breyer about Rule 41, which is that Rule 41 serves 15 exactly this function. It tells you how to read a dismissal. 16

17JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: Well, the --18MR. FLETCHER: It doesn't specify its

19 effect.

JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: -- the real problem for you is that any -- the dismissal of the action, even according to this order by the court, would happen at the end of the case. And at the end of this case we had a dismissal with prejudice. One would think that everything would get merged into the final judgment.

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1	MR. FLETCHER: So I I disagree with that,
2	that you're talking about the dismissal ultimately
3	entered after remand in 2013. I do want to talk about
4	that, but but first I think it's it's helpful to
5	just sort of tie down the 2009 dismissal originally.
6	And just to wrap up the point, it's that
7	under Rule 41, if you have a dismissal that's for lack
8	of jurisdiction, that doesn't count as an adjudication
9	on the merits; it's not with prejudice.
10	And in this Court's decision in Costello,
11	which courts have followed ever since, jurisdiction
12	there doesn't mean jurisdiction in the sense of
13	jurisdiction over the person or the subject matter. It
14	also includes a failure to satisfy a precondition like
15	it did here.
16	JUSTICE BREYER: Just simply, No. 279,
17	10/1/2009, judgment in favor of CSRT against the EEOC?
18	MR. FLETCHER: I believe so, yes.
19	JUSTICE BREYER: Okay. Where is it?
20	MR. FLETCHER: So the the judgment that
21	is actually entered is I think not in the Joint
22	Appendix. It's
23	JUSTICE BREYER: Well, I mean but where
24	do I find it?
25	MR. FLETCHER: You find it at Docket Entry

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1 No. 279 on the district court's docket. 2 JUSTICE BREYER: What does it say? 3 MR. FLETCHER: It says, "Decision by the 4 court. This came to trial or hearing before the Court. The issues have been tried or heard and a decision has 5 6 been rendered. It is ordered and adjudged that 7 Plaintiff EEOC takes nothing, and the action is dismissed." 8 9 JUSTICE BREYER: The action is dismissed. MR. FLETCHER: Yes. The action is 10 11 dismissed. And so then to understand the effect of that 12 dismissal, you look to Rule 41, which says, "A dismissal 13 involuntarily ordinarily operates as an adjudication 14 with prejudice on the merits." 15 We're not disagreeing with that as to the 16 claims on which the district court passed on the merits and concluded that we didn't have enough evidence to 17 18 survive a motion for summary judgment. 19 JUSTICE BREYER: Except -- it has three exceptions: Lack of jurisdiction, improper venue, or 20 21 failure to join a party. 22 MR. FLETCHER: Yes. 23 JUSTICE BREYER: This was not failure to 24 join a party. 25 MR. FLETCHER: Yes.

1 JUSTICE BREYER: It is not improper venue. 2 MR. FLETCHER: Yes. 3 JUSTICE BREYER: I don't think it's lack of jurisdiction. Is that what it is, lack of jurisdiction? 4 5 MR. FLETCHER: It's exactly that because in 6 this Court's decision in Costello, the Court said 7 jurisdiction in Rule 41 doesn't mean lack of 8 jurisdiction over the parties. It also includes failure 9 to satisfy a precondition to bringing suit. 10 In Costello, that particular precondition was the failure to file an affidavit of good cause 11 12 before the government brought a denaturalization 13 proceeding. That's a precondition that looks a lot like 14 this one. And, in fact, in Mach Mining, this Court 15 analogized the precondition at issue in Costello to the precondition at issue here in --16 17 JUSTICE KAGAN: Mr. Fletcher, could I -could I take you back to where you started, which is 18 whether you've waived all of this? 19 20 MR. FLETCHER: Yes. 21 JUSTICE KAGAN: And, you know, you point out 22 that the question presented includes your argument, but 23 clearly it is, as you say, a different argument from the 24 one you litigated below, both in the district court and in the circuit court. 25

1 MR. FLETCHER: Yes. 2 JUSTICE KAGAN: And in the bio that you 3 filed here. 4 And Mr. Smith has responded to this new 5 argument in less than a page, which is really his every 6 right to do, given that it has sort of sprung from your 7 head at this late date. And I'm wondering why we shouldn't just ignore the whole thing. 8 9 MR. FLETCHER: So if I could address it separately. First of all, as to why it wasn't raised 10 below, below this -- both parties litigated this case on 11 12 the understanding that it was governed by circuit 13 precedent established by an Eighth Circuit decision 14 called Marguardt that made clear that --15 JUSTICE KAGAN: Well, you can always file a footnote, you know? I mean --16 17 MR. FLETCHER: Well, that -- that's true, 18 but I guess that -- that argument doesn't do Mr. Smith much good because he didn't make that argument. He 19 20 didn't challenge beyond the merits rule in the Eighth Circuit. They didn't even do it in their petition for 21 22 rehearing en banc. 23 Now, we haven't argued that they've waived 24 it because we think it was within their rights to stay within the confines of circuit precedent and then to 25

1 make a broader argument on the same legal question once 2 they're in this Court. But we think we have a equal 3 right to refine our arguments once we're free from the 4 constraints of circuit --

5 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: We -- what is the --6 I suppose I should know, but, I mean, what is the general practice? I mean, it would be kind of futile to 7 8 go before the Eighth Circuit and say we think you should 9 overrule your precedent, at least on the panel decision. But that doesn't mean they're not free to raise the 10 11 argument here. This is where -- where you should go if 12 you want a court of appeals overruled.

13 MR. FLETCHER: Absolutely. And as I'm 14 saying, I don't fault Mr. Smith for not raising --15 challenging me on the merits rule. I'm just saying that 16 there's a good reason why we weren't considering a 17 different argument or considering how we might respond 18 to a challenge to that rule because it just wasn't 19 raised by either party. Both parties should have 20 litigated within the confines of Eighth Circuit 21 precedent.

Now, that also leaves the brief in opposition, Justice Kagan, which you also asked about. There, you're right; we didn't raise this argument. We defended the Eighth Circuit's decision. In part,

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1 frankly, obviously, if we had it to do over again, we'd 2 present the argument that we presented in our merits 3 brief.

But I think it's important to go back and look at the petition. The petition doesn't really develop a developed argument on this point, either. It doesn't say Buckhannon. It doesn't make an extended argument about what it means to be a prevailing party. It mostly focuses on certiorari considerations.

And we did the same thing in our brief in opposition. I think this Court's argument -- or cases about when you waive an argument by failing to -- to include it on -- in the op. Our focus on cases for the argument is about why the question presented isn't really presented or why there's a bar to reaching it, and that's not what this argument is.

JUSTICE KAGAN: Well, regardless of whether there's blame on either part, we're still in a situation where it really has not been briefed by one party, and it hasn't been thought about by the courts below. And usually, you know, we do that -- we're a court of review, not a first view, mine, and we would kick it back.

24 MR. FLETCHER: Yes. You certainly could do 25 that. We think -- you know, we have presented it. It's

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1	aired in the amicus briefs. And Mr. Smith certainly
2	could have addressed it at greater length in his reply
3	brief. But if that's your view, it's certainly well
4	within the Court's right to kick it back to the Eighth
5	Circuit for consideration of these issues.
6	JUSTICE GINSBURG: Mr. Fletcher, is it your
7	view that all of this discussion of prevailing parties
8	is really academic because there's no way that the EEOC
9	could satisfy the Christiansburg standard?
10	MR. FLETCHER: I think I agree with that,
11	Justice Ginsburg. And that's where I was going to go,
12	was to say another option for this Court is to resolve
13	this on the alternative ground that we've raised, which
14	is Christiansburg.
15	JUSTICE KAGAN: That seems even worse. I
16	mean, nobody has thought about that. It seems to be a
17	complicated factual scenario, you know. There are
18	circumstances in which you could proceed with a class
19	properly and circumstances in which you couldn't, and we
20	know nothing about whether this is the circumstances,
21	one or the other.
22	MR. FLETCHER: Well, you don't you
23	certainly don't have to resolve it on the merits. But I
24	think all you need to do is to say it was not
25	unreasonable for us to think that we had done it here.

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1 And I think the way that you know that is because 2 Judge Murphy, in a very persuasive dissent, concluded 3 that we were not only reasonable, but correct in 4 thinking that we'd satisfied our obligations. And also 5 because not even Petitioner is defending the rule that 6 the district court applied. 7 The district court said you cannot conciliate a claim on a classwide basis. You have to 8 9 conciliate on behalf of each and every one of these 67 individuals. That's the rule the Eighth Circuit 10 applied. That's the rule Judge Murphy criticized. And 11 12 Petitioner doesn't defend it. What Petitioner said 13 instead is that this was all fine as long as we had a 14 pattern-or-practice theory. And it only became not fine 15 when we lost on summary judgment on the pattern-or-practice issue. But I don't think that --16 17 our -- our conciliation can become inadequate only when 18 we lose a summary judgment motion. 19 Thank you. 20 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Thank you, counsel. Mr. Smith, you have three minutes remaining. 21 22 REBUTTAL ARGUMENT OF PAUL M. SMITH 23 ON BEHALF OF THE PETITIONER 24 MR. SMITH: Thank you, Mr. Chief Justice. 25 First of all, on the question of Buckhannon

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1 and this idea that we have to show a change in the legal 2 relationship between the parties, the -- the first thing 3 that Buckhannon says is the paradigm of a -- a case 4 where there's been a prevailing party is where a 5 judgment has been entered. It only goes on to talk 6 about this other more complicated stuff about legal 7 relationships when it's talking about things plaintiffs 8 win short of a judgment. But there's nothing in 9 Buckhannon that says a judgment can't be treated as a 10 basis for a prevailing party.

11 Now, to the extent it matters what the 12 nature of the dismissal here was -- and I don't know 13 that it should, but if it does -- I'd point out that any 14 uncertainty about the nature of the dismissal here 15 arises from the fact that the government never made any argument in the courts below that the distinction made 16 17 any difference. And, indeed, it contradicted the very point it's now making. It said to the Eighth Circuit --18 and this is on page 11 in our reply brief in the 19 20 footnote -- it said, quote, "The court recognized 21 dismissal as a severe remedy and acknowledged it would 22 result in dozens of potentially meritorious sexual 23 harassment claims never seeing the inside of a 24 courtroom."

JUSTICE GINSBURG: It said it may -- may

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1 result, not would result.

2 MR. SMITH: No, no. This is -- I'm reading 3 their quote from their brief where they left out the 4 word "may" because they thought that it didn't make a 5 That they knew at the time and understood, difference. 6 or at least believed, she was referring to the fact that 7 these individual women might be able to litigate their 8 own claims. But they recognized over and over again in 9 the courts below that the "may" didn't mean that the 10 EEOC could come back and litigate, that they were 11 precluded. That's why they filed their Rule 60 motion 12 five years later.

13 Now, to the extent there was an argument 14 that we shouldn't get all these fees, we should maybe 15 get a little bit of fees because we should have raised 16 the issue early on, the problem here precisely was the 17 class action. The two are tied together, and they were both, Judge Reed found, frivolous, the argument that 18 there was a pattern of practice here, and then the 19 20 argument that they could go on and litigate on behalf of the individuals once the class action washed out. 21 22 They're -- they're part of a package. But until --23 JUSTICE GINSBURG: Did she hold that they 24 would have to investigate and conciliate each individual 25 claim?

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1 MR. SMITH: She said that where there is not 2 a valid pattern or practice. I don't think there's 3 anything in -- in the court's decision that suggests you 4 can never conciliate a class claim. The court so held 5 in General Telephone. She cites the case. I don't know 6 that the judge was intending to -- to second-guess this 7 Court's decision in General Telephone about how pattern 8 and practice cases are litigated. The question is where 9 you don't have any kind of a policy or -- or standard operating procedure. You have a handful of individual 10 11 stories, or maybe a large number of individual stories. 12 How do you conciliate those? And the answer she gave 13 was you have to conciliate them one by one, just --14 or -- or you're bypassing the statutory procedure and 15 the statutory policy. 16 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: What is the rule that 17 you would like us to announce? When is it right to award prevailing defendants attorneys' fees? 18 19 MR. SMITH: When they --20 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: What would be your rule? 21 MR. SMITH: When they've won a judgment and 22 prevailed, and where the --23 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: It doesn't matter with or without prejudice? 24 25 MR. SMITH: I would -- I would think that

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1	that should not be in the rule, that that ought to be
2	something within the discretion of the district judge
3	for a lot of the reasons we've been discussing here.
4	And where the the claim that that was dismissed
5	was frivolous or unreasonable or without foundation
6	under Christiansburg. And that that, therefore, caused
7	costs to be incurred as occurred here. And, you know, I
8	don't see any reason why you would want to add
9	additional constraints.
10	Thank you, Your Honor.
11	CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Thank you, counsel.
12	The case is submitted.
13	(Whereupon, at 11:06 a.m., the case in the
14	above-entitled matter was submitted.)
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