SUPREME COURT OF THE UNITED STATES

	IN T	HE	SUPREME	COURT	OF	THE	UNITED	STATES
		-				_		
TYSON TIM	BS,)		
		Рe	titioner	· ,)		
	v	•)	No. 17-	1091
INDIANA,)		
		Re	spondent	•)		

Pages: 1 through 65

Place: Washington, D.C.

Date: November 28, 2018

HERITAGE REPORTING CORPORATION

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1	IN THE SUPREME COURT OF THE	UNITED STATES
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3	TYSON TIMBS,)
4	Petitioner,)
5	v.) No. 17-1091
6	INDIANA,)
7	Respondent.)
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10	Washington, D.	C.
11	Wednesday, Novemb	per 28, 2018
12		
13	The above-entitled	matter came on for
14	oral argument before the Supre	me Court of the
15	United States at 10:04 a.m.	
16		
17	APPEARANCES:	
18		
19	WESLEY P. HOTTOT, ESQ., Seattl	e, Washington; on
20	behalf of the Petitioner.	
21	THOMAS M. FISHER, Indiana Soli	citor General,
22	Indianapolis, Indiana; on	behalf of the
23	Respondent.	
24		
25		

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1	PROCEEDINGS
2	(10:04 a.m.)
3	CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: We'll hear
4	argument this morning in Case 17-1091, Timbs
5	versus Indiana.
6	Mr. Hottot.
7	ORAL ARGUMENT OF WESLEY P. HOTTOT
8	ON BEHALF OF THE PETITIONER
9	MR. HOTTOT: Mr. Chief Justice, and
10	may it please the Court:
11	The freedom from excessive fines
12	applies to the states because it is deeply
13	rooted in our nation's history and traditions
14	and fundamental to our scheme of ordered
15	liberty.
16	The State of Indiana appears not to
17	dispute that straightforward answer to the
18	actual question presented. And for good
19	reason. The freedom from excessive fines
20	easily warrants incorporation alongside the
21	Eighth Amendment's other protections. This
22	Court has said just that five times over the
23	last 30 years.
24	Without addressing the incorporation
25	question directly the State asked whether the

1	clause	applies	to the	states	the	same	wav	that

- 2 it applies to the federal government. But 50
- 3 years of incorporation precedent holds that
- 4 incorporated Bill of Rights protections apply
- 5 to the states the exact same way that they
- 6 apply to the federal government.
- 7 There's no reason to adopt the
- 8 so-called two-track approach at this late stage
- 9 of the incorporation doctrine, especially --
- 10 JUSTICE GINSBURG: Is that so of all
- incorporations? What about the non-unanimous
- 12 jury in -- in criminal cases?
- 13 MR. HOTTOT: Justice Ginsburg, as the
- 14 Court recognized in McDonald, the non-unanimous
- 15 jury in criminal cases is an anomalous decision
- 16 that results from a one-justice concurrence in
- 17 the Apodaca case, and there's no reason, as the
- 18 Court recognized in McDonald, for that to
- 19 control when there's over 50 years of
- 20 precedent, beginning in Malloy versus Hogan,
- 21 Mapp, Aguilar, again in McDonald, rejecting
- that two-track approach.
- 23 Adopting the two-track approach at
- this late stage would only invite further
- 25 litigation about rights that are already

- 1 incorporated. When this Court interpreted the
- 2 Fourth Amendment right to be free from having
- 3 your cell phone tracked in the Carpenter case,
- 4 if my friend's argument were correct, we would
- 5 have to relitigate whether that right applies
- 6 to the states.
- 7 Virtually all of the Bill of Rights,
- 8 with the one exception noted by Justice
- 9 Ginsburg, has been incorporated on the
- 10 right-by-right approach used in McDonald, not
- on the application-by-application approach
- 12 proposed --
- 13 JUSTICE ALITO: There are a few others
- 14 that have not been incorporated, isn't that
- 15 right?
- MR. HOTTOT: Oh, that's true,
- 17 absolutely. But that's either because they
- 18 haven't been addressed by this Court, like in
- 19 the case of the Third Amendment right against
- 20 quartering soldiers, or because, as the Court
- 21 recognized in McDonald, they long predate the
- 22 era of selective incorporation.
- 23 So I think it's possible that if the
- 24 rights at issue in Bombolis and Hurtado were to
- 25 come before this Court today, the results might

- 1 be different. But we don't have to get into
- 2 that history here because the history on the
- 3 question presented of whether the Excessive
- 4 Fines Clause applies to the states is clear.
- 5 JUSTICE ALITO: What is the provision
- 6 in the Constitution that you rely on?
- 7 MR. HOTTOT: The Section 1 of the
- 8 Fourteenth Amendment, Your Honor.
- 9 JUSTICE ALITO: It's a component of --
- 10 of the liberty that's substantively --
- 11 substantively protected by the Fourth
- 12 Amendment's Due Process Clause?
- 13 MR. HOTTOT: Yes, Your Honor. And we
- 14 also have an alternative argument under
- 15 Section 1's Privileges Or Immunities Clause.
- 16 And --
- 17 JUSTICE GINSBURG: That would leave
- 18 out non-citizens?
- 19 MR. HOTTOT: Yes, textually, Justice
- 20 Ginsburg, that would leave out non-citizens,
- 21 but, of course, Petitioner is a citizen, and
- that could be a decision for another day. It's
- also true that the fundamental and deeply
- 24 rooted rights that are currently incorporated
- 25 under the Due Process Clause apply to

- 1 non-citizens and they would continue to do so
- 2 regardless of the Court's reasoning in this
- 3 case --
- 4 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Well, but you
- 5 can see there's different arguments about
- 6 whether -- and this, I gather, is the State's
- 7 primary submission -- whether excessive fines
- 8 are prohibited and whether civil in rem
- 9 forfeitures are.
- 10 And I certainly understand the
- 11 argument that the disproportion and
- 12 excessiveness arguments would be quite
- 13 different with respect to forfeiting the
- instrumentalities of the crime. I mean, an
- 15 argument could be made, well, that's always
- 16 proportionate since it's the way the crime is
- 17 accomplished.
- MR. HOTTOT: I don't agree, Your
- 19 Honor, because whatever might be said of
- 20 historic in rem forfeiture practices,
- 21 forfeitures today, like this one, are fines
- 22 within the meaning of the clause.
- The Court was unanimous on that point
- in Austin, and since then, it has reaffirmed
- 25 that point in the Bajakajian case, in the

- 1 Hudson case, and most recently in Kokesh, all
- 2 of which rely on Austin.
- 3 As a result, state and federal courts
- 4 today are --
- 5 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Well, of
- 6 course, the -- the argument there was not for
- 7 the purposes we're talking about today in terms
- 8 of incorporation. And if the test is, as it
- 9 has been, you know, whether it's essential,
- 10 fundamental, and all that, you can see a
- distinction between saying, okay, you're going
- to be fined \$500,000 and saying you're going to
- 13 -- I mean, the action is not against the
- 14 individual. It's against the asset. And so
- 15 you will lose assets that you use in crime.
- MR. HOTTOT: Well, that --
- 17 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: The first one
- 18 sounds, yeah, that's pretty excessive. The
- 19 second one, you can certainly argue, well, that
- 20 makes a lot of sense.
- MR. HOTTOT: Doubtless, Your Honor,
- 22 but these questions go to the excessiveness
- 23 analysis, not to the incorporation analysis
- 24 that is currently before the Court.
- 25 When -- when the Court incorporated

- 1 the Second Amendment right to keep and bear
- 2 arms in the McDonald case, it had rejected that
- 3 right for 140 years, until the Heller decision,
- 4 and then, just two years later, incorporated it
- 5 against the states.
- 6 So there's no reason to require, as my
- 7 friend suggests should be required, that --
- 8 that litigants show a historic pattern of the
- 9 right being enforced.
- 10 And, in any event, as the Court
- 11 recognized in Austin and Bajakajian and most
- 12 recently in -- in Kokesh, we're dealing with a
- 13 different animal. It uses the same name, civil
- in rem forfeiture, but it's a different animal
- in that it's not just about personal
- jurisdiction and pirate ships anymore; it's
- about every person's property, and every
- 18 officer on the street now has the power to
- 19 strip people of their property.
- 20 JUSTICE ALITO: Well, your client was
- 21 convicted of an offense that was punishable by
- 22 a maximum of 10 years' imprisonment; am I
- 23 correct?
- MR. HOTTOT: Twenty years'
- 25 imprisonment.

- 1 JUSTICE ALITO: Twenty years'
- 2 imprisonment. And he was sentenced to six, but
- 3 it was -- it ws suspended, right?
- 4 MR. HOTTOT: That's correct, Your
- 5 Honor. He was sentenced to home detention for
- one year and then five years of probation, the
- 7 minimum on that scale.
- 8 JUSTICE ALITO: So, if he had been
- 9 sentenced to six years of actual imprisonment,
- 10 would that have been a violation of the Eighth
- 11 Amendment?
- 12 MR. HOTTOT: Possibly, Your Honor. We
- 13 would have to look at the -- the
- 14 proportionality to the gravity of the offense.
- And for what it's worth, Judge Todd in rural
- 16 Grant County, Indiana, looked at this offense
- 17 and the impact on the community and determined
- 18 that it would be grossly disproportionate to
- 19 strip Petitioner of his property or even to
- 20 send him to prison.
- 21 And I think that's significant,
- 22 especially given that the Indiana -- the
- 23 Indiana Court of Appeals affirmed that
- 24 decision. And the Indiana Supreme Court didn't
- even address it because it didn't have an

- 1 opportunity to reach the excessiveness
- 2 question.
- JUSTICE ALITO: Well, what have we
- 4 said about the application of the grossly
- 5 disproportionate standard?
- 6 MR. HOTTOT: Well, Your Honor, as you
- 7 know, the -- the Court in Bajakajian
- 8 articulated that standard for the first time,
- 9 and it hasn't had an opportunity to address it
- 10 again since.
- 11 JUSTICE ALITO: Well, I mean in the
- 12 context of -- of imprisonment, not fines.
- MR. HOTTOT: Oh, absolutely, Your
- 14 Honor. Well, under the Cruel and Unusual
- 15 Punishment Clause, the -- the Court has
- 16 articulated a very similar standard: Is -- is
- 17 the punishment grossly disproportionate to the
- 18 gravity of the offense?
- 19 And there's nothing -- there's nothing
- 20 radical about allowing trial judges at the end
- of a proceeding to assess under all of the
- 22 circumstances, as this Court emphasized in
- 23 Bajakajian they should, even with respect to in
- 24 rem forfeitures. That's something that trial
- 25 judges do every day.

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1 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: But -- but
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- 2 your assumption is that you assess the
- 3 particular circumstances of the case. I mean,
- 4 I suppose if you ask people do you think six
- 5 months is an excessive sentence for whatever it
- 6 was, three counts of dealing in, you know,
- 7 hazardous illegal drugs, many people might say
- 8 no.
- 9 It's only when you say, well, is six
- 10 months too much for the -- whatever the
- 11 circumstances were here, the much -- I don't
- 12 want to say insignificant, but lighter
- 13 quantities involved, what do you look at? The
- 14 particular circumstances or what the crime is?
- 15 The crime is not dealing with tiny amounts of
- 16 drugs. The crime that he's convicted for is
- 17 much broader than that.
- 18 MR. HOTTOT: Your Honor, excessiveness
- is "necessarily fact-intensive." That's from
- the Bajakajian case. Excuse me, Your Honors,
- 21 that's -- that's actually from the Second
- 22 Circuit's van Hofe case, which attempts --
- 23 attempts to apply Bajakajian to the real-world
- 24 circumstances of an in rem forfeiture. But
- 25 Blackstone recognized that as well.

1	There there's no way to assess the
2	disproportionality to the gravity of the
3	offense in the abstract. By contrast, the
4	incorporation question that's before the Court
5	today is easy to assess in the abstract.
6	We ask ourselves not whether civil in
7	rem forfeitures a right against excessive in
8	rem forfeitures is somehow deeply rooted and,
9	hence, can be incorporated. We ask whether the
10	the freedom from excessive fines, which has
11	been recognized since the 13th Century, is
12	incorporated.
13	And it's important to recognize that
14	the Indiana Supreme Court's decision in this
15	case did not adopt my friend's suggestion of
16	simply saying that it doesn't apply to in rem
17	forfeitures. The citizens of Indiana today
18	don't enjoy protection from excessive fines of
19	any kind.
20	And that's true of the citizens of
21	three other jurisdictions, as we pointed out in
22	our petition for certiorari.
23	JUSTICE ALITO: If we were to assume
24	for the sake of argument that imprisonment for

six years would not be an Eighth Amendment

1 violation for this offense, what would that say

- about a fine of \$42,000? Is it possible that
- 3 six years' imprisonment is not an Eighth
- 4 Amendment violation, but a fine of \$42,000 is
- 5 an Eighth Amendment violation?
- 6 MR. HOTTOT: Well, Your Honor, we'd
- 7 have to know all of the circumstances of the
- 8 case. And if we're talking about this
- 9 particular case, I think it's clear that the
- judge on the ground that was closest to this
- 11 crime felt that it was grossly disproportionate
- 12 to the gravity.
- This is a first-time offender who was
- 14 caught dealing a small amount of drugs. And
- 15 the vehicle here was not used to --
- 16 JUSTICE ALITO: But we're talking
- 17 about a federal constitutional standard, not --
- 18 MR. HOTTOT: Of course.
- 19 JUSTICE ALITO: -- whatever sentencing
- 20 philosophy any one of the thousands of judges
- 21 in the United States who impose sentences might
- 22 think is the right sentence for a particular
- 23 crime and a particular offender.
- MR. HOTTOT: Absolutely, Your Honor.
- 25 But the question presented here is merely

1 whether a defendant in any case has the right

- 2 to interpose a defense under the Excessive
- 3 Fines Clause.
- 4 We're not asking the Court to
- 5 articulate a new standard of excessiveness.
- 6 We're not asking the Court to determine that
- 7 this forfeiture was or was not excessive.
- 8 We're merely emphasizing that part of
- 9 the purpose of the Fourteenth Amendment was to
- 10 guarantee to all 330 million Americans a right
- 11 to a defense under the Excessive Fines clause.
- 12 Indiana denied Petitioner that defense, and the
- 13 Court should reverse and remand.
- 14 Two state courts here struck down this
- 15 forfeiture, held that it was punitive under
- 16 Austin, believing that the clause already
- 17 applies to the states, and believing that this
- 18 forfeiture would be excessive.
- 19 The Indiana Supreme Court did not
- 20 address the excessiveness question. It
- "declined to find or assume incorporation"
- 22 until this Court "authoritatively holds that
- 23 the clause applies."
- 24 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: Is there any in
- 25 rem forfeiture, not this one, which relied on

- 1 the criminal activity of this defendant, but
- 2 let's say that Austin -- that the state did
- 3 away with innocent owner defense so that the
- 4 forfeiture was against the innocent owner.
- 5 Would that be punishment? I think
- 6 under our -- my reading of Austin, it was that
- 7 only those forfeitures that are punitive count
- 8 under the clause. So what can a state do to
- 9 take it out of its punitive nature?
- 10 MR. HOTTOT: Well, it's important to
- 11 recognize that Austin says that, if the
- 12 forfeiture is at least partly punitive, it
- 13 comes within the confines of the clause. So a
- 14 forfeiture --
- JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: So they do away
- 16 with the innocent owner defense, and the
- innocent owner comes in and says, this is my
- 18 property, I didn't commit a crime. They say
- 19 it's too bad.
- 20 MR. HOTTOT: Well, I --
- JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: The property did.
- MR. HOTTOT: I think, Your Honor, it's
- 23 -- it's safe to say that that could be deemed
- 24 excessive. If -- if we look at the Bennis
- 25 case, that case is about a co-owner who didn't

1 commit the crime. And the Court held that, as

- 2 a matter of federal substantive due process,
- 3 that co-owner did not have a -- an innocent
- 4 owner defense.
- 5 But that does not dictate that the --
- 6 that that co-owner couldn't articulate an
- 7 excessive fines defense. Indeed, three --
- 8 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: Why?
- 9 MR. HOTTOT: Well, three --
- 10 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: If it's not
- 11 punitive against him, it's the property that is
- 12 being charged --
- MR. HOTTOT: I see.
- 14 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: -- with having
- 15 been involved in a crime.
- 16 MR. HOTTOT: I see your question, Your
- 17 Honor.
- I think that if someone had done
- 19 nothing wrong -- let us say that someone steals
- 20 my car as I'm walking into a Target, commits a
- 21 bank robbery, and the police seize that vehicle
- 22 quite righteously, I mean, as a practical
- 23 matter, of course, the police are going to
- 24 return the vehicle to me.
- 25 But, if the state were to go so far as

- 1 to institute forfeiture proceedings against
- that person, as Justice Kennedy recognized in
- 3 his Austin concurrence, there would be several
- 4 serious constitutional problems with that.
- 5 And it -- it may be that in those
- 6 circumstances, where I'm entirely blameless,
- 7 that the Court would hold that there is a
- 8 substantive due process right to reject that
- 9 forfeiture, or the Court would find it to be
- 10 grossly disproportionate to the gravity of the
- 11 nonexistent defense.
- 12 So I think Bennis can be easily
- 13 reconciled with this case, particularly when --
- 14 when the Court looks at Justice Stevens'
- 15 dissent in Bennis, which with two other
- 16 Justices points out that Mrs. Bennis didn't
- 17 bring an excessive fines defense. Had she done
- so, at least those three Justices would have
- 19 been inclined to rule in her favor.
- 20 JUSTICE ALITO: So you're saying even
- 21 if it's a classic in rem forfeiture of a kind
- that's been known for centuries, that would
- 23 potentially violate the Excessive Fines Clause?
- 24 MR. HOTTOT: Yes, Your Honor. This
- 25 Court has rejected the idea that states can

- 1 work their way around the Excessive Fines
- 2 Clause based on nothing more than a label.
- This is not a labeling game. The
- 4 Court looks to the substance of what's
- 5 happening. It emphasized that most recently in
- 6 the Kokesh decision, that, you know, fines,
- 7 penalties, they sometimes serve several
- 8 purposes.
- 9 But, with respect to civil in rem
- 10 forfeitures, if any of those purposes are
- 11 punitive in nature, then the defense can be
- 12 raised. And that makes sense.
- 13 JUSTICE BREYER: What is the situation
- 14 with jail, prison? I have a vague recollection
- 15 -- often such recollections are incorrect --
- 16 (Laughter.)
- 17 JUSTICE BREYER: -- but I have a vaque
- 18 recollection that there was a case in which
- 19 California's three-strike law was applied to
- 20 sentence to life a person whose final offense
- 21 was stealing an \$80 golf club. And I think the
- 22 majority said, no, we're not going to look at
- that because it's too complicated.
- 24 Am I right? Does that ring a bell?
- 25 Because if -- if that still is the

- 1 law, which I think it is, it's something
- anomalous about saying, by the way, if you took
- 3 his Mercedes, we will look to see whether
- 4 that's disproportionate to taking a golf club,
- 5 but if you send him to jail for life, we won't.
- 6 Now have -- have I stated this
- 7 correctly and, if so, how do we -- how do we
- 8 deal with it?
- 9 MR. HOTTOT: Well, Your Honor, I think
- 10 the most relevant authority here is the
- 11 Harmelin decision in which this Court, similar
- to the situation you're describing, allowed a
- person to be sentenced from -- a person from
- 14 Michigan to be sentenced to life without the
- possibility of parole for having 650 grams of,
- 16 I believe it was cocaine.
- 17 And the Court reasoned that, look,
- 18 that amount of cocaine could be broken up and
- 19 easily used for distribution, so it's
- appropriate in these circumstances to punish
- 21 that harshly.
- 22 Here, we're dealing with two grams --
- JUSTICE BREYER: My question really
- is, are there cases where we have said that the
- 25 punishment is disproportionate, where it's

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1 simply a question of the degree of punishment,
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- 2 i.e., life imprisonment, and the nature of the
- 3 offense, e.g., stealing a golf club?
- 4 And do you see what I -- I'm not sure
- 5 there are, and, if there are not, it seems odd,
- 6 and I think I'd have to think about it, or
- 7 maybe we should address in some way your
- 8 argument, as to why there is that difference.
- 9 MR. HOTTOT: Your Honor, I -- I -- I
- 10 think if we posit that difference, yes, it's --
- 11 JUSTICE BREYER: Am I right, you're
- 12 saying there is a difference?
- 13 MR. HOTTOT: Between sentencing a
- 14 person for stealing a golf club to a life --
- 15 JUSTICE BREYER: Yeah.
- 16 MR. HOTTOT: -- a life sentence?
- JUSTICE BREYER: Uh-huh.
- 18 MR. HOTTOT: I -- I think that, no,
- 19 there is no difference, and that if -- if there
- 20 is that tension between the Excessive Fines
- 21 Clause and the Cruel and Unusual Punishment
- 22 Clause, that in an appropriate case this Court
- 23 should resolve it. But, here, the question --
- JUSTICE GINSBURG: I thought the --
- 25 the three strikes, it wasn't simply --

- 1 JUSTICE BREYER: Yeah.
- JUSTICE GINSBURG: -- stealing a golf
- 3 club, it was the third -- the third offense, so
- 4 it was --
- 5 JUSTICE BREYER: Yeah, he had a
- 6 history.
- 7 JUSTICE GINSBURG: -- it was a
- 8 punishment for recidivist.
- 9 MR. HOTTOT: Absolutely, Your Honor,
- 10 and thank you for that.
- 11 JUSTICE BREYER: Yeah. He also robbed
- 12 a chicken coop.
- 13 (Laughter.)
- MR. HOTTOT: Well --
- 15 JUSTICE ALITO: This gets me back to
- 16 the question I was asking before. If six
- 17 years' imprisonment is not a violation of the
- 18 Eighth Amendment, and, you know, you said it
- 19 might be, I think you might have something of
- an uphill fight to prove that, but three years,
- 21 two years? How -- how low would the ceiling of
- 22 permissible term of imprisonment have to go in
- order to justify a holding that a fine of
- 24 \$42,000 is a violation of the Eighth Amendment?
- What is the equation between the --

1 the monetary -- between dollars in -- in a fine

- 2 and time imprisonment?
- MR. HOTTOT: Your -- Your Honor,
- 4 although it might be unsatisfying, the Court
- 5 has said repeatedly that there is no equation
- 6 and that there can be no equation because these
- 7 situations are inherently real-world in nature
- 8 and that courts have been directed,
- 9 specifically with respect to in rem forfeitures
- in the Bajakajian case, to assess all of the
- 11 circumstances.
- 12 And -- and as Justice Ginsburg was
- assisting me, it -- it's absolutely the case
- 14 that the court has to look at not just the
- value of the property, not just the gravity of
- 16 the offense, but also the offender himself and
- 17 his effect, potentially, on the community if he
- 18 remains at large.
- 19 There -- there's nothing new about
- 20 that. Trial judges every day assess in all of
- 21 the circumstances what is an appropriate
- 22 punishment. And all we're saying in this
- 23 case -- we're several step -- steps removed
- 24 from the question presented right now. All
- 25 we're saying is that you have an excessive

- 1 fines defense that you may raise.
- 2 JUSTICE KAGAN: So we are several
- 3 steps removed, but I think that the import of
- 4 some of these questions is, look, we've made it
- 5 awfully, awfully hard to assert a
- 6 disproportionality claim with respect even to
- 7 imprisonment. And if it's at least equally
- 8 hard to assert a disproportionality claim with
- 9 respect to fines, we could incorporate this
- 10 tomorrow and it would have no effect on
- anybody.
- MR. HOTTOT: That's potentially true,
- 13 Your Honor, but the standard of assessing this
- 14 type of economic sanction, it's important to
- 15 recognize, is being developed as we speak in
- 16 the lower courts.
- 17 This Court's decision in Bajakajian
- 18 has prompted the lower courts to try to
- 19 articulate factors. And some courts use some
- 20 factors; other courts use others. In an
- 21 appropriate case with full briefing and -- and
- 22 comment from amici, this Court can and should
- 23 decide that important question.
- 24 But this case merely insists that
- 25 Petitioner, like every other American, has the

1 right to raise the excessive fines defense and

- 2 that the Indiana courts can then assess the
- 3 situation.
- 4 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Well, but
- 5 you're asking us to, you know, buy a pig in a
- 6 poke; in other words, you're saying incorporate
- 7 this, but, you know, we're -- we don't even
- 8 know whether it means we're going to decide
- 9 whether \$10,000 is enough or \$20,000, or if
- we're simply going to say something along the
- 11 lines of Harmelin, which it's not just that
- it's whatever so many grams; it's that it's the
- 13 third offense, and so that's -- that's what's
- 14 the -- protection against that is fundamental
- 15 to -- to a civilized society or whatever the
- standard is that we've been applying.
- 17 MR. HOTTOT: Well --
- 18 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: And you say
- 19 don't worry about what it means; just
- 20 incorporate it and then figure it out later on.
- MR. HOTTOT: Your Honor, I'm not
- 22 saying don't worry about it. I think that this
- is a pressing question, and in an appropriate
- 24 case, I -- I think that the Court does need to
- 25 take it up.

1	But if we look to the Harmelin
2	decision, Justice Scalia's opinion in that case
3	points out that there is special reason to be
4	concerned when the government uses economic
5	sanctions to punish a person because, unlike
6	all other forms of punishment, whether it be
7	life imprisonment, Justice Alito, or or a
8	three strikes law, those cost the government
9	money.
10	But these types of forfeitures and
11	fines raise revenue. And there's good reason,
12	there's good history, for being concerned about
13	the sovereign power to raise revenue using
14	punishment.
15	JUSTICE ALITO: Well, let me give you
16	two examples. What suppose your client,
17	instead of using a a Land Rover, was it?
18	MR. HOTTOT: Yes.
19	JUSTICE ALITO: Yes, a Land Rover, had
20	been using a 15-year-old Kia or, at the other
21	extreme, suppose that he used a Bugatti, which
22	costs like a quarter of a million dollars.
23	Would the Excessive Fine Clause apply
24	differently in those three cases?
25	MR. HOTTOT: No, Your Honor. It

- 1 applies the same. The same test --
- JUSTICE ALITO: Well, would the result
- 3 be different? If he had been driving a -- a
- 4 car with a -- a book value of \$1500, would the
- 5 result be different?
- 6 MR. HOTTOT: Well, Your Honor, we
- 7 would have to know more. We would have to know
- 8 what the gravity of the offense was.
- 9 JUSTICE ALITO: We know. It is --
- 10 it's the offense we have here.
- 11 MR. HOTTOT: Okay.
- 12 JUSTICE ALITO: We know what the
- 13 offense is.
- 14 MR. HOTTOT: I -- I think in this
- instance, any forfeiture of the vehicle would
- 16 be excessive because this vehicle was not
- 17 instrumental to this crime. It was incidental.
- 18 It's no surprise that -- in rural
- 19 Indiana that a -- a person might drive
- 20 somewhere to -- to meet with someone. And that
- 21 doesn't make this vehicle somehow like a pirate
- 22 ship that had been sailing the high seas.
- 23 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Well, that's
- 24 contrary to a lot of civil forfeiture law. I
- 25 mean, this was an instrumentality of the crime.

1 This is how he got to the -- the deal place and

- 2 how he carried the drugs. Normally, I mean,
- 3 you're carrying the -- the drugs in your car, I
- 4 think it's pretty well established your -- your
- 5 car can be forfeited.
- 6 MR. HOTTOT: Potentially, Your Honor.
- 7 It's -- it's well established that the car is
- 8 subject to forfeiture. It is not, however,
- 9 well established that that would necessarily
- 10 not be excessive. So if we look --
- 11 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Well, does it
- make a difference -- we've been talking about
- 13 the value of the -- the item. What if the --
- 14 the person doing this, you know, was a
- 15 multimillionaire? Forty-two thousand dollars
- 16 doesn't seem excessive to him.
- 17 MR. HOTTOT: Well --
- 18 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: And -- and
- 19 yet, if someone is impoverished, it is
- 20 excessive? Does that matter?
- 21 MR. HOTTOT: Well, Your Honor, if the
- 22 Court looks to the brief of the Eighth
- 23 Amendment scholars, filed in support of neither
- 24 party, they discuss this. Magna Carta had the
- 25 principle of salvo contenemento, the idea that

1 you can't take from a man so much that he would

- 2 be destitute.
- 3 And the Court has suggested that -- in
- 4 -- in the -- in the Bajakajian case, that that
- 5 might be a factor, but it -- but it
- 6 specifically declined in Bajakajian to
- 7 articulate factors, recognizing that this is
- 8 highly contextual, highly fact-intensive, and
- 9 something that ought to be developed in the
- 10 lower courts before this Court pronounces any
- 11 particular test.
- 12 JUSTICE KAGAN: What is the -- on the
- 13 federal side, how does this work? What kind of
- 14 forfeitures have been held unconstitutional?
- 15 Have any?
- 16 MR. HOTTOT: Yes, Your Honor. The
- 17 Second Circuit's von Hofe decision is helpful.
- 18 That case dealt with a wife who was unaware
- 19 that her husband was cultivating marijuana in
- 20 the family home. And the Second Circuit
- 21 wrestled with that case, articulated factors
- for assessing excessiveness, and determined
- 23 that that wife was entitled to return of a
- 24 portion of the property.
- 25 And -- and that's important to

1 recognize too. This isn't an all-or-nothing

- 2 thing. It may be that the Bugatti that Justice
- 3 Alito was talking about would be forfeited in
- 4 part and not in full, or that a person who was
- 5 particularly dependent on their vehicle, say
- 6 they're a mother and it's the -- the minivan
- 7 that they use to get their children to school,
- 8 that a trial judge might determine that that is
- 9 constitutionally excessive.
- 10 Your Honors, if there are no further
- 11 questions, I'd like to reserve the balance of
- 12 my time.
- 13 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Thank you,
- 14 counsel.
- 15 General Fisher.
- 16 ORAL ARGUMENT OF THOMAS M. FISHER
- 17 ON BEHALF OF THE RESPONDENT
- 18 MR. FISHER: Mr. Chief Justice, and
- 19 may it please the Court:
- 20 In rem forfeitures have been a feature
- 21 of the Anglo-American judicial system for
- 22 hundreds of years, but until about 25 years
- ago, no court had held that they were subject
- 24 to a proportionality limitation. While other
- 25 constitutional doctrines may limit --

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1 JUSTICE GORSUCH: General, before we
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- 2 get to the in rem argument and its application
- 3 to this case, can we just get one thing off the
- 4 table? We all agree that the Excessive Fines
- 5 Clause is incorporated against the states.
- 6 Whether this particular fine qualifies because
- 7 it's an in rem forfeiture, another question.
- But can we at least get the -- the
- 9 theoretical question off the table, whether you
- 10 want to do it through the Due Process Clause
- and look at history and tradition, you know,
- 12 gosh, excessive fines, guarantees against them
- go back to Magna Carta and 1225, the English
- 14 Bill of Rights, the Virginia Declaration of
- 15 Rights, pretty deep history, or whether one
- 16 wants to look at privileges and immunities, you
- 17 might come to the same conclusion. Can we at
- 18 least -- can we at least agree on that?
- 19 MR. FISHER: I have two responses to
- 20 that. First, with --
- JUSTICE GORSUCH: Well, I -- I think
- 22 -- I think a "yes" or "no" would probably be a
- 23 good starting place.
- 24 (Laughter.)
- MR. FISHER: Well, I think, with

1 respect to in personam, the answer is yes, but

- 2 you -- you have to take into account -- and
- 3 this is the methodology of McDonald. You have
- 4 to take into account the history and traditions
- 5 of the right being claimed.
- 6 Now the right being claimed here is a
- 7 right of proportionality as to in rem
- 8 forfeitures. The Court has to grapple with
- 9 that history, which is really not seriously
- 10 contested that that was never subject to
- 11 proportionality --
- 12 JUSTICE GORSUCH: Well, whatever the
- 13 Excessive Fine Clause guarantees, we can argue,
- 14 again, about its scope and in rem and in
- 15 personam, but whatever it, in fact, is, it
- 16 applies against the states, right?
- 17 MR. FISHER: Well, again, that
- depends.
- 19 JUSTICE GORSUCH: I mean, most -- most
- 20 of these incorporation cases took place in like
- 21 the 1940s.
- MR. FISHER: Right.
- 23 JUSTICE GORSUCH: And here we are in
- 24 2018 --
- MR. FISHER: Right.

1 JUSTICE GORSUCH: -- still litigating

- 2 incorporation of the Bill of Rights. Really?
- 3 Come on, General.
- 4 MR. FISHER: My -- well, I think what
- 5 you have to take into account, though, is the
- 6 history, and you have to take into account all
- 7 the history, not just the in personam history,
- 8 the in rem history.
- 9 JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: Well, for the
- 10 clause, why do you have to take into account
- 11 all of the history, to pick up on Justice
- 12 Gorsuch's question? Isn't it just too late in
- the day to argue that any of the Bill of Rights
- is not incorporated?
- 15 MR. FISHER: The Court has never
- incorporated a right against the states where
- 17 it could not conclude that there was a
- 18 relationship that was fundamental or -- and
- 19 deeply rooted in our history and tradition.
- 20 JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: But aren't -- but
- 21 aren't all -- all the Bill of Rights at this
- 22 point in our conception of what they stand for,
- 23 the history of each of them, incorporated?
- MR. FISHER: Well, with fairness, not
- 25 with your -- respect to your concession --

- 1 conception on excessive fines, and Austin's
- 2 what stands in the way of that. Austin is --
- 3 had been undermined by subsequent cases,
- 4 including Ursery, including Bajakajian, which,
- 5 by the way, was --
- 6 JUSTICE GINSBURG: Bajakajian cited it
- 7 in a footnote with seeming approval.
- 8 MR. FISHER: Well, that would --
- 9 that's -- one thing that's interesting about
- 10 that footnote is that it's as weak an
- 11 endorsement as I think we can imagine. It says
- 12 that Austin was justified by reference to some
- difference between common law forfeitures and
- 14 so-called modern forfeitures.
- Well, Austin didn't depend on that
- 16 distinction. And that distinction does not
- 17 exist. The so-called modern-day forfeitures
- 18 are materially the same with respect to the
- 19 conceptual nature of them, that they are
- against the property and not the person, with
- 21 respect to the procedural nation -- nature,
- 22 which is civil and not criminal.
- 23 JUSTICE KAGAN: If I -- if I
- 24 understood your response to Justice Gorsuch, it
- 25 was essentially that we can't answer the

1 question wholesale, that we have to look at the

- 2 particular right being invoked.
- 3 So I guess the question is, do you
- 4 have a theory about how we go about dividing up
- 5 rights? You know, how do we decide that we're
- 6 looking at a particular right against in rem
- 7 forfeitures as opposed to a general right
- 8 against excessive fines?
- 9 MR. FISHER: Well, I think McDonald
- 10 gives us some instruction on that. McDonald
- 11 talked about not simply the Second Amendment
- 12 but about the right to self-defense in the
- 13 home.
- 14 Other cases of incorporation this
- 15 Court has decided have approached, for example,
- 16 reasonableness under the Fourth Amendment as
- 17 distinguished from, you know, the exclusionary
- 18 rule.
- 19 There are -- there are precedents that
- 20 do that, but there is no precedent where the
- 21 Court has incorporated a right that was not
- 22 deeply rooted or fundamental.
- 23 JUSTICE KAGAN: I mean, that seems to
- 24 make the incorporation question sort of
- 25 indistinguishable from the substantive

- 1 question.
- 2 MR. FISHER: I think you have to come
- 3 to grips with the history, whether you just --
- 4 whether you call it incorporation or you call
- 5 it the substantive merits question. We've
- 6 given you three different ways to do this.
- 7 The most historically sound way is to
- 8 overrule Austin. If you don't want to do that,
- 9 you can --
- 10 JUSTICE GORSUCH: Wait a minute,
- 11 counsel, you know, if -- if -- just -- just to
- 12 pause on that for a second, you know, the
- 13 Indiana Supreme Court didn't address the merits
- 14 questions, didn't address any of this
- 15 forfeiture, in rem, in personam. It just said
- 16 that the Excessive Fines Clause is not
- incorporated, period.
- 18 Why isn't that just wrong? And then
- 19 you can go make these arguments about why it
- doesn't apply to this case on remand.
- 21 Do you really want us to answer the
- 22 merits questions too?
- MR. FISHER: Well, the problem with
- 24 relying on lower court percolation on the
- 25 merits question, in terms of whether Austin is

1 correct, is that Austin binds the lower courts.

- 2 They don't have an opportunity to revisit that.
- 3 This Court does. The matter has
- 4 been -- has been --
- 5 JUSTICE GORSUCH: Okay. Let's say
- 6 this Court's not inclined to revisit Austin.
- 7 You're going to lose not just the incorporation
- 8 question but the merits question too.
- 9 Could these work?
- 10 MR. FISHER: Well, I'm not sure what
- 11 you mean by the -- the merits question in that
- 12 regard. With respect to whether this
- 13 forfeiture is excessive, certainly, that
- 14 discussion would -- and that argument would
- take place back in the Indiana Supreme Court.
- 16 With respect to the meaning of Austin,
- 17 whether Austin remains good, I think, you know,
- 18 that's only something this Court can effect.
- 19 And I think, with respect to the
- 20 broader question, even if the question, Justice
- 21 Kagan, is -- is -- is the Excessive Fines
- 22 Clause as a whole, and not something where
- 23 we're going to slice and dice the rights, we
- 24 still have to take into account that history of
- in rem forfeiture. And we don't have any

1 examples of incorporation where there is this

- 2 substantial history that calls into question
- 3 the fundamental or deeply rooted nature of a --
- 4 a -- a very large, you know, area where that
- 5 right would be applied.
- 6 JUSTICE GINSBURG: But we do have
- 7 relatively recent history calling into question
- 8 the division between in rem and in personam.
- 9 Certainly, in the area of personal
- 10 jurisdiction, it was once quasi in rem
- 11 jurisdiction and personal jurisdiction, and
- 12 yet, in Shaffer against Heitner, the Court said
- 13 we're not going to do that anymore. Due
- 14 process controls both.
- So, whether you label it in rem or in
- 16 personam, let's remember that it's -- things
- don't have rights or obligations in and of
- 18 themselves. It's people that have rights or
- obligations with respect to things.
- MR. FISHER: Well, with respect to
- 21 Shaffer, I think what's critical there is the
- 22 word "quasi" because, of course, it was not a
- 23 straight-up in rem proceeding.
- We're talking about the ability to
- 25 seize assets for a case where there had been an

- 1 in personam judgment. And that is -- that
- 2 distinguishes that category of cases from the
- 3 historical in rem forfeitures we're talking
- 4 about.
- 5 In rem is still critical for
- 6 jurisdictional reasons, for -- it comes up in
- 7 sovereign immunity. It binds the states there
- 8 that we can't assert sovereign immunity the
- 9 same way when we've got an in rem proceeding.
- 10 You've got other situations. Double jeopardy.
- 11 We already have a distinction in the double
- jeopardy context where in rem is critical. So
- 13 I don't think we can just wave -- you know,
- 14 wave it away.
- 15 JUSTICE ALITO: What is the difference
- between the approach that you're advocating
- 17 here and the way the Court used to address the
- 18 question whether rights protected by the Bill
- 19 of Rights apply to the states, before it began
- 20 the process of incorporating provisions of the
- 21 Bill of Rights one by one, and it said that
- 22 what applied to the states were those rights
- that were implicit in the concept of ordered
- 24 liberty.
- 25 So there was a two-tiered system. And

1 that seems to be what you're asking us to go

- 2 back to with respect to the Excessive Fines
- 3 Clause.
- 4 MR. FISHER: We don't --
- 5 JUSTICE ALITO: Is there a difference?
- 6 I -- I don't -- could you explain what is the
- 7 difference between those two approaches?
- 8 MR. FISHER: Yes, indeed. We're not
- 9 suggesting some sort of systematic differential
- 10 treatment. In McDonald, the Court acknowledged
- 11 that the differences that exist between the --
- 12 the Bill of Rights rights that apply to the
- 13 federal government and the states are as a
- 14 matter of stare decisis.
- Now, here, what we're saying is if
- 16 that -- if the -- in the analysis, because of
- 17 the lack of historical roots of the in rem
- 18 proportionality right, there ends up being a
- 19 difference, that has to be based on the stare
- 20 decisis of Austin.
- 21 If Austin remains good law only
- 22 because of stare decisis, that puts it in the
- 23 same category as those other cases. It's not a
- 24 systematic federalism discount, if you will, on
- 25 -- on the right.

1	JUSTICE ALITO: But, if Austin were			
2	overruled, then the rule as applicable to the			
3	federal government would change as well?			
4	MR. FISHER: That's right. That's			
5	right. We would be in the same			
6	JUSTICE ALITO: So I'm still not			
7	seeing the difference between them.			
8	MR. FISHER: Well, the difference			
9	would be, if if you look at Austin if you			
10	were to look at Austin and say, you know what,			
11	Austin was dead right, historically this is			
12	historically rooted and it is fundamental, then			
13	I don't think there's any grounds for us to say			
14	that there should be that the outcome should			
15	be any different between the states and the			
16	federal government.			
17	If you look at Austin and you say, you			
18	know what, that's questionable, but we don't			
19	want to overturn it because stare decisis			
20	principles counsel against that, that's a			
21	that's a different analysis, and that's more			
22	like Hurtado, more like Bombolis.			
23	JUSTICE ALITO: Well, isn't that			
24	pretty much what the dissent in McDonald said?			
25	We don't like Heller, but at least let's just			

- 1 keep it applicable to the District of Columbia
- 2 and the federal government and not apply it to
- 3 the states.
- 4 MR. FISHER: Well, I think that was a
- 5 -- a different -- for a different reason in
- 6 that the plurality acknowledged the distinction
- 7 with Bombolis and Hurtado being purely a matter
- 8 of stare decisis. And that's the basic
- 9 principle we're -- we're calling on here, which
- 10 is, if -- if Austin remains good law only
- 11 because of stare decisis, that doesn't make
- 12 this a systematic sort of discounted right.
- That just means that, you know, you've
- 14 got as a question -- question of the Court's
- 15 history some other way you have to look at the
- 16 situation.
- 17 But I think it's critical to
- 18 understand also that the idea that somehow
- 19 so-called modern in rem forfeitures are
- 20 different from history because of the existence
- 21 of innocent owner exceptions is also not
- 22 correct.
- 23 Innocent owner exceptions did exist
- 24 within, you know, the last couple of hundred
- 25 years. Indeed, authorities contemporaneous

- 1 with the ratification or roughly
- 2 contemporaneous with the ratification of the
- 3 Fourteenth Amendment acknowledged that there --
- 4 there might be innocent owner defenses.
- 5 The treatise by Bishop says, if the
- 6 law in its clemency permits an innocent owner
- 7 to make a claim, that does not convert into
- 8 punishment that which was not already
- 9 punishment. It doesn't make any difference.
- 10 So whether we -- no matter how we look
- 11 at in rem forfeitures today and the features
- that they exhibit, they're no different than
- 13 the historical in rem forfeitures that this
- 14 Court has said in -- in cases after Austin
- 15 calling Austin into question that they were not
- 16 punishment.
- 17 JUSTICE BREYER: Well, in your view,
- an in rem civil forfeiture is not an excessive
- 19 fine, is that right?
- 20 MR. FISHER: Yes, that is -- that is
- 21 true.
- JUSTICE BREYER: So what is to happen
- 23 if a state needing revenue says anyone who
- 24 speeds has to forfeit the Bugatti, Mercedes, or
- 25 a special Ferrari or even jalopy?

1	(Laughter.)
2	MR. FISHER: There no, there is no
3	there is no excessive fines issue there. I
4	what I will say and what I think is
5	important to to remember is that there is a
6	constitutional limit, which is the proof of
7	instrumentality, the need to prove nexus.
8	JUSTICE BREYER: That isn't a problem
9	because it was the Bugatti in which he was
10	speeding.
11	(Laughter.)
12	MR. FISHER: Right.
13	JUSTICE BREYER: So so there is all
14	the nexus.
15	MR. FISHER: Historically
16	JUSTICE BREYER: Now I just wonder,
17	what what is it? What is it? That is
18	that just permissible under the Constitution?
19	MR. FISHER: To forfeit the Bugatti
20	for speeding?
21	JUSTICE BREYER: Yeah, and, by the
22	way, it was only five miles an hour
23	MR. FISHER: Yeah.
24	JUSTICE BREYER: above the speed

25

limit.

- 1 MR. FISHER: Well, you know, the
- 2 answer is yes. And I would call your attention
- 3 to the --
- 4 JUSTICE BREYER: Is it yes?
- 5 MR. FISHER: Yes, it's forfeitable.
- 6 JUSTICE BREYER: It is forfeitable?
- 7 MR. FISHER: Yeah. The Louisa Barber
- 8 case, one person over the -- the passenger
- 9 limit and the entire ship is forfeit. This is
- 10 -- history shows us in rem forfeiture --
- 11 JUSTICE BREYER: So if the airplane is
- 12 speeding --
- 13 (Laughter.)
- MR. FISHER: Well, in rem forfeitures
- 15 have -- have -- have always been with us and
- 16 they have always been harsh.
- 17 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: General, yeah,
- 18 that -- that is true, but that's because at a
- 19 certain -- up to a certain point in our
- 20 history, we didn't apply the Bill of Rights to
- 21 the states.
- So, in all of the situations before we
- 23 apply the Bill of Rights to this -- before we
- 24 apply the Bill of Rights to states, they did
- 25 things that, under incorporation, were

- 1 unconstitutional. And in most of our cases,
- 2 they were history going both ways. Some states
- 3 did; some states didn't.
- 4 So, really, what the issue that we
- 5 have to look at isn't -- is where has our
- 6 understanding come to in terms of a particular
- 7 Bill of Rights? And in Austin, we said it is a
- 8 long part of history that punitive sanctions
- 9 cannot be excessive. And Justice Scalia said
- 10 it very well: For the Eighth Amendment to
- 11 limit cash fines while permitting -- permitting
- 12 limitless in-kind assessments would make little
- 13 sense, altering only the form of the Star
- 14 Chamber abuses.
- So, at a certain point in Austin, we
- looked at what had happened to in rem
- 17 forfeiture and realized that we had just
- 18 changed the Star Chamber form.
- 19 I -- I -- I don't actually understand
- 20 your argument based on history because, without
- incorporation, the history's going to be what
- 22 you want it to be. The real question is the
- 23 fundamental right.
- 24 Are we trying to avoid a society
- 25 that's like the Char -- Star Chamber? And if

1 we look at these forfeitures that are occurring

- 2 today, and that's what Austin documented, many
- 3 of them seem grossly disproportionate to the
- 4 crimes being charged.
- 5 So how do you deal with that? How do
- 6 we avoid a Star Chamber return?
- 7 MR. FISHER: Well, the history that's
- 8 relevant is not simply the history of what
- 9 states were doing. It's also the history of
- 10 what the federal government was doing. And
- 11 there was no suggestion that before the civil
- 12 rights amendments were passed that the federal
- 13 government, when all of its harsh in rem
- 14 forfeitures, was somehow violating the
- 15 Excessive Fines Clause. There was no
- 16 proportionality limit there.
- Now I think, with respect to
- 18 understanding, you know, how we view today's
- 19 forfeitures, you can't distinguish what's
- 20 happening now from -- history when,
- 21 historically, an innocent owner was never --
- 22 you know, not entitled to a defense.
- 23 How -- how would we ever say -- and I
- 24 think Justice Scalia makes this point -- how
- 25 would we ever say that a forfeiture as to an

- 1 innocent owner was proportional because the
- 2 owner is innocent?
- 3 So the -- that has never been part of
- 4 the equation.
- 5 JUSTICE GORSUCH: Well, the -- the
- 6 part that's different about modern forfeitures
- 7 -- and I think this is what Justice Sotomayor's
- 8 getting at -- is that many of them are punitive
- 9 to the person and that that was not part of in
- 10 rem forfeitures at common law.
- 11 MR. FISHER: Well --
- 12 JUSTICE GORSUCH: We're dealing with a
- world in which it's different in kind, not just
- 14 degree, not just a number but in kind. And
- that's what Justice Scalia, that's what
- everybody, in Austin agreed on. That much was
- 17 unanimous.
- 18 MR. FISHER: Well --
- 19 JUSTICE GORSUCH: And I guess I'm
- asking you, given the concession by the State
- 21 before the Indiana Supreme Court that the
- forfeiture here was punitive, if we do -- don't
- overrule Austin, and you want us to apply not
- just the question of incorporation but go to
- 25 the merits, don't you lose?

1 MR. FISHER: No, I don't think we lose

- 2 because I don't think -- the -- the question of
- 3 punitive and remedial is -- is something that
- 4 Austin borrowed from Halper. That test has --
- 5 has been overruled as to -- as to double
- 6 jeopardy.
- Now, if it remains the test with
- 8 respect to something that -- whether it's
- 9 encompassed within the Excessive Fines Clause,
- 10 there still has to be the -- the analysis. I
- 11 mean, we have to figure out what
- 12 disproportionate means.
- 13 JUSTICE GORSUCH: Sure. But you
- 14 conceded that it's punitive. Now it becomes a
- 15 question of proportionality.
- 16 MR. FISHER: But -- but I don't think
- 17 you can take these on a case-by-case basis. I
- 18 think it's -- you have to say what is the right
- 19 being claimed. It's not whether this
- 20 particular forfeiture was punitive or not.
- 21 It's a question of whether in rem forfeitures
- 22 are of the -- of the sort that are swept within
- 23 the Excessive Fines Clause. And, historically,
- 24 they --
- JUSTICE GORSUCH: The statute here

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1 says it's punitive and you've conceded the
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- 2 statute's punitive. So I'm still stuck on how
- 3 -- how do you get out of that box?
- 4 MR. FISHER: Well, I -- I suppose -- I
- 5 mean, if -- if that's -- if it's the magic word
- 6 "punitive," we can just change the statute, but
- 7 I don't think that would be a very satisfactory
- 8 result.
- 9 I think what the Court is probably
- 10 looking for is some better way to -- to
- 11 describe what is included within the Excessive
- 12 Fines Clause, something more substantive than
- 13 that. And the cases after Austin all make
- 14 clear that this distinction between punitive
- and remedial simply falls apart.
- 16 You know, you -- the idea of
- 17 deterrence in Austin, the thought was, if it's
- 18 deterrent, that makes it punishment. Well, the
- 19 Court's now rejected that in Hudson and in
- 20 other cases. And in Bajakajian. So that part
- of the test doesn't hold up anymore either.
- 22 So I think you have to go back and
- 23 look at this entire -- you know, whether -- you
- 24 have to look very critically at the idea that
- 25 there's something different about modern-day

- 1 forfeitures. There really is no distinction,
- 2 no material distinction, between them and what
- 3 was happening at common law and certainly what
- 4 was happening in the middle of the 19th
- 5 Century.
- 6 So I think the other critical thing to
- 7 bear in mind here is that if we get into the
- 8 idea that we're somehow going to apply a
- 9 grossly disproportionate test akin to the way
- it comes up in -- in the in personam cases,
- 11 effectively, you're going to be wiping away
- 12 centuries of -- of precedent, not just Bennis
- 13 but other innocent owner cases, Van Oster, the
- 14 Little Charles, the Malek Adhel, all these
- 15 cases that say that an innocent owner has no
- 16 constitutional defense.
- 17 And if it somehow has to come down to
- 18 the relationship between the -- the guilt of
- 19 the owner and the crime, then those precedents,
- 20 I think, simply cannot stand any longer. So I
- 21 think you're -- you're in this situation where
- 22 you're confronted with which -- you know, which
- 23 source of doctrine are we going to override.
- 24 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Well, are we
- 25 going to be wiping all that away or just

leaving that for another day? I mean, it -- it

- 2 -- what -- I guess this gets back to Justice
- 3 Gorsuch's first question.
- I mean, the question presented is does
- 5 the Excessive Fines Clause -- you know, is it
- 6 incorporated in the Eighth Amendment? And I
- 7 guess your argument is -- seems to be this
- 8 isn't an excessive fine, and, in fact, it isn't
- 9 a fine at all.
- Well, we can deal with that later,
- 11 right?
- 12 MR. FISHER: Well, first of all, of
- 13 course, it's in front of you now, so why not.
- 14 It's been -- you know, it's been briefed and
- the lower courts can't come to any opposite
- 16 conclusion. So you're not -- it's not going to
- 17 percolate.
- 18 But the second point is that even if
- 19 we were to say we're not going to revisit
- 20 Austin, the history of the right is still
- 21 critical. McDonald tells us that. And it has
- 22 to inform the question of incorporation.
- 23 And the Court has never incorporated
- 24 where there's that kind of history that is four
- 25 square against the right that's being claimed.

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1 And I think that that is going to have to
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- 2 inform the way --
- 3 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Well, you just
- 4 -- you just want us to make sure that in our
- 5 opinion that we say, if we're ruling against
- 6 you, that the excessive fines are incorporate
- 7 -- incorporated under -- under our
- 8 incorporation doctrine and not say civil in rem
- 9 forfeitures are incorporated?
- 10 MR. FISHER: Well, but if that's all
- 11 the Court says, unfortunately, the lower courts
- 12 are going to then read Austin and say, well,
- 13 you're at civil in rem and so that's part of
- 14 excessive fines. And -- and when are we ever,
- 15 you know, going to have a court that's going to
- 16 create any kind of -- of -- of, you know,
- 17 dispute on that point?
- JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: So, just so I'm
- 19 clear, you're asking us to overrule Austin?
- 20 MR. FISHER: I think that's the most
- 21 historically --
- 22 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: Because that's the
- 23 only way that you can win with a straight face?
- MR. FISHER: No, I don't --
- 25 (Laughter.)

- 1 MR. FISHER: Not with a straight face.
- 2 No. Look, I think that's the most historically
- 3 sound thing to do. But I don't think that
- 4 that's -- if you're unwilling to do that, that
- 5 cannot be the -- the end of the analysis on
- 6 incorporation because, again, you have to take
- 7 into account under your precedents the history
- 8 of the right being claimed.
- 9 Not just some of the history, not just
- 10 the in personam history, but also the in rem
- 11 history. And there's no --
- 12 JUSTICE KAGAN: But, again, it -- it
- just seems as though there are two questions,
- and one question is incorporating the right,
- and the other question is the scope of the
- 16 right to be incorporated.
- And, really, what you're arguing is
- 18 about the scope of the right.
- MR. FISHER: Well, but I'm --
- 20 JUSTICE KAGAN: And we can incorporate
- 21 the right --
- MR. FISHER: Yeah.
- JUSTICE KAGAN: -- without saying a
- 24 word about the scope of the right.
- Now, as you say, Austin says something

1 about the scope of the right, and that's a

- 2 problem for you. But -- but you're really
- 3 asking us to talk about the scope of the right,
- 4 aren't you?
- 5 MR. FISHER: Well, certainly, that
- 6 would -- that's our -- what we think is the
- 7 most historically sound thing to do, but even
- 8 if you, you know, assume that away and were
- 9 just looking at what this -- whether we're
- 10 going to incorporate the right, the test for
- incorporation is historically rooted or -- or
- 12 fundamental to ordered liberty.
- 13 And to answer that question, you have
- 14 to look at the history of the right. If the
- 15 right includes --
- 16 JUSTICE KAGAN: Well, that's why --
- 17 why I asked at the beginning what's your theory
- 18 for how you define the right and which history
- 19 you look to --
- MR. FISHER: Yeah.
- 21 JUSTICE KAGAN: -- because you're
- 22 really suggesting that we don't take the right
- 23 wholesale; we try to chop it up. And I guess,
- 24 you know, there are always going to be
- 25 questions about the scope of the right to be

- 1 incorporated.
- 2 And, so far, we have not addressed
- 3 those questions when we've decided whether to
- 4 flip the switch of incorporation or not. We've
- 5 understood those questions to be distinct
- 6 and -- and to be questions for another day.
- 7 And why is it that you're saying we
- 8 should not use that pretty standard practice
- 9 and instead start chopping up the right at the
- 10 incorporation stage?
- MR. FISHER: We think that's one way
- 12 to do it. We don't think that's the only way.
- And if, indeed, the Court doesn't want
- to chop up the right and it wants to just look
- 15 at the Excessive Fines Clause, it has to look
- 16 at all the history, and that includes the
- 17 history of in rem.
- 18 And our view is that history means
- 19 that you can't incorporate. If -- if the
- 20 history is only in personam, then I don't think
- 21 there's any serious question about
- 22 incorporation.
- 23 But if the history includes the in rem
- 24 history, the much larger history, the much --
- 25 the largely uncontested history, that is --

- 1 then there is no precedent for incorporating in
- 2 that circumstance where -- where there was that
- 3 amount of history standing four square against
- 4 a substantial number of applications of the
- 5 right. There just isn't anything to look to on
- 6 that.
- 7 JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: You cited McDonald
- 8 as an example earlier of a case where the Court
- 9 had, in your view, chopped up the right as
- 10 incorporated. Are you saying the Second
- 11 Amendment has a different scope after McDonald?
- 12 MR. FISHER: Oh, no, no, no. No, what
- 13 -- what I'm saying is that the methodology of
- 14 McDonald, when doing the incorporation
- analysis, was to ask, what's the right being
- 16 claimed? And the right being claimed was the
- 17 right to have guns in the home for
- 18 self-defense. And we think that's instructive
- 19 as to how you look at the right.
- JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: But you agree
- 21 post-McDonald -- and this is similar, I think,
- 22 to what Justice Kagan's asking -- that the --
- 23 the right is the same as against the states and
- the federal government?
- 25 MR. FISHER: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. But,

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1 again, we're not dealing there with the same
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- 2 stare decisis issue that we are grappling with
- 3 with respect to Austin, which I think is --
- 4 puts this in -- more like in the Hurtado and
- 5 Bombolis category.
- 6 We're not asking for a -- again, we're
- 7 not asking for a federalism discount. What
- 8 we're asking for is some ability to take
- 9 cognizance of -- of stare decisis without
- 10 sacrificing the necessary historical analysis.
- 11 JUSTICE ALITO: Well, at the time of
- 12 McDonald and at the present time, all the --
- 13 the Court has held that the Second Amendment
- 14 right protects the right to have a -- certain
- 15 firearms in the home for self-defense. It
- 16 hasn't gone further.
- 17 But, if this Court were to go further,
- 18 let's say in a case -- in another case
- involving the District of Columbia, and said
- that the right included something more than
- 21 that, would we have to go through another round
- of incorporation inquiry to determine whether
- 23 this broader right applies to the state, or
- 24 would it follow automatically under McDonald
- 25 that it -- it applies to the states?

- 1 MR. FISHER: Well, I think
- 2 particularly given the methodology the Court
- 3 would use in coming to grips with what that new
- 4 right is, it would likely just follow. I don't
- 5 see there would be any need for -- because it
- 6 would be essentially the same analysis anyway.
- 7 But you -- you know, I think the idea
- 8 here that you can simply look at one part of
- 9 the history without looking at all of it, you
- 10 know, I don't think that you can look to -- to
- 11 McDonald or any of the other precedents and
- 12 have guidance for that.
- 13 You have to take -- you can't just
- 14 ignore it. You have to do something with it.
- 15 You have to take it into account. And whether
- 16 that means chopping it up or, you know,
- 17 grappling with the right as a whole and saying
- 18 that that history counsels against
- incorporation, or simply overruling Austin,
- 20 that's -- you know, one of these ways has to
- 21 take into account the in rem history.
- So, you know, that's -- I think, you
- 23 know, we offer those -- those three suggestions
- 24 and -- and, you know, we -- we think
- 25 historically, the most historically sound thing

- 1 to do is to overrule Austin.
- 2 So I think, you know, we've got also
- 3 grounds for saying that Austin is -- I think
- 4 fits within the Court's precedents on when to
- 5 overrule cases notwithstanding stare decisis.
- In -- in Hudson, this Court has
- 7 already said that the test that Austin applies
- 8 that comes out of Halper is unworkable. It has
- 9 gone through the history in Bajakajian and
- 10 largely shown that Austin was wrongly decided.
- 11 There isn't any serious reliance
- interest, I think, that would mean that there
- was going to be some sort of disruption if
- 14 Austin were overruled. So, you know, the
- 15 normal factors the Court takes into account
- 16 with respect to its precedents, I think, are
- 17 not barriers here to over -- overruling Austin.
- 18 And the -- the other thing, I think,
- 19 you know, you -- you almost can't get away from
- 20 the prospect of at least implicitly overruling
- 21 precedent no matter what you do here. If it's
- 22 not going to be Austin, then it's going to be
- 23 the innocent owner cases, Bennis, Van Oster,
- 24 all those precedents.
- 25 And I think it's instructive here that

- 1 my friend cites to the dissent in Bennis,
- 2 acknowledging that, if you're going to
- 3 incorporate a grossly disproportionate
- 4 analysis, then, really, what you've got to do
- 5 is start getting away from the innocent owner,
- 6 you know, the lack of a required innocent owner
- 7 exception, that that's going to become
- 8 something that is going to have to be part of
- 9 that analysis.
- 10 Now Justice Scalia, I -- I do want to
- 11 call your attention to in -- in Austin, in his
- 12 concurrence, was grappling with this -- this
- idea, as can we do something that's grossly
- disproportionate on in rem the way we would do
- 15 it in personam.
- And his concern was, you know what,
- maybe really what it comes down to is simply
- 18 this idea of nexus. And the nexus test that he
- was describing there is essentially what we're
- describing that would be the proper test under
- 21 due process.
- You know, is there a connection
- 23 between the property and the offense? And we
- think that belongs in due process. But Justice
- Scalia, I think, was onto something there when

1 he was acknowledging that there really has to

- 2 be a different treatment. Given all that
- 3 history, given all those -- those precedents of
- 4 the Court, there has to be a differential
- 5 treatment.
- 6 And at the end of the day, I think,
- 7 you know, what you've got to do here when
- 8 you're looking at this incorporation question
- 9 is not simply be, you know, I think, you know,
- 10 cavalier about the idea of this is easy to
- 11 incorporate.
- 12 You don't want to do that, I think,
- 13 without taking a very careful look at what is
- the right that you're actually incorporating
- and does it fit with the doctrines and the
- 16 history of the Court and all of the ways that
- it's -- it's handled incorporation before.
- 18 And if there's nothing else, I'll cede
- 19 the remainder of my time. Thank you.
- 20 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Thank you,
- 21 General.
- Mr. Hottot, four minutes.
- 23 REBUTTAL ARGUMENT OF WESLEY P. HOTTOT
- 24 ON BEHALF OF THE PETITIONER
- 25 MR. HOTTOT: Your Honors, this case is

1 about constitutional housekeeping. Five times

- 2 over the last 30 years, this Court has remarked
- 3 that the freedom from excessive economic
- 4 sanctions should be understood to apply to the
- 5 states.
- 6 In Hall, in Kennedy, in Roper, in
- 7 Cooper Industries, and in Booth, all that
- 8 remains to do is to expressly so hold.
- 9 My friend's approach, by contrast, is
- 10 radical. He asks the Court to overrule Austin,
- 11 a unanimous decision that has been on the books
- for 25 years, that was reaffirmed in Hudson, in
- 13 Bajakajian, and, again, in Kokesh.
- 14 And that case looked at the same
- 15 history that my friend urges this Court to
- 16 review here. It would allow, if the Court were
- 17 to overrule Austin, governments at all levels
- 18 to impose constitutionally excessive civil in
- 19 rem forfeitures based on nothing more than a
- 20 label.
- This is not a labeling game.
- 22 It would also revive the so-called
- 23 two-track approach that this Court has rejected
- 24 now for more than 50 years.
- 25 So even if we imagine that -- that the

1 Court would take such a radical approach, it --

- 2 it would break with, for example, the
- 3 commercial speech doctrine, which there was a
- 4 long history of commercial speech activity in
- 5 this country before the 1970s decision in which
- 6 this Court held that there is a commercial
- 7 speech right, and did so in a case against the
- 8 state without even pausing on the incorporation
- 9 question.
- 10 So, you know, even if some forfeitures
- 11 are non-punitive, other forfeitures are
- 12 punitive. And the forfeiture in this case
- 13 clearly meets Austin's test that it be at least
- 14 partly punitive.
- 15 If the Court looks to Indiana Code
- 34-24-1-4(a), it shows that this statute is
- 17 more punitive than the statute at issue in
- 18 Austin because it required the -- the state in
- 19 its case-in-chief to prove that Petitioner knew
- 20 about or should have known about the crime at
- 21 issue here, and that is not true under 21
- U.S.C. 881, the statute at issue in Austin.
- Both statutes have innocent owner
- 24 defenses. So, if anything, this is more
- 25 punitive, not less.

1	If the Court has no further questions.
2	Thank you, Your Honor.
3	CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Thank you,
4	counsel. The case is submitted.
5	(Whereupon, at 11:01 a.m., the case
6	was submitted.)
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