## SUPREME COURT OF THE UNITED STATES

IN THE SUPREME COURT OF THE	UNITED STATES
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ASHLEY MOODY, ATTORNEY GENERAL OF	)
FLORIDA, ET AL.,	)
Petitioners,	)
v.	) No. 22-277
NETCHOICE, LLC, DBA NETCHOICE,	)
ET AL.,	)
Respondents.	)

Pages: 1 through 157

Place: Washington, D.C.

Date: February 26, 2024

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7	NETCHOICE, LLC, DBA NETCHOICE,	)
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9	Respondents.	)
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12	Washington, D.C	
13	Monday, February 26	, 2024
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15	The above-entitled matter	came on for
16	oral argument before the Supreme	Court of the
17	United States at 10:04 a.m.	
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1	APPEARANCES:
2	HENRY C. WHITAKER, Solicitor General, Tallahassee,
3	Florida; on behalf of the Petitioners.
4	PAUL D. CLEMENT, ESQUIRE, Alexandria, Virginia; on
5	behalf of the Respondents.
6	GEN. ELIZABETH B. PRELOGAR, Solicitor General,
7	Department of Justice, Washington, D.C.; for the
8	United States, as amicus curiae, supporting the
9	Respondents.
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1	PROCEEDINGS
2	(10:04 a.m.)
3	CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: We will hear
4	argument first this morning in Case 22-277,
5	Moody versus NetChoice.
6	Mr. Whitaker.
7	ORAL ARGUMENT OF HENRY C. WHITAKER
8	ON BEHALF OF THE PETITIONERS
9	MR. WHITAKER: Mr. Chief Justice, and
10	may it please the Court:
11	Internet platforms today control the
12	way millions of Americans communicate with each
13	other and with the world. The platforms
14	achieved that success by marketing themselves as
15	neutral forums for free speech. Now that they
16	host the communications of billions of users,
17	they sing a very different tune. They now say
18	that they are, in fact, editors of their users'
19	speech, rather like a newspaper. They contend
20	that they possess a broad First Amendment right
21	to censor anything they host on their sites,
22	even when doing so contradicts their own
23	representations to consumers.
24	But the design of the First Amendment
25	is to prevent the suppression of speech, not to

- 1 enable it. That is why the telephone company
- 2 and the delivery service have no First Amendment
- 3 right to use their services as a choke point to
- 4 silence those they disfavor.
- 5 Broadly facilitating communication in
- 6 that way is conduct, not speech, and if
- 7 Verizon asserted a First Amendment right to
- 8 cancel disfavored subscribers at a whim, that
- 9 claim would fail no less than the claimed right
- 10 to censorship failed in Pruneyard versus Robins
- 11 and Rumsfeld versus FAIR.
- 12 Social networking companies too are in
- the business of transmitting their users'
- 14 speech. Their users are the ones who create and
- select the content that appears on their sites.
- 16 The plat -- the platforms, indeed, disavow
- 17 responsibility for that conduct in their terms
- 18 of service. The platforms do sort and
- 19 facilitate the presentation of user speech. But
- 20 this Court just last term, in Twitter versus
- 21 Taamneh, and the platforms themselves in
- 22 Gonzalez versus Google describe those tools as
- 23 little more than passive mechanisms for
- 24 organizing vast amounts of third-party content.
- The platforms do not have a First

- 1 Amendment right to apply their censorship
- 2 policies in an inconsistent manner and to censor
- 3 and deplatform certain users.
- 4 I welcome your questions.
- 5 JUSTICE THOMAS: Counsel, it would
- 6 seem that this case is a facial challenge, and
- 7 to some extent, it relies on the overbreadth
- 8 doctrine, but that seems to be an odd fit since
- 9 Respondent represents virtually all of the
- 10 platforms and that it would be easy enough for a
- 11 platform who's affected to bring an as-applied
- 12 challenge.
- Would you comment on that or at least
- 14 address the fact that this is a facial
- 15 challenge?
- MR. WHITAKER: Certainly, Your Honor.
- 17 I do think that's a very significant aspect of
- 18 this case. It comes to the Court on a facial
- 19 challenge, which means that the only question
- 20 before the Court is whether the statute has a
- 21 plainly legitimate sweep.
- I actually don't understand them, Your
- 23 -- Your Honor, to -- to be making an overbreadth
- 24 challenge, which, as I understand it, would --
- 25 would rely on the effects on third parties. As

- 1 I understand it, they're principally relying on
- 2 the effects on their members. If they were
- 3 bringing an overbreadth challenge, they would --
- 4 they would have to show various third-party --
- 5 JUSTICE THOMAS: Well, I think -- how
- 6 would they do that when they haven't shown that
- 7 there are no -- there's no way that this statute
- 8 can be applied that's consistent with the
- 9 Constitution? Have they met that?
- 10 MR. WHITAKER: They certainly have
- 11 not, Your Honor. I mean, and -- and we -- we
- think the statute has, indeed, a plainly
- 13 legitimate sweep.
- And, certainly, there are a number of
- the platforms that are open to all comers and
- 16 content, much like a traditional common carrier.
- 17 And just -- just as a traditional common
- 18 carrier, consistent with the First Amendment,
- 19 would be subject to hosting requirements,
- 20 non-discrimination requirements, so too we think
- 21 that the platforms that satisfy that
- 22 characterization, which are a number of them,
- absolutely would give this statute a plainly
- 24 legitimate sweep.
- 25 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: Can -- can I --

- 1 this is such a odd case for our usual
- 2 jurisprudence. It seems like your law is
- 3 covering just about every social media platform
- 4 on the Internet, and we have amici who are not
- 5 traditional social media platforms, like
- 6 smartphones and others who have submitted amici
- 7 brief, telling them that readings of this law
- 8 could cover them.
- 9 This is so, so broad, it's covering
- 10 almost everything. But the one thing I know
- 11 about the Internet is that its variety --
- 12 variety is infinite. So at what point in a
- challenge like this one does the law become so
- 14 generalized, so broad, so unspecific, really,
- that you bear the burden of coming in and
- telling us what exactly the sweep is and telling
- 17 us how there is a legitimate sweep of virtually
- 18 -- or -- or a meaningfully swath of cases that
- 19 this law could cover but not others?
- MR. WHITAKER: Well -- well, let me,
- 21 Your --
- 22 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: Where -- when does
- 23 the burden shift to the state, when it write --
- 24 when it writes a law so broad that it's
- 25 indeterminate?

1 MR. WHITAKER: I don't think so, Your 2 I still think it is their burden, as the plaintiffs challenging an action of a sovereign 3 state legislature, to show that the law lacks a 4 plainly legitimate sweep. 5 But let me just say a word about the 6 7 -- the breadth of the law. The -- the legislature did define the term "socia media 8 9 platform," which is part of what triggers the 10 law's application, but -- but the breadth of 11 that definition, which -- which wouldn't cover 12 every single website, it -- it would -- it would cover certain large websites with large revenues 13 14 and subscribers and the like, but the breadth of 15 the law, apart from that definition, is 16 significantly narrowed by the fact that the 17 substantive provisions of the law are regulating 18 websites that host user-generated content. 19 That's what the substantive provisions of the 20 statute apply to. 21 So let me talk JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: 2.2 about Etsy. Etsy is a marketplace like -- if --23 I'm going to try to analogize it to physical 24 space, which I think in this area is a little 25 crazy because it -- yes, in some ways, this is

- 1 like an online bookstore and online magazines,
- online newspaper, online whatever you want to
- 3 call it, an online supermarket, but it's not
- 4 because, even though it has infinite space, it
- 5 really doesn't because viewers, myself included,
- 6 or users can't access the millions of things
- 7 that are on the Internet and actually get
- 8 through them and pick the things we want because
- 9 there's too much information. So we're limited
- 10 by human attention spans. So are they.
- 11 So our theories are a little hard, but
- 12 let's look at Etsy. Etsy is a supermarket that
- wants to sell only vintage clothes, and so it is
- 14 going to and does limit users' content. It's a
- 15 free marketplace, it's open to everyone, but it
- says to the people who come onto its marketplace
- 17 we only want this kind of product.
- They're going to have to censor.
- 19 They're going to have to take people off.
- They're going to have to do all the things that
- 21 your law say they can't do without all of these
- 22 conditions.
- Why is that? Why should we be
- 24 permitting and under what level of scrutiny
- 25 would we be looking at this broad application of

- 1 this law that affects someone who all they want
- 2 to do is sell a particular kind of product and
- 3 they have community standards and they tell you
- 4 that they don't want you to curse, they don't
- 5 want you to talk politics, they don't want you
- 6 to do whatever, all they want you to do is sell
- 7 your product. But, if they're a public
- 8 marketplace, which they are, they're selling to
- 9 the public, this law would cover them.
- 10 MR. WHITAKER: I think that's right,
- 11 Your Honor, but -- but let me just say a word
- 12 about how the law might apply to Etsy.
- 13 First of all, it wouldn't regulate the
- 14 goods Etsy is offering. What our law regulates
- is the moderation of user-generated content. So
- it would only apply to Etsy to the extent that
- 17 they -- and -- and I'm not sure to what extent
- it actually would apply to Etsy. I guess it
- 19 would apply somewhat, but I quess people are
- 20 uploading user-generated content in connection
- 21 with the sale of goods. And that's the conduct
- that it would regulate. It doesn't limit what
- 23 goods Etsy can limit its marketplace to.
- Let me just say a word about that. It
- 25 --

1	JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: Well, it opens it
2	up for sale of goods and it tells its users
3	MR. WHITAKER: Well
4	JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: don't, please,
5	speak about politics because that's not what our
6	marketplace is about.
7	MR. WHITAKER: And
8	JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: That's viewpoint
9	discrimination. This falls under a whole lot of
LO	your listings and bans and disclosure
L1	requirements.
L2	Why are we imposing that on something
L3	like this?
L4	MR. WHITAKER: Well, in Pruneyard
L5	versus Robins, Your Honor, this this Court
L6	held that the State of California could regulate
L7	the speech-hosting activity of a shopping mall
L8	which was hosting speech as incident to
L9	JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: But not inside the
20	stores. We said that they could come, but if
21	they go inside the store, we didn't say anything
22	that free speech that someone could stand
23	stand on a platform in the middle of the store
24	and scream out their political message.
5	We said the common areas where we're

- 1 permitting others to speak, we're going to let
- 2 this particular speaker speak anything he or she
- 3 wants. That's why I'm afraid of all of these
- 4 common law rules that you're trying to analogize
- 5 to.
- 6 MR. WHITAKER: Well -- well,
- 7 Your Honor, I do think Etsy is similar insofar
- 8 as it is, in fact, hosting speech and some
- 9 expression as incident to some other commercial
- 10 enterprise. And I think that, if anything,
- 11 makes Etsy's speech interests even weaker than
- 12 the -- the social --
- JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: I'm out of --
- 14 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Counsel, you
- began your presentation talking about concern
- 16 about the power, market power and ability of the
- social media platforms to control what people
- do, and your response to that is going to be
- 19 exercising the power of the state to control
- what goes on on the social media platforms.
- 21 And I wonder, since we're talking
- 22 about the First Amendment, whether our first
- 23 concern should be with the state regulating
- 24 what, you know, we have called the modern public
- 25 square?

1	MR. WHITAKER: Well, I think you
2	certainly should be concerned about that, Your
3	Honor. What what I would say is is that
4	the kind of regulation that the State of Florida
5	is imposing is one that is familiar to the law.
6	When you have businesses that have generally
7	opened their facilities to all comers and
8	content, this is the way that traditional common
9	carrier has worked regulation has worked for
10	centuries.
11	If you were an innkeeper and you held
12	yourself out as open to the public, you could
13	indeed be permitted to act in accordance with
14	that voluntarily chosen business model. So I
15	certainly think the Court should proceed
16	carefully, but one thing the Court, I think,
17	it's important to keep in mind is that there is
18	an important First Amendment interest precisely
19	in ensuring that large powerful businesses like
20	that that have undertaken to host massive
21	amounts of speech and have the power to silence
22	those speakers, the state has an interest, a
23	First Amendment interest, in promoting and
24	ensuring the free dissemination of ideas.
25	CHIEF HIGHICE POREPTS: Is there any

- 1 aspect of social media that you think is
- protected by the First Amendment?
- MR. WHITAKER: Yes, Your Honor. I
- 4 can -- I can certainly imagine platforms that
- 5 would be subject to this law that would have --
- 6 would indeed have First Amendment rights. I
- 7 mean, we point out in our brief that we think
- 8 that if you had a -- an Internet platform that,
- 9 indeed, had a platform-driven message, was
- 10 selective on the front end, Democrats.com, I
- 11 think that would be a very different kind of
- 12 analysis compared to a company like Facebook or
- 13 YouTube, who is in the business of just
- 14 basically trying to get as many eyeballs on
- 15 their site as possible.
- 16 JUSTICE KAGAN: But why is it
- 17 different? You -- you know, when we talked --
- when we had the parade case, we said they don't
- 19 have a lot of rules, but they have some rules,
- and we're going to respect the rules that they
- 21 do have. Even though they let a lot of people
- 22 come in, they don't let a few people come in,
- and that seems to be quite important to them.
- 24 And similarly here, I mean, Facebook,
- 25 YouTube, these are the paradigmatic social media

- 1 companies that this law applies to, and they
- 2 have rules about content. They say, you know,
- 3 you can't have hate speech on this site. They
- 4 say you can't have misinformation with respect
- 5 to particular subject matter areas.
- 6 And they seem to take those rules -- I
- 7 mean, you know, somebody can say maybe they
- 8 should enforce them even more than they do, but
- 9 they do seem to take them seriously. They have
- 10 thousands and thousands of employees who are
- 11 devoted to enforcing those rules.
- 12 So why aren't they making content
- judgments, not quite as explicit as the -- the
- 14 kind in your hypothetical, but definitely
- they're making content judgments about the kind
- of speech that they think they want on the site
- and the kinds of speech that they think is
- 18 intolerable.
- MR. WHITAKER: Well -- well, there's a
- 20 lot -- lot in there, Your Honor. May -- maybe I
- 21 can start with the Hurley case. I mean, I -- I
- 22 think what was going on in Hurley, I think, is
- 23 that you had a parade that was --
- 24 JUSTICE KAGAN: Could -- could --
- 25 maybe just start with the more general question.

- 1 MR. WHITAKER: Sure -- sure --
- 2 for sure.
- JUSTICE KAGAN: I mean, I'm happy for
- 4 you to talk about Hurley. I don't want to, you
- 5 know, get in your way.
- 6 MR. WHITAKER: I'll start wherever you
- 7 want. It's your time, not mine, Your Honor.
- 8 So, yeah. So, certainly, the more -- the
- 9 broader question about rules of the road and the
- 10 like.
- 11 Common carriers have always conducted
- 12 their businesses subject to general rules of
- decorum. I think the fact that the platforms
- 14 have these general rules of decorum, the fact
- 15 remains that upwards of 99 percent -- for all
- 16 that content moderation, that's really a product
- of the fact that they have so -- they host so
- 18 much content. But the fact remains that 99 --
- 19 upwards of 99 percent of what goes on the
- 20 platforms is basically passed through without
- 21 review.
- Yes, they have spam filters on the
- front end and the like, and that's not uniquely
- 24 --
- JUSTICE KAGAN: But that 1 percent

- 1 seems to have gotten some people extremely
- 2 angry. You know, the 1 percent that's like we
- 3 don't want --
- 4 MR. WHITAKER: Well --
- 5 JUSTICE KAGAN: -- anti-vaxxers on our
- 6 site --
- 7 MR. WHITAKER: Sure.
- 8 JUSTICE KAGAN: -- or we don't want
- 9 insurrectionists on our site.
- I mean, that's what motivated these
- 11 laws, isn't it? And that's what's getting
- 12 people upset about them --
- MR. WHITAKER: Right.
- 14 JUSTICE KAGAN: -- is that other
- 15 people have different views about what it means
- 16 to -- to provide misinformation as to voting and
- things like that, and, you know, that's the
- 18 point. There are some sites that can say this
- 19 kind of talk about vaccination policy is good
- and some people can say it's bad, but it's up to
- 21 the individual speakers.
- MR. WHITAKER: The fact that some
- 23 people are angry about the content moderation
- 24 policies doesn't show that is their speech.
- 25 And -- and my friends talk about their

advertisers. Well, we don't know whether the 1 2 advertisers think it's their speech or whether 3 they just disagree with the speech. And their advertisers and people who are angry with speech 4 don't get a heckler's veto on Florida's law. 5 6 But even more broadly than that, I 7 mean, we know that mere -- the -- the fact that a hosting decision is idealogically charged and 8 9 causes controversy can't be the end of the game 10 because I think Rumsfeld versus FAIR would have 11 had to come out the other way then, because, in 12 Rumsfeld, certainly, the law schools there felt 13 very strongly that the military were being 14 bigots and they didn't want them on campus. 15 And yet this Court did not look to the 16 idealogical controversy surrounding those decisions. Instead, it looked at objectively 17 18 whether the law schools were engaged in 19 inherently expressive conduct. 20 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Well, it 21 looked at the fact that the schools were getting 2.2 money from the federal government, and the federal government thought: Well, if they're 23

going to take our money, they have to allow

military recruiters on the campus. I don't

24

- 1 think it has much to do with the issues today at
- 2 all.
- 3 MR. WHITAKER: Well, Mr. Chief
- 4 Justice, it's difficult for me to argue with you
- 5 very much about what Rumsfeld versus FAIR means.
- 6 (Laughter.)
- 7 MR. WHITAKER: But let me just take a
- 8 crack because, I mean, I -- I think, as I -- as
- 9 I read your opinion for the Court, you didn't
- 10 rely, actually, on the funding aspect of the
- 11 case to reach the conclusion that what was going
- on there was not First Amendment protected
- 13 conduct. You were willing to spot them that
- the -- the -- the question would be exactly the
- same if it were a direct regulation of speech as
- opposed to a funding condition.
- 17 So I absolutely think that the
- analysis in that case directly speaks to this.
- 19 And just -- just --
- 20 JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: Can I -- can I ask
- 21 you about a different precedent, about what we
- 22 said in Buckley? And this picks up on the Chief
- Justice's earlier comment about government
- intervention because of the power of the social
- 25 media companies.

1	And it seems like, in Buckley, in
2	1976, in a really important sentence in our
3	First Amendment jurisprudence, we said that "the
4	concept that the government may restrict the
5	speech of some elements of our society in order
6	to enhance the relative voice of others is
7	wholly foreign to the First Amendment." And
8	that seems to be what you responded with to the
9	Chief Justice.
10	And then, in Tornillo, the Court went
11	on at great length as well about the power of
12	then newspapers, and the Court said they
13	recognized the argument about vast changes that
14	place in a few hands the power to inform the
15	American people and shape public opinion and
16	that that had led to abuses of bias and
17	manipulation. The Court accepted all that but
18	still said that wasn't good enough to allow some
19	kind of government-mandated fairness, right of
20	reply or anything.
21	So how do you deal with those two
22	principles?
23	MR. WHITAKER: Sure, Justice
24	Kavanaugh. First of all, if if you agree
25	with me with our front-line position that what

2.2

- is being regulated here is conduct, not speech,
- 2 I don't think you get into interests and
- 3 scrutiny and all that. I do think that the law
- 4 advances the -- the First Amendment interests
- 5 that I mentioned, but I think the -- the -- the
- 6 -- that interest, the interest that our law is
- 7 serving, if you did get to a point in the
- 8 analysis that required consideration of those
- 9 interests, our interests --
- JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: Do you agree then,
- if speech is involved, that those cases mean
- 12 that you lose?
- MR. WHITAKER: No, I don't agree with
- 14 that, and -- and the reason I don't agree with
- 15 that is because the interests that our law serve
- 16 are -- are legitimate, and it's -- it's hard
- 17 because different parts of the law serve
- 18 different interests. But I think the one that
- 19 -- that sounds in the -- in your concern that is
- 20 most directly implicated would be the hosting
- 21 requirement applicable to journalistic
- 22 enterprises.
- 23 So one provision of the law says that
- the platforms cannot censor, shadow ban, or
- 25 deplatform journalistic enterprises based on the

- 1 content of their publication or broadcast. And
- 2 that serves an interest very similar to the
- 3 interest that this Court recognized as
- 4 legitimate in Turner when Congress imposed on
- 5 cable operators a must-carry obligation for
- 6 broadcasters.
- 7 And -- and just as a broadcaster --
- 8 and what the Court said was there was not just a
- 9 legitimate interest in promoting the free
- 10 dissemination of ideas through broadcasting, but
- 11 it was indeed a -- a compelling interest, a
- 12 highly compelling interest. And so I think the
- journalistic enterprise provision serves a --
- 14 that very similar issue.
- 15 But there are also other interests
- 16 that our law serves. For example, the
- 17 consistency provision, Your -- Your Honor, is
- 18 really a consumer protection measure. It --
- 19 it's sort of orthogonal to all that. The
- 20 consistency provision, which is really the heart
- of our law, just says to the -- the platforms:
- 22 Apply your content moderation policies
- 23 consistently. Have whatever policies you want,
- 24 but just apply them consistently.
- 25 JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: Could the

- 1 government apply such a policy to publishing
- 2 houses and printing presses and movie theaters
- 3 about what they show? Bookstores, newsstands?
- 4 MR. WHITAKER: No, no --
- 5 JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: In other words, be
- 6 consistent in what kinds of content you exclude?
- 7 Could that be done?
- 8 MR. WHITAKER: I -- I don't think so,
- 9 Your Honor.
- JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: And why not?
- 11 MR. WHITAKER: Well -- well, I think
- 12 that there is -- the consumer -- here, the --
- 13 the social media platforms, their terms of
- 14 service, their content moderation policies are
- really part of the terms under which they are
- offering their service to users. I don't think
- 17 that that really -- that that paradigm really
- 18 fits in what Your Honor is -- is talking about.
- So -- but I -- but, look, we agree, we
- 20 certainly agree that a newspaper, a book -- and
- 21 a bookstore is engaging in inherently expressive
- 22 conduct. And our whole point is that these
- 23 social media platforms are not like those. And
- 24 why are --
- 25 JUSTICE JACKSON: Doesn't it depend on

- 1 exactly what they're doing? I mean, I guess the
- 2 hard part for me is really trying to understand
- 3 how we apply this analysis at the broad level of
- 4 generality that I think both sides seem to be
- 5 taking here.
- I mean, you say what -- what is being
- 7 regulated here is conduct, not speech. Well, I
- 8 guess maybe if you're talking about Facebook's
- 9 news -- news feed feature. But there are lots
- of other things that Facebook does that -- you
- 11 know, that might be speech, but then there might
- 12 be other things that Facebook does that doesn't
- 13 qualify as speech.
- So don't we have to, like, drill down
- more in order to really figure out whether or
- 16 not things are protected?
- 17 MR. WHITAKER: Actually, I don't think
- 18 so. I think that that precise ambiguity
- 19 strongly favors our position, Your Honor,
- 20 because, in the posture of this facial
- 21 challenge, all you need to look at is whether
- 22 there are at least some activities --
- JUSTICE JACKSON: No, but that's --
- 24 no, no, no. I guess what I'm saying is you
- 25 mentioned the Pruneyard case or the FAIR case,

- 1 excuse me. I mean, we didn't say that law
- 2 schools, you know, as a categorical matter are,
- 3 you know, always engaged in unprotected speech.
- 4 We looked at the particular thing. This was a
- 5 fair and, you know, the law school was saying,
- 6 we don't want these certain entities in it.
- 7 I hear you suggesting that we can just
- 8 say, you know, Facebook is a common carrier and,
- 9 therefore, everything it does qualifies as
- 10 conduct and not speech. And I don't think
- 11 that's really the way we've done this in our
- 12 past precedents. So can you speak to that?
- 13 MR. WHITAKER: Sure. Certainly,
- 14 that's not what we're saying, Your Honor. I --
- 15 I completely agree with you that it's very
- 16 important to isolate what conduct the particular
- 17 -- each particular provision of the law is
- 18 regulating.
- 19 JUSTICE JACKSON: Not the law, the
- 20 entity. What is the entity doing?
- 21 MR. WHITAKER: Well --
- JUSTICE JACKSON: Like we have to do
- 23 --
- MR. WHITAKER: Sure.
- 25 JUSTICE JACKSON: -- an intersection

- of what the law says they can't do and what in
- 2 particular they are doing, right?
- 3 MR. WHITAKER: Well, and I guess the
- 4 right level of generality and the general -- the
- 5 level of generality that's sufficient, I think,
- 6 to conclude that the law has a plainly
- 7 legitimate sweep is we are talking about the --
- 8 the social networking companies' activities in
- 9 -- in content-moderating user-uploaded content.
- 10 That -- that, I think, is the relevant activity,
- 11 and -- and that is what -- that -- that activity
- 12 --
- JUSTICE JACKSON: All right. So what
- do you do about -- what do you do with LinkedIn
- has a virtual job fair and it has some rules
- 16 about who can be involved. That seems to map
- on, I would think, to the FAIR case. Is that
- 18 what you're saying?
- 19 MR. WHITAKER: Well, I -- I -- I don't
- 20 -- I don't think so. I don't think it would map
- on to our theory in this case because it sounds
- 22 like to me, and I'm not totally aware of all the
- 23 facts of LinkedIn there, but --
- JUSTICE JACKSON: Yeah.
- 25 MR. WHITAKER: -- if I understand --

1 JUSTICE JACKSON: I think that's a 2 problem in this case. MR. WHITAKER: Well --3 JUSTICE JACKSON: We're not all aware 4 5 of the facts --6 MR. WHITAKER: Well --7 JUSTICE JACKSON: -- of what's 8 happening. 9 MR. WHITAKER: -- exactly. And I -- I 10 think that that -- that is one of the -- the --11 the -- the reasons why this -- this facial 12 challenge has been very confusing to defend, because we kind of don't -- we kind of don't 13 14 know what to defend against. 15 JUSTICE GORSUCH: Mr. Whitaker, on --16 on that score, so we have some -- in a facial 17 challenge, we have a bit of a problem because 18 different legal principles apply in different 19 factual circumstances, and there are many different defendants or plaintiffs here, sorry, 20 21 with different services. So that -- that's a 22 complicating feature on a -- on a facial 23 challenge. But here's another one for you: 24 25 about Section 230, which preempts some of this

- 1 law? How much of it? And how are we to account
- 2 for that complication in a facial challenge?
- 3 MR. WHITAKER: Well --
- 4 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Why don't you
- 5 answer the question, then we'll move on.
- 6 JUSTICE GORSUCH: Briefly. Yeah.
- 7 MR. WHITAKER: Well -- well, I
- 8 think that the Court should answer the question
- 9 presented, I guess.
- 10 JUSTICE GORSUCH: But how can we do
- 11 that without looking at 230?
- MR. WHITAKER: Well, because I -- I
- don't -- I don't think that there's any -- some
- of this was briefed at the -- at the cert stage,
- 15 Your Honor. I don't think that the -- the
- 16 Section 230(c) preemption -- (c)(2) preemption
- 17 question is really going to dispose of the case.
- 18 You know, the district court actually reached
- 19 the Section 230 issue but concluded that it
- 20 still had to reach the constitutional issue
- anyway.
- JUSTICE GORSUCH: I'll get back to
- 23 this in my turn. Thank you.
- 24 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Thank you,
- 25 counsel.

1	Justice Thomas, anything further?
2	JUSTICE THOMAS: Mr. Whitaker, the
3	could you give us your best explanation of what
4	you perceive the speech to be in this case or
5	allege to be in this case?
6	MR. WHITAKER: Well, as I understand
7	their contention, it's it's this idea that
8	the platforms, in having content moderation
9	policies, are somehow creating a welcoming
10	community, I guess. It seems to me, at that
11	level of generality, that can't really be a
12	cognizable message that seems to me more like
13	a tautology than than a message. Basically,
14	we want the people on our sites that we want.
15	And and and I think, at that
16	level of generality, certainly, the Pruneyard
17	case would have to come out the other way
18	because, in Pruneyard, the mall certainly wanted
19	to ban leafleting because it wanted to create a
20	certain environment, and yet this Court said
21	that they did not have a First Amendment right
22	to do that.
23	JUSTICE THOMAS: I think what I was
24	more interested in is, you know, we're
25	talking we're using broad terms like "content

- 1 moderation, " and throughout the briefs, you have
- 2 "shadow banning," "deprioritizing," and all
- 3 sorts of things.
- 4 And I guess, with these facial
- 5 challenges, I always have a problem that we
- 6 don't -- we're not talking about anything
- 7 specific. In an as-applied challenge, at least
- 8 we know what's in front of us and what your
- 9 interpretation or at least the state's
- 10 interpretation of its law is in that case. Now
- 11 we're just speculating as to what the law means.
- 12 So I'm just trying to get more of a --
- more specificity as to what the speech is in
- 14 this case. They are censoring as far as I can
- tell, and I don't know of any protected --
- speech interests in censoring other speech, but
- 17 perhaps there is something else.
- 18 MR. WHITAKER: Well, I don't think
- 19 that they do have a -- certainly not a speech
- interest. I mean, at most, I think that they
- 21 would have some interest in the inherently --
- 22 allegedly inherently expressive conduct of
- 23 speech. You know, that way of looking at it I
- 24 take it my friends from the United States agree
- with. But we do not think they have a message

- in censoring and deplatforming users from the
- 2 sites any more than the law schools in FAIR had
- 3 a message in booting military recruiters off
- 4 campus.
- 5 JUSTICE THOMAS: Thank you.
- 6 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Justice Alito?
- 7 JUSTICE ALITO: Did the plaintiffs
- 8 raise content -- I'm sorry -- overbreadth below?
- 9 MR. WHITAKER: No -- no, Your Honor.
- 10 I'm not a -- I -- I -- I can't -- I
- 11 couldn't find the word "overbreadth" in any of
- 12 their pleadings.
- 13 JUSTICE ALITO: Where in the record
- 14 would -- should I look to find a list of all of
- the platforms that are covered by the Florida
- 16 statute?
- 17 MR. WHITAKER: Well -- well, Your
- 18 Honor, I'm afraid that doesn't appear in the --
- in the record because I think that the platforms
- were fairly cagey about which of their members
- 21 they thought the statute applied to. The -- the
- 22 record only contains three platform-specific
- 23 declarations: Etsy, Facebook, and YouTube.
- So that -- that's part of the problem
- in this case, is that we -- we -- we don't have

- 1 a sense of -- the record has not been fully
- developed to answer that question, so we're kind
- 3 of litigating in the dark here.
- 4 And this was litigated on a
- 5 preliminary injunction at breakneck speed
- 6 without the -- the State having a chance to take
- 7 discovery, and that's part of the reasons why
- 8 some of these questions are difficult to answer.
- 9 JUSTICE ALITO: Well, I'll ask Mr.
- 10 Clement that argument -- that question too.
- 11 As to the platforms that are covered,
- 12 where in the record would I look to find a list
- of all of the functions that those platforms
- 14 perform?
- 15 MR. WHITAKER: I'm not aware in the
- 16 record, Your Honor, of a -- an all-encompassing
- 17 list of all the functions the platforms perform.
- 18 There certainly are, as I mentioned, three
- 19 platform-specific declarations, also some more
- 20 general declarations that talk about some of
- 21 their -- their members more generally, but it's
- 22 not sort of all in one place.
- I apologize, Your Honor.
- 24 JUSTICE ALITO: Does your law cover
- any websites that primarily or even exclusively

- 1 engage in non-expressive conduct? 2 MR. WHITAKER: I think it does cover 3 websites that engage in primarily non-expressive conduct. I mean, we would -- we would 4 characterize the social networking platforms as 5 6 engaging in primarily non-expressive conduct 7 in -- in -- insofar as they are hosting speech, just like a traditional common carrier is not 8 9 engaged in -- in expressive conduct in 10 transmitting the communications of its 11 subscribers. And we do think our law would 12 apply to certainly the -- the largest -- at a minimum, the largest social networking 13 14 platforms. 15 JUSTICE ALITO: What is the right 16 standard for a facial challenge if we think that 17 your law implicates a -- a -- a portion, a percentage of expressive conduct and a portion 18 19 of non-expressive conduct? 20 How should we analyze that? 21 MR. WHITAKER: I think that you would
- JUSTICE ALITO: So we need a -- we

-- that -- so there's a -- there's --

- 24 need a numerator and a denominator there, I
- 25 think. What -- what would they be?

2.2

1	MR. WHITAKER: Well, I I don't
2	think there is that the standard would have a
3	numerator and a denominator. Actually, Your
4	Honor, in this context, we would view it as the
5	question being whether the statute has a plainly
6	legitimate sweep without the need to compare
7	applications.
8	As I understand this Court's
9	precedents, the numerator/denominator comparison
10	would be something you would do if there were an
11	overbreadth claim in this case, but I don't
12	understand my friends to be making an
13	overbreadth claim. Maybe they'll say something
14	different, but I could not find the word
15	"overbreadth" in their in their pleadings.
16	In the Texas case, they do have a footnote
17	suggesting that they made an overbreadth claim
18	in the alternative.
19	JUSTICE ALITO: Thank you.
20	CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Justice
21	Sotomayor?
22	Justice Kagan?
23	JUSTICE KAGAN: I just wanted to sort
24	of understand your position, and I want to
25	narrow this to the paradigmatic social media

- 1 companies' sort of news feed postings, Facebook,
- 2 YouTube, Twitter/X.
- 3 So suppose that -- that I say -- just
- 4 take this as a given, all right? You can argue
- 5 with the facts, but don't.
- 6 (Laughter.)
- 7 JUSTICE KAGAN: Suppose that I say,
- 8 for the most part, all these places say we're
- 9 open for business. Post whatever you like and
- 10 we'll host it.
- 11 But there are exceptions to that and
- 12 clearly content-based exceptions, which the
- 13 companies take seriously. So let's say they say
- 14 there we think that misinformation of particular
- 15 kinds is extremely damaging to society --
- misinformation about voting, misinformation
- 17 about certain public health issues -- and so too
- 18 we think that hate speech or bullying is
- 19 extremely problematic.
- 20 And so we are going to enforce rules
- 21 against this. They're only going to apply to a
- 22 small percentage of the things that people want
- 23 to post. For the most part, they're open for
- 24 business. But we are serious about those
- 25 content-based restrictions. All right?

1 So, in that world, why isn't that a -you know, a -- a -- a classic First Amendment 2 3 violation for the state to come in and say, we're not allowing -- going to allow you to 4 enforce those sorts of restrictions even though, 5 6 you know, you're basically -- it's like an 7 editorial judgment, you're excluding particular 8 kinds of speech? 9 MR. WHITAKER: Well -- well, Your Honor, I think, if you -- I take your -- your 10 11 hypo to be assuming that it's -- it's First 12 Amendment protected activity, and I think that 13 what you would do in that instance, you would 14 have to run intermediate scrutiny under Turner. 15 And -- and the analysis regrettably --16 JUSTICE KAGAN: So don't say what --17 what I take it to be First Amendment activity. 18 I mean, do you take it to be First Amendment 19 activity? 20 MR. WHITAKER: No, no. That's our 21 whole point. I mean, again --2.2 JUSTICE KAGAN: Even though they're 23 saying, yeah, we're -- we have -- we are a 24 big forum for lots of messages but not for those

kinds of messages. We want to exclude those

- 1 kinds of messages.
- Why isn't that First Amendment, a
- 3 First Amendment judgment?
- 4 MR. WHITAKER: I mean, I -- I -- I
- 5 think it's very -- the Court held otherwise, I
- 6 think, in Pruneyard because, there, there was an
- 7 editorial policy against leafleting too. And,
- 8 again, I don't buy --
- 9 JUSTICE KAGAN: No, that was just
- about leafleting and the mall owner didn't have
- 11 any expressive views. I'm taking as a given
- 12 that these -- that YouTube or Facebook or
- whatever has expressive views, there are
- 14 particular kinds of expression defined by
- 15 content that they don't want anywhere near their
- 16 site.
- 17 MR. WHITAKER: But -- but I think,
- 18 Your Honor, you still would have to look at the
- 19 objective activity being regulated, namely,
- 20 censoring and deplatforming, and ask whether
- 21 that expresses a message.
- 22 And because they host so much content,
- an objective observer is not going to readily
- 24 attribute any particular piece of content that
- 25 appears on their site to some decision to either

- 1 refrain from or to censor or deplatform. And
- 2 that makes --
- 3 JUSTICE KAGAN: Do you think so as to
- 4 this -- here, this is a real-world example.
- 5 Twitter users one day woke up and found
- 6 themselves to be X users and the content rules
- 7 had changed and their feeds changed, and all of
- 8 a sudden they were getting a different online
- 9 newspaper, so to speak, in a metaphorical sense
- 10 every morning, and a lot of Twitter users
- 11 thought that was great, and a lot of Twitter
- 12 users thought that was horrible because, in
- 13 fact, there were different content judgments
- 14 being made that was very much affecting the
- speech environment that they entered every time
- 16 they opened their app.
- 17 MR. WHITAKER: Your Honor, that
- 18 does -- respectfully, that does not answer
- whether they have a message in their censorship
- 20 any more than, you know, the -- I'm sure people
- objected, again, quite strenuously to the fact
- 22 that the law schools were permitted to interview
- on campus. I'm sure people wanted to ban
- leafleting at the -- the mall in Pruneyard.
- 25 And -- and that does not give them a message.

1 And I think the reason for that is, if 2 they are not carefully selecting the content in 3 the newspaper, they don't have a message in the 4 existence, in the mere existence, of the content 5 on the site. 6 JUSTICE KAGAN: Thank you, General. 7 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Justice Gorsuch? 8 9 JUSTICE GORSUCH: I just wanted to give you a chance to finish up on the Section 10 230 point. I think it's Section 6 of your law 11 12 that says that the law is not enforceable to the extent it conflicts with Section 230. 13 14 MR. WHITAKER: Sure, sure. 15 JUSTICE GORSUCH: So why wouldn't we 16 analytically want to address that early on in 17 these proceedings, whether in this Court or a 18 lower court? 19 MR. WHITAKER: Well, the law --20 JUSTICE GORSUCH: And does that 21 complicate our attempt to --2.2 MR. WHITAKER: Sure. 23 JUSTICE GORSUCH: -- resolve things in a facial challenge? 24

MR. WHITAKER: Sure, Your Honor. And

- 1 I think the -- the reason is -- is because the
- 2 law is not facially at least preempted under
- 3 230(c)(2), which principally regulates
- 4 takedowns.
- 5 One reason for that is we -- we
- 6 understand 230(c)(2) not to sanction
- 7 viewpoint-based content moderation under the
- 8 rubric of otherwise objectionable. And there's
- 9 a very nice article that Professor Volokh has on
- 10 this in the -- in the Journal of Free Speech Law
- 11 where he lays this out. And we obviously
- 12 haven't briefed this, Your Honor.
- 13 The second point I would make about
- 14 Section 230(c)(2) is that it only applies to
- 15 good-faith content moderation, so to the extent
- our law prohibits them from engaging in
- 17 bad-faith content moderation, that is absolutely
- 18 not preempted by 230(c)(2).
- 19 And one way to understand their
- 20 constitutional claims in this case, because they
- 21 have an expansive view of Section 230(c)(2), is
- that they are in essence asserting a
- 23 constitutional right to engage in bad-faith
- 24 content moderation because they already have the
- 25 right to engage in a lot of moderation of

- 1 illicit content under 230(c)(2) as long as they
- 2 do so in good faith.
- 3 JUSTICE GORSUCH: And then just to
- 4 follow up on Justice Kagan's line of
- 5 questioning, you've analogized to common
- 6 carriers and telegraphs in particular.
- Why is that an apt analogy here, do
- 8 you think?
- 9 MR. WHITAKER: I think it's an apt
- 10 analogy, Your Honor, because the -- the -- the
- 11 principal function of a social media site is to
- enable communication, and it's enabling willing
- speakers and willing listeners to talk to each
- 14 other.
- And it's true that the posts are more
- 16 public, but I don't think that Verizon would
- gain any greater right to censor simply because
- 18 it was a conference call. I don't think that
- 19 UPS or FedEx would gain a greater right to
- 20 censor books because it was a truckload of books
- as opposed to one book.
- 22 And so the analogy is indeed apt. And
- 23 -- and so there's been talk of market power.
- 24 Market power is not an element, I think, of
- 25 traditional common carrier regulation, and,

1 indeed, some entities that are regulated as 2 common carriers, like cellphone providers, 3 operate in a fairly competitive market. 4 JUSTICE GORSUCH: Thank you. CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Justice 5 6 Kavanaugh? 7 JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: In your opening remarks, you said the design of the First 8 9 Amendment is to prevent "suppression of speech." 10 And you left out what I understand to be three 11 key words in the First Amendment or to describe the First Amendment, "by the government." 12 13 Do you agree "by the government" is 14 what the First Amendment is targeting? 15 MR. WHITAKER: I do agree with that, 16 Your Honor, but I don't agree that there is no 17 First Amendment interest in allowing the 18 people's representatives to promote the free 19 exchange of ideas. This Court has recognized 20 that as a legitimate First Amendment interest in 21 the Turner case and all the way going back to 2.2 the Associated Press case when --23 JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: Well, in the

Turner case, the intervention was, the Court

emphasized, unrelated to the suppression of

24

- 1 speech, the antitrust-type intervention there.
- 2 So I'm not sure when it's related to ensuring
- 3 relative voices are balanced out or there's
- 4 fairness in the speech or balance in the speech,
- 5 that that is covered by Turner.
- 6 Do you agree with that?
- 7 MR. WHITAKER: No, I don't agree with
- 8 that, Your Honor. Our -- our -- our interest
- 9 and our law --
- 10 JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: What did Turner
- 11 mean by "unrelated to" the suppression of
- 12 speech?
- MR. WHITAKER: Well, we don't view our
- law as advancing interests that are related to
- the suppression of speech. We think that the
- interests, for example, in protecting
- journalistic enterprises from being censured,
- 18 from -- from MSNBC being censured because an
- 19 Internet platform doesn't like a broadcast it
- showed on its station the other day, that is
- 21 just an interest in preventing from being
- 22 silenced. It's not an equalizing interest.
- 23 It's giving them a chance.
- 24 JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: On the editorial
- 25 control point, you really want to fight the idea

- 1 -- and I understand -- that editorial control is
- 2 the same thing as speech itself. And you've
- 3 emphasized Pruneyard over and over again.
- 4 But we have a whole other line of
- 5 cases, as you're aware, of course, Hurley, PG&E,
- 6 Tornillo, Turner, which emphasize editorial
- 7 control as being fundamentally protected by the
- 8 First Amendment.
- 9 And I understood the line between
- 10 Pruneyard on the one hand and those cases on the
- 11 other to be whether you were involved in a
- speech, communications business, as opposed to a
- shopping center owner, which is the other side
- 14 of the line.
- 15 Can you respond to those cases?
- 16 MR. WHITAKER: Sure. I guess I don't
- 17 dispute the general principle of editorial
- 18 control. I just don't think that this -- that
- 19 the social media platforms are engaged in
- 20 editorial control.
- 21 And, again, the -- the -- the
- 22 recruiters -- the law schools, excuse me, in
- 23 Rumsfeld versus FAIR argued that they were
- 24 exercising editorial control when they booted
- 25 military recruiters off campus and invoked

- 1 Tornillo explicitly. And this Court had none of
- 2 it.
- 3 So the Court does need to draw a line,
- 4 I think, between a selective speech host that is
- 5 exercising editorial control and a speech host
- 6 like a common carrier or like the mall in
- 7 Pruneyard that can indeed be regulated in
- 8 prevent -- in being prevented from silencing its
- 9 customers.
- 10 JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: On the selective
- 11 speech host point, I think you've made the point
- 12 to Justice Kagan that they don't eliminate much
- 13 speech. But didn't we deal with that in Hurley
- 14 as well and say that the mere fact that the
- parade organizer usually took almost all comers
- 16 was irrelevant to the First Amendment interest
- in essentially editorial control over who
- 18 participated in the parade?
- MR. WHITAKER: Yeah, and I -- and I --
- and I guess I think Hurley, Your Honor, really
- 21 turned more on the fact that what was the
- 22 activity there was a St. Patrick's Day parade
- with a particular expressive purpose, and so
- 24 perhaps the -- the -- it -- it could
- 25 still be expressive and be a little bit more

- 1 lenient.
- 2 But I would note that this Court in
- 3 Hurley did -- in rejecting the conduit argument,
- 4 relied on the fact that there was front-end
- 5 selection of -- of the members of the parade,
- 6 that the -- the parade committee -- the
- 7 committee that was responsible for it was doing
- 8 front-end selection. So I do think Hurley fits
- 9 our theory.
- 10 But I also think that selectivity is
- 11 totally relevant to who is the speaker. And we
- 12 -- we analogize in our brief to the government
- 13 speech cases where this Court has made that
- exact point in a variety of cases, such as Matal
- 15 versus Tam and Shurtleff. And what you have
- 16 said is that if the government is not exercising
- 17 a ton of control over the speech that comes into
- 18 a forum, it is not speaking and it can't censor.
- 19 That's what this Court held in Shurtleff
- 20 involved.
- 21 JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: Thank -- thank
- 22 you.
- 23 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Justice
- 24 Barrett?
- 25 JUSTICE BARRETT: Mr. Whitaker, I have

- 1 a question about this editorial control because,
- 2 really, when it comes to platforms that are the
- 3 traditional social media platforms like YouTube,
- 4 Instagram, you know, TikTok, Twitter/X, it all
- 5 rides -- it all turns on editorial control.
- It seems to me that one distinction
- 7 between this and FAIR is that, here, these
- 8 companies are speech hosts, right? I mean, the
- 9 law schools in FAIR were hosting job fairs for
- 10 this purpose, like online recruiting. They
- 11 weren't gathering together a whole bunch of
- 12 people and saying, here, present your ideas,
- 13 present your posts. I mean, these social media
- 14 companies are hosting speech.
- So why isn't that more like a
- 16 newspaper in Tornillo?
- 17 MR. WHITAKER: It is -- it is
- 18 different, Your Honor, but I think that that's
- 19 why we've -- we've leaned on -- also on the
- 20 common carrier analogy, which I think reflects
- 21 that a speech -- you can't just say it's a
- 22 speech host and go home because, if that were
- 23 true, Verizon could censor. Excuse me.
- JUSTICE BARRETT: Well -- well, put
- 25 aside common carrier for one second and just

- 1 pretend -- just put common carrier to the side.
- 2 Just tell me why this doesn't look like the same
- 3 kind of editorial control we see newspapers
- 4 exercise.
- 5 MR. WHITAKER: Because the platforms
- 6 do not review -- it is a strange kind of editor,
- 7 Your Honor, that does not actually look at the
- 8 material that is going on its compilation. I
- 9 mean, in Twitter versus Taamneh, the platforms
- 10 told you that they didn't even know that ISIS
- 11 was on their platform and doing things. And it
- 12 is a strange kind of editor that does not even
- 13 know that -- the material that it is editing.
- 14 JUSTICE BARRETT: Is it because it's
- not humanized? I mean would -- "humanized," not
- 16 human eyes. Is it because it could be an
- 17 algorithm that says, you know, we want to have,
- 18 as Justice Kagan was pointing out, terms of
- 19 service, we want to have this kind of site. You
- 20 know, or -- or -- or some say that, for example,
- 21 TikTok might have boosted pro-Palestinian speech
- 22 and reduced -- reduced pro-Israel speech.
- That's a viewpoint, right? And if you
- have an algorithm do it, is that not speech?
- MR. WHITAKER: Well, it -- it might

- 1 be, Your Honor, but -- but, again, in -- in --
- 2 in Twitter and Gonzalez, the -- the platforms
- 3 told you that the algorithms were methods of
- 4 organizing -- neutral methods of organizing the
- 5 speech, much like the Dewey decimal system.
- 6 JUSTICE BARRETT: Well, that's not
- 7 what they're saying here. So let's -- let's
- 8 assume that what they're saying here, that
- 9 they're organizing it, you know, in ways that
- 10 reflect preferences, that are expressive of
- 11 their terms and conditions.
- In that event, do you think it would
- be editorial control in a First Amendment sense?
- MR. WHITAKER: No. And I think it's
- important to separate the organize -- and I
- 16 agree with Justice Jackson that it's important
- 17 to separate the various functions -- the
- organizing function from the hosting function.
- 19 And this is a point that Professor Volokh has
- 20 made in his -- in his article that we cite.
- I mean, if -- simply because they are
- 22 required to host certain speech, that does not
- 23 actually meaningfully prevent -- prevent them
- 24 from organizing that speech. So I think the
- 25 Court has to separate out regulation of the

- 1 organization from simply preventing them from
- 2 censoring.
- And the reason, Your Honor, it is
- 4 different from a newspaper, I think, is two
- 5 principal points. First, we've been talking a
- 6 lot about selection, but, second, space
- 7 constraints. Space constraints are something
- 8 that this Court in FAIR and in Tornillo relied
- 9 on as one factor that is relevant. And the
- 10 social media companies have -- don't have any
- 11 space constraints, which means that a
- 12 requirement to host an additional piece of
- 13 content is a relatively less restriction over --
- JUSTICE BARRETT: Well, let me just
- interrupt you there. I mean, Justice Sotomayor
- 16 pointed out that even though there may not be
- 17 physical space constraints, there are the -- the
- 18 constraints of attention, right? They have to
- 19 present information to a consumer in some sort
- of organized way and that there's a limited
- 21 enough amount of information that the -- the
- 22 consumer can absorb it.
- 23 And don't all methods of organization
- 24 reflect some kind of judgment? I mean, could
- 25 you tell -- could Florida enact a law telling

- 1 bookstores that they have to put everything out
- 2 by alphabetical order and that they can't
- 3 organize or put some things closer to the front
- 4 of the store that they think, you know, their
- 5 customers will want to buy?
- 6 MR. WHITAKER: I think, first --
- 7 first, let me just take a step back because one
- 8 of the problems here is we don't have any
- 9 information in this record on their algorithms.
- 10 It's very difficult for us to piece -- pick
- 11 apart what exactly the algorithms are doing.
- 12 You certainly could imagine, I think, to be --
- 13 you know, to be candid, an algorithm that could
- 14 be expressive.
- As far as we can tell, if the
- 16 algorithms work, though, in the manner that this
- 17 Court described them in Twitter versus Taamneh,
- 18 they look more like neutral ways to reflect user
- 19 choice, and I don't think there's expression in
- 20 that.
- Now you can imagine a different kind
- 22 of algorithm. If an algorithm -- if it were
- 23 possible to have an algorithm that made a
- 24 website look like a newspaper, that would be
- 25 different. But, again, I think the Court -- the

- 1 question of organization is analytically
- 2 distinct from the separate question of whether
- 3 they can be regulated in their hosting and
- 4 censorship.
- 5 JUSTICE BARRETT: Okay. So your
- 6 argument that it's not expressive entirely
- 7 depends on the hypothesis that the sorting and
- 8 feed functions are solely some sort of neutral
- 9 algorithm that's designed to user preference and
- 10 that they reflect no kind of policy judgment
- 11 based on the platform itself?
- MR. WHITAKER: No. No, not at all,
- 13 actually, Your Honor, because I think that
- 14 preventing them from censoring does not
- meaningfully preclude them from organizing.
- If they're required to carry a piece
- of content, they can organize it however they
- 18 want generally. I mean, there are prohibitions
- on shadow banning and the like, but they can
- 20 generally organize it however they want. So a
- 21 prohibition on censorship and deplatforming is
- 22 not, I think, a meaningful interference with
- 23 organizing.
- But -- but, again, on -- on
- 25 algorithms, I would just stress that this is

- 1 a -- a facial challenge. We don't have any
- 2 particular information on what exactly the
- 3 content of their algorithms are. And so I think
- 4 the only question there is whether there's a
- 5 possible state of the world under which the
- 6 algorithms are non-expressive.
- 7 JUSTICE BARRETT: Okay. Let me just
- 8 ask you one last question. It's about the
- 9 facial challenge aspect of this.
- 10 So Florida's law so far as I can
- 11 understand it is very broad, and we're talking
- 12 about the classic social media platforms, but it
- looks to me like it could cover Uber, it looks
- 14 to me like it could cover just Google search
- 15 engines, Amazon Web Service, and all of those
- things would look very different.
- 17 And, you know, Justice Sotomayor
- 18 brought up Etsy. It seems to me that they're
- 19 arguing -- now Etsy has a feed recommended for
- 20 you, right, but it also just has shops for
- 21 handmade goods that you can get. It looks a lot
- 22 more like a brick-and-mortar marketplace or flea
- 23 market, you know, than, you know, a place for
- 24 hosting speech. Okay?
- So, if this is a facial challenge and

- 1 Florida's law indeed is broad enough to cover a
- 2 lot of this conduct which is farther away from
- 3 expression than these standard social media
- 4 platforms, why didn't you then in your brief
- 5 kind of defend it by pointing out, look, there's
- 6 all this other stuff that's perfectly fine that
- 7 Florida covers. We don't want, you know, some
- 8 person who wants to sell their goods on Etsy to
- 9 be suppressed because it's, you know, stuff --
- 10 handmarked -- handmade goods that express a
- 11 political view, for example.
- 12 MR. WHITAKER: I think we did defend
- the application of our law to Etsy, and I think
- 14 I've -- I've defended that from -- from the
- 15 lectern, but -- but -- but I don't think you
- 16 need to be with me on --
- JUSTICE BARRETT: But, I mean,
- 18 pointing out, I mean, I can -- I can sit here
- 19 and think of all kinds of applications of this
- 20 law that really wouldn't hit expression, but --
- 21 but I -- I just don't understand you to have
- 22 been defending the law in that way --
- MR. WHITAKER: Well --
- 24 JUSTICE BARRETT: -- as opposed to
- 25 countering the argument that the -- the

- 1 platforms are not engaged in expression.
- MR. WHITAKER: We're -- we're --
- 3 we're -- we're making both arguments, Your
- 4 Honor, to be clear. As I was -- as I was
- 5 discussing with Justice Sotomayor, we view Etsy
- 6 as not having a significant expressive interest
- 7 in applying its policy -- its content moderation
- 8 policies.
- 9 JUSTICE BARRETT: So is that enough to
- just make this whole thing fail, I guess, is my
- 11 question. If -- if --
- MR. WHITAKER: Yes, I think it is.
- JUSTICE BARRETT: -- if we agree with
- 14 you that Etsy, it's fine for it to apply to, or
- 15 Uber, it's fine, you know, Amazon Web Services,
- if we agreed with you with all that, is that
- 17 enough to just say, well, then this facial
- 18 challenge can't succeed?
- 19 MR. WHITAKER: Yes, because that would
- 20 give the law a plainly legitimate sweep, and
- 21 that's all the Court needs to -- to address here
- 22 to reject the facial challenge.
- JUSTICE BARRETT: Thank you.
- 24 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Justice
- 25 Jackson?

_	OODIICE OACKDON: DO I LEEI IIKE
2	there's a lot of indeterminacy in this set of
3	facts and in this circumstance, as Justice Alito
4	tried to, I think, illuminate with his
5	questions. We're not quite sure who it covers.
6	We're not clear exactly how these these
7	platforms work.
8	One of the things I wanted to give you
9	the chance to address is the lack of clarity
10	about what the statute necessarily means.
11	You've given a couple of you've talked about
12	the consistency provision, for example, and
13	you've represented what you think it means, but
14	we don't have a state court determination
15	interpreting that provision, do we?
16	MR. WHITAKER: You do not, Your Honor.
17	In fact, the the the law was not allowed
18	to go into effect, so the Florida courts have
19	not had an opportunity to construe this statute
20	at all.
21	And I think that counsels strongly in
22	favor of rejecting the facial challenge because
23	this Court has considered in Washington State
24	Grange case the the fact that the state
25	courts have not had an opportunity to construe a

- 1 state law that's being attacked on its face as
- 2 -- as a reason to reject it for the count.
- JUSTICE JACKSON: Can I ask you, do
- 4 you think this statute could be susceptible to
- 5 multiple interpretations? I mean, I can imagine
- 6 even the consistency provision, you know, well,
- 7 what does it mean that they have to do this
- 8 consistently? They have to apply the same
- 9 standards, or it has to substantively result in
- 10 the same level of preference? I could imagine
- 11 there you -- you could interpret that both more
- 12 narrowly or broadly.
- 13 MR. WHITAKER: There certainly may be
- 14 some interpretive questions, Your Honor. On
- that point, I don't think there is any -- any
- 16 ambiguity. And let me just read to you what the
- 17 consistency provision says. It says, "a social
- 18 media platform must apply censorship,
- 19 deplatforming, and shadow banning standards in a
- 20 consistent manner among its users on the
- 21 platform."
- 22 And the censorship, deplatforming, and
- shadow banning standards are the things that the
- 24 social media company must under a separate
- 25 provision of the law publicly disclose, which

- 1 was a disclosure requirement that the Eleventh
- 2 Circuit upheld.
- JUSTICE JACKSON: Yes, I understand.
- 4 MR. WHITAKER: But --
- 5 JUSTICE JACKSON: I mean, I -- I
- 6 appreciate that Florida's position is that our
- 7 law is perfectly clear, but I -- I --
- 8 MR. WHITAKER: Well, no, but I think
- 9 that that -- that that language I just read to
- 10 you I think makes clear that the baseline for
- 11 comparison is not some abstract notion of
- 12 fairness.
- let me ask you this about that, all right? So
- 15 let's assume we get to the point we disagree
- 16 with you about whether or not expressive
- activity is covered and we're actually applying
- or trying to determine which standard applies,
- 19 that is, you know, level of scrutiny.
- 20 What I'm a little confused about is
- 21 how we evaluate, for example, the 30-day
- 22 restriction with respect to determining whether
- it's content-based or content-neutral. I
- 24 appreciate that on its face it doesn't
- 25 particularly -- you know, it doesn't point to a

- 1 particular type of content -- content, but I
- 2 suppose it's applied in reference to content,
- 3 right?
- 4 MR. WHITAKER: Well, the --
- 5 JUSTICE JACKSON: I mean, that -- that
- 6 restriction is a regulated entity can only
- 7 change its rules, terms, and engagements once
- 8 every 30 days. But we would have to look at
- 9 what it was before and what it is now to
- 10 determine if there's a change. So is that a
- 11 content-based restriction or not?
- 12 MR. WHITAKER: Certainly not. I mean,
- 13 the -- you know, this Court held a couple terms
- ago in the City of Austin case just that simply
- 15 because a regulation requires consideration of
- 16 content doesn't -- doesn't make it
- 17 content-based. And there's nothing on the face
- 18 of that provision that targets any particular
- 19 message of the platforms.
- 20 And -- and I think just to -- just to
- 21 zoom out a little bit on the 30-day provision, I
- 22 mean, that provision is really an adjunct to
- 23 the -- the consistency provision as I understand
- it, and -- and the point of it is that it
- wouldn't do much good to require the platforms

- 1 to apply their policies consistently if they
- 2 could just sort of constantly change them.
- 3 And -- and that, I think, is the point --
- 4 JUSTICE JACKSON: I understand. But,
- 5 in the application of even the consistency
- 6 provisions, to determine whether they're not
- 7 doing it consistently, aren't we also looking at
- 8 content to some extent? I mean, I just --
- 9 MR. WHITAKER: Well --
- 10 JUSTICE JACKSON: -- it's -- I -- I
- 11 think it's not necessarily as easy as it might
- 12 seem to determine whether or not these
- 13 provisions are actually content-based or
- 14 content-neutral.
- MR. WHITAKER: Well, again, I -- I --
- 16 I don't think the fact that it requires
- 17 consideration of -- of content makes it
- 18 content-based. I think you would look at
- 19 whether it's targeting some kind of a message of
- the platform, and there's nothing on the face of
- 21 the 30-day provision that does that, Your Honor.
- JUSTICE JACKSON: Thank you.
- 23 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Thank you,
- 24 counsel.
- Mr. Clement.

1	ORAL ARGUMENT OF PAUL D. CLEMENT
2	ON BEHALF OF THE RESPONDENTS
3	MR. CLEMENT: Mr. Chief Justice, and
4	may it please the Court:
5	Florida's effort to level the playing
6	field and to fight the perceived bias of big
7	tech violates the First Amendment several times
8	over. It interferes with editorial discretion.
9	It compels speech. It discriminates on the
10	basis of content, speaker, and view and
11	viewpoint. And it does all this in the name of
12	promoting free speech but loses sight of the
13	first principle of the First Amendment, which is
14	it only applies to state action.
15	Florida defends its law, as you've
16	heard this morning, principally by insisting
17	that there's no expressive activity being
18	regulated. That blinks reality. This statute
19	defines the targeted websites in part by how big
20	their audience is. It regulates the content and
21	display of particular websites, and it tries to
22	prevent my clients from censoring speakers and
23	content.
24	If you are telling the websites that
25	you are that they can't censor speakers, you

- 1 can't turn around and say you're not regulating
- 2 expressive activity. It's all over this law.
- 3 And that brings it squarely within the teaching
- 4 of Tornillo, PG&E, and Hurley.
- 5 All three of those cases teach that
- 6 you cannot have the forced dissemination of
- 7 third-party speech and then reject
- 8 considerations of market power, misattribution,
- 9 or space constraints. And Reno and 303 Creative
- 10 make clear those principles are fully applicable
- 11 on the Internet.
- 12 Indeed, given the vast amount of
- material on the Internet in general and on these
- 14 websites in particular, exercising editorial
- discretion is absolutely necessary to make the
- 16 websites useful for users and advertisers. And
- 17 the closer you look at Florida's law, the more
- 18 problematic the First Amendment problems become.
- 19 It singles out particular websites, in
- 20 plain violation of Minneapolis Star. Its
- 21 provisions that give preferences to political
- 22 candidates and to edit -- and to journalistic
- enterprises are content-based in the extreme.
- I welcome the Court's questions.
- JUSTICE THOMAS: Mr. Clement, if the

- 1 government did what your clients are doing,
- 2 would that be government speech?
- 3 MR. CLEMENT: So it might be
- 4 government speech, but I think it would be
- 5 unconstitutional government speech, which is to
- 6 say, when the government -- I mean, you know,
- obviously, you have government speech cases, but
- 8 when what the government's doing is exercising
- 9 editorial discretion to censor some viewers or
- 10 some speakers and not others, I think that
- 11 plainly violates the First Amendment.
- 12 And I think that's essentially the
- thrust of this Court's decision in the Manhattan
- 14 Community Cable case against Halleck, which is
- 15 that in this area, looking for state action is
- 16 absolutely critical. There are things that the
- 17 -- if the government does, is a First Amendment
- 18 problem and if a private speaker does, we
- 19 recognize that as protected activity.
- JUSTICE THOMAS: So --
- JUSTICE JACKSON: Mr. Clement, you --
- 22 oh, sorry.
- JUSTICE THOMAS: -- can you give me
- one example of a case in which we have said the
- 25 First Amendment protects the right to censor?

1 MR. CLEMENT: So I don't know that the 2 Court used that particular locution, Justice 3 Thomas, but I think that is the thrust of Hurley, that is the thrust of PG&E, that is the 4 thrust of Tornillo. In all of those cases, a 5 6 private party did not want to convey and 7 disseminate the speech of a third party. And in 8 every case, the government said, no, we have some really good reason here why this private 9 10 party has to disseminate the message of a third 11 party. And --12 JUSTICE THOMAS: I've been fortunate or unfortunate to have been here for most of the 13 14 development of the Internet. 15 (Laughter.) 16 JUSTICE THOMAS: And the argument 17 under Section 230 has been that you're merely a 18 conduit, which it -- exact -- that was the case back in the '90s and perhaps the early 2000s. 19 20 Now you're saying that you are engaged 21 in editorial discretion and expressive conduct. 2.2 Doesn't that seem to undermine your Section 230 23 arguments? MR. CLEMENT: With respect, Justice 24 25 Thomas, I mean, obviously, you were here for all

- of it. I wasn't here for all of it. But my
- 2 understanding is that my clients have
- 3 consistently taken the position that they are
- 4 not mere conduits. And Congress, in passing
- 5 Section 230, looked at some common law cases
- 6 that basically said, well, if you're just a pure
- 7 conduit, that means that you're free from
- 8 liability. But, if you start becoming a
- 9 publisher, by keeping some bad conduct out --
- 10 content out, then you no longer have that common
- 11 law liability protection.
- 12 And as I understand 230, the whole
- point of it was to encourage websites and other
- 14 regulated parties to essentially exercise
- 15 editorial discretion to keep some of that bad
- 16 stuff out of there, and as a result, what
- 17 Congress said is -- they didn't say: And you're
- 18 still a conduit if you do that. No, it said:
- 19 You shouldn't be treated as a publisher, because
- 20 Congress recognized that what my clients were
- 21 doing would, in another context, look like
- 22 publishing, which would come with the kind of
- 23 traditional defamation liability, and they
- 24 wanted to protect them against that precisely to
- 25 encourage them to take down some of the bad

- 1 material that, if these laws go into effect,
- we'd be forced to convey on our websites.
- JUSTICE JACKSON: Mr. Clement, can I
- 4 ask you about the facial nature of this?
- 5 Because my understanding is that, to strike down
- 6 this statute as facially unconstitutional, we
- 7 would have to conclude that there's no possible
- 8 way for this law to govern these entities and
- 9 their conduct.
- 10 So, first, do I have the standard
- 11 right?
- MR. CLEMENT: With all due respect, I
- don't think so.
- JUSTICE JACKSON: Okay.
- 15 MR. CLEMENT: In the First Amendment
- 16 context, as my friend was indicating, the
- 17 question is whether or not the statute has a
- 18 plainly legitimate sweep. So it's not the
- 19 Salerno, if there's one little application
- 20 somewhere, that's enough to save the statute.
- JUSTICE JACKSON: But, I mean, whose
- 22 burden is that? I thought it was your burden to
- 23 say that this statute, in almost all of its
- 24 applications or in most or a substantial number
- or something, would be unconstitutional in order

- 1 to get it facially stricken.
- 2 MR. CLEMENT: So two things, Your
- 3 Honor. I think our burden would be -- it would
- 4 be our burden to say that this statute doesn't
- 5 have a plainly legitimate sweep. In fact, it is
- 6 our position, and we did make this argument
- 7 below and succeeded, that this statute actually
- 8 has no constitutional application, and part of
- 9 that is because none of this statute, at least
- 10 none of the part that's in front of you today,
- 11 applies unless you are a covered website.
- 12 JUSTICE ALITO: Does the --
- MR. CLEMENT: And the website --
- JUSTICE JACKSON: But -- but wait.
- 15 Can I just -- I don't understand. I'm sorry.
- 16 So no application, but we have so many
- 17 different applications of the law in this
- 18 situation precisely because it is so broad. So
- 19 how -- how can you say that?
- 20 MR. CLEMENT: Because the statute only
- 21 applies to websites that are a handful of
- 22 websites that meet the viewership threshold or
- 23 the total sales threshold.
- 24 And it's -- you know, it's not our
- only argument, obviously, but one of our

- 1 arguments is you can't regulate expressive
- 2 activity in that kind of targeted way.
- JUSTICE ALITO: Mr. Clement, does the
- 4 --
- 5 JUSTICE JACKSON: And those websites
- 6 only --
- 7 JUSTICE ALITO: -- does the Florida
- 8 law cover Gmail?
- 9 MR. CLEMENT: The -- the Florida law I
- 10 -- I think by its terms could cover Gmail.
- 11 JUSTICE ALITO: All right. So does
- 12 Gmail have a First Amendment right to delete,
- 13 let's say, Tucker Carlson's or Rachel Maddow's
- 14 Gmail accounts if they don't agree with her --
- 15 his or her viewpoints?
- MR. CLEMENT: They -- they might be
- able to do that, Your Honor. I mean, that's
- obviously not something that has been the square
- 19 focus of this litigation, but lower courts have
- 20 looked --
- JUSTICE ALITO: Well, if they don't,
- then how are we going to judge whether this law
- 23 satisfies the -- the requirements of either
- 24 Salerno or overbreadth?
- MR. CLEMENT: So it's -- you know,

- 1 again, I think it's the plainly legitimate sweep
- test, which is not synonymous with overbreadth,
- 3 but in all events, since this statute applies to
- 4 Gmail, if it applies at all, because it's part
- of Google, which qualifies over the threshold,
- 6 and it doesn't apply to competing email services
- 7 that provide identical services, that alone is
- 8 enough to make every application of this statute
- 9 unconstitutional.
- 10 JUSTICE KAGAN: I mean, how could that
- 11 be?
- 12 JUSTICE ALITO: Does it apply to -- go
- 13 ahead.
- 14 JUSTICE KAGAN: How could -- how could
- that be, Mr. Clement? It's not unconstitutional
- 16 to distinguish on the basis of bigness, right?
- 17 MR. CLEMENT: It is when you're
- 18 regulating expressive activity. That's what
- 19 this Court said in Minneapolis Star. So the
- 20 statute in Minneapolis Star was unconstitutional
- 21 in all its applications. The statute --
- JUSTICE KAGAN: If you -- you're
- 23 saying, if -- if -- if there were no issue here
- of -- that this is really a subterfuge, they
- 25 were trying to get at a certain kind of media

- 1 company that -- because of their views, and the
- only issue was it's not worth it to regulate a
- 3 lot of small sites, you know, we -- we only want
- 4 to go after the big sites that actually have
- 5 many millions of users, you think that's a First
- 6 Amendment violation?
- 7 MR. CLEMENT: I do. The way you're
- 8 asking the question suggests you think that's a
- 9 harder case than the one I actually have before
- 10 you.
- 11 JUSTICE KAGAN: I think it's a little
- 12 bit of an impossible case to say you can't go
- 13 after big companies under the First Amendment.
- MR. CLEMENT: All you have to do is go
- 15 after all the social website -- media websites
- 16 or all of the websites. You don't have to draw
- 17 these artificial distinctions that just so, you
- 18 know, coincidentally happen to coincide with the
- websites that you think have a bias that you're
- 20 trying to correct. And just to remind you of
- 21 how the statute --
- JUSTICE KAGAN: Right, but I took that
- out of the -- the question. Let's say that they
- 24 weren't going after these companies because of
- bias or because they thought they had a slant.

- 1 It was just, you know, we're going after the
- 2 biggest companies because those are the
- 3 companies with the biggest impact and the most
- 4 number of users. How -- how could that be a
- 5 First Amendment violation?
- 6 MR. CLEMENT: Because Minneapolis Star
- 7 says it is, because Arkansas Writers' Project
- 8 says it is, and because, if you actually got to
- 9 analyzing their so-called consumer protection
- interest, the consumer protection interest would
- 11 be exactly the same for a website with 99
- 12 million global users as it would be with a
- website with a hundred million global users.
- 14 And so I think there are red flags over all of
- 15 the distinctions drawn in the statute.
- And then, if you look at the statute
- 17 more closely, I mean, my goodness, the political
- 18 candidates provision says that you can't have
- 19 posts about a political candidate. I can't
- 20 imagine anything more obviously content-based
- 21 than that. That's --
- 22 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Counsel, is
- 23 there --
- 24 MR. CLEMENT: -- unconstitutional in
- every one of its applications.

1 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: -- is there 2 any aspect of the service provided on the social 3 platforms that is not protected under the First 4 Amendment or that is plainly valid under the 5 First Amendment? 6 MR. CLEMENT: I think it's all 7 protected by the First Amendment. I mean, obviously --8 9 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Direct mess --10 direct messages? 11 MR. CLEMENT: I -- I think direct 12 messages are protected under the First 13 Amendment. I think that the courts that have 14 looked at things like whether Gmail is a common 15 carrier have actually held that -- and there's a 16 case involving the RNC that has a specific 17 holding that Gmail is not a common carrier. 18 think much of the logic of that would apply to 19 direct messaging. Obviously, if this were a statute that 20 tried to address my clients only to the extent 21 22 that they operated a job board, this would be a 23 lot closer to FAIR and I might have a harder 24 case. 25 JUSTICE GORSUCH: So, Mr. Clement, the

- 1 government says your brief sometimes errs in
- 2 suggesting that conduit-type activity is always
- 3 expressive. And direct messages, Gmail, I take
- 4 it your view then is that providers can
- 5 discriminate on the basis of political views,
- 6 religious beliefs, maybe even race?
- 7 MR. CLEMENT: So, Justice Gorsuch, I
- 8 think you have to distinguish between two
- 9 things. One is sort of a status-based
- 10 discrimination, and the other is status as
- 11 speaker. And so I don't think that our clients
- 12 could discriminate and say you can't be on our
- 13 service, you can't even get access to our
- 14 service on the basis of race.
- JUSTICE GORSUCH: But -- but in how
- 16 they use it and -- and their speech.
- 17 MR. CLEMENT: So --
- JUSTICE GORSUCH: I'm talking about
- 19 the content of their speech.
- 20 MR. CLEMENT: Yeah. I think, when it
- 21 comes --
- JUSTICE GORSUCH: That it has
- 23 something to do with religion or politics or
- 24 race, you can editorialize and use that
- editorial power to suppress that speech, right?

1	MR. CLEMENT: So I think that gets to
2	a very hard question. I think it would be
3	speech, but like I think it's the
4	JUSTICE GORSUCH: So the answer is
5	yes, we can we can delete emails, we can
6	delete direct messages that we don't agree with
7	based on politics, religion, or race?
8	MR. CLEMENT: Probably not in
9	application, but I do think, look, a bookstore,
LO	if it wants to have a display this month to
L1	celebrate black history, can they limit that
L2	display just to African American authors? I
L3	think the answer is probably yes.
L4	JUSTICE GORSUCH: And so it is here
L5	too, right?
L6	MR. CLEMENT: I think the answer is
L7	that there's at least First Amendment activity
L8	going on there, and then you would apply the
L9	equal protection clause to it, and then you
20	would decide whether or not that's permissible
21	or not. But, obviously, I think this case
22	involves editorial decisions at its heart.
23	And one thing I just want to make
24	clear on the facial challenge point just so you
25	understand how this case came to be as you

- 1 heard today, my friend's principal argument is
- 2 this doesn't cover expressive activity at all.
- And in the lower court, when we sought
- 4 a preliminary injunction, they put all their
- 5 eggs in that basket and they specifically said,
- 6 look, we don't want to do intermediate scrutiny
- 7 at the preliminary injunction stage, so we
- 8 really only have an argument to resist this
- 9 preliminary injunction if you hold that this is
- 10 not expressive activity. And they did the same
- 11 thing in the Eleventh Circuit. There's a -- we
- have a footnote in our brief making it clear on
- 13 the pages exactly where they did this.
- 14 So they basically said: We either
- want to win this on the threshold question that
- this is not expressive activity, or we don't
- want to get into the rest of it at this point.
- 18 We'll have some discovery and we'll have the
- 19 preliminary injunction and delay it.
- 20 JUSTICE ALITO: Mr. Clement --
- JUSTICE BARRETT: Mr. Clement --
- 22 JUSTICE ALITO: -- does the -- does
- 23 the Florida law apply to Uber?
- 24 MR. CLEMENT: Its definition would
- seem to apply to Uber, yes.

1 JUSTICE ALITO: So you've told us that 2 it's okay for your clients to discriminate on 3 the basis of viewpoint in the provision of email services or in allowing direct messages, 4 messages from one Facebook user to another on --5 6 on a private facility. 7 How about Uber discriminating on the basis of viewpoint with respect to people that 8 9 its drivers will pick up? 10 MR. CLEMENT: So I -- I think the way 11 that --12 JUSTICE ALITO: Is that okay? MR. CLEMENT: I don't think that's 13 14 okav. I don't think Uber is interested in doing 15 I think the way the statute would apply that. to Uber, just to make clear, is it really would 16 17 apply, like, on comments on the drivers or comments section on something like that if Uber 18 19 wants to just sort of -- and -- and on Etsy, I 20 think it's the same way. 21 You know, Etsy has an ability for you 2.2 to put comments on the seller and whether they 23 did a nice job or a bad job. And Etsy doesn't 24 want certain comments on that, and they want to 25 clean that up to keep it to be a better place

- for people to come and look at materials.

  So, when you think about the
- 3 applications of this statute to some of the
- 4 things that seem less obvious, it's really
- 5 focused on that expressive aspect of it.
- 6 But, obviously, the core of the
- 7 statute and the motivation for the legislation
- 8 and the examples that my friends from Florida
- 9 include in their own petition appendix are about
- 10 much more expressive activity by the YouTubes
- and the Facebooks of the world, excluding
- 12 certain speakers, and they want to override that
- 13 classic editorial decision.
- JUSTICE BARRETT: But, Mr. Clement,
- 15 that's cut -- one of the things that's hard for
- me about this case is let's posit that I agree
- 17 with you about Facebook and YouTube and those --
- 18 those core social media platforms.
- 19 Don't we have to consider these
- 20 questions Justice Alito is raising about DMs and
- 21 Uber and Etsy because we have to look at the
- 22 statute as a whole? And, I mean, we don't have
- 23 a lot of briefing on this, and this is a
- 24 sprawling statute and it makes me a little bit
- 25 nervous.

1 I'm not sure I agree with you about 2 DMs and -- and Gmail, just it -- it's not 3 obvious to me anyway that that -- that they would -- that they can't qualify as common 4 carriers. 5 6 MR. CLEMENT: Look, I agree, you don't 7 want to decide all of that today. 8 JUSTICE BARRETT: Yeah. MR. CLEMENT: But this is not here on 9 sort of final judgment. It's here on a 10 11 preliminary injunction. And the question is, 12 you know, do you want this law with all of these 13 unconstitutional applications enforced by every 14 Floridian, so every -- these provisions are 15 enforced by every Floridian being able to go 16 into court and get \$100,000 in civil penalties. 17 Now do you want that completely 18 antithetical law to the First Amendment to go 19 into effect while we sort out all these anterior 20 questions, or do you want it to be put on hold 21 while we can litigate all of this stuff, and if 2.2 it turns out there's a couple of applications 23 that are okay or somebody wants, you know, 24 briefing just on the question of whether direct 25 mail is -- is a common carrier, all that --

1	JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: And
2	JUSTICE BARRETT: Can we escape that
3	in this posture?
4	MR. CLEMENT: Absolutely you can
5	escape that in this posture. You affirm this
6	preliminary injunction which is in place. If
7	you want to, you can point to the clear
8	litigation judgment that Florida expressly made
9	below, which is we're not going to get into all
10	of that intermediate scrutiny stuff. We don't
11	want a record on that. We're going to put all
12	our eggs in the expressive activity basket, and
13	they could not have been more clear about that
14	below and in the Eleventh Circuit, and then you
15	say this law which has all of these First
16	Amendment problems, this wolf comes as a wolf,
17	we are going to put that on hold and then we can
18	sort out some of these tertiary questions.
19	JUSTICE ALITO: Well, if that's the
20	case, Mr. Clement, to what extent is it the
21	is it the result of your own litigation
22	decisions? You could have brought an as-applied
23	challenge limited to the two platforms that you
24	want to talk about, Facebook and YouTube.
25	But, instead, you brought a facial

- 1 challenge, and you claim that it's also 2 susceptible to analysis under overbreadth. 3 you had to -- to get a preliminary injunction, you had to show you had a probability of success 4 5 on your facial or overbreadth challenge. MR. CLEMENT: And we did in --6 7 JUSTICE ALITO: You can't now shift 8 and say let's -- you know, it was a good 9 preliminary injunction because it's fine as 10 applied to the platforms I want to talk about, 11 and let's forget about all the other platforms 12 that might be covered. MR. CLEMENT: Well, Justice Alito, 13 first of all, we -- we did all that and we won. 14 15 Second of all --16 JUSTICE ALITO: Did you bring an 17 as-applied challenge? 18 MR. CLEMENT. No, we didn't bring an 19 as-applied challenge because we think this --20 JUSTICE GORSUCH: So --21 MR. CLEMENT: -- we think this --
- 24 unconstitutional in all its applications.

2.2

23

JUSTICE GORSUCH: Exactly. And so

JUSTICE GORSUCH: So --

MR. CLEMENT: -- statute is

- 1 you -- you -- you suggested it could be sorted
- out on remand, but, on remand, it's still a
- 3 facial challenge, and -- and there is no --
- 4 MR. CLEMENT: It is still a facial
- 5 challenge, you're right.
- JUSTICE GORSUCH: And so, again, you
- 7 think all of the applications are
- 8 unconstitutional, right?
- 9 MR. CLEMENT: I -- I do because the
- 10 definitions are problematic, the terms --
- JUSTICE GORSUCH: So there's nothing
- 12 to sort out on remand. It's done. If you
- 13 should prevail in this -- on a -- on a
- 14 preliminary injunction here, I mean, for
- practical purposes, it's finished, and so there
- is no opportunity to sort out anything on
- 17 remand.
- 18 MR. CLEMENT: There's the whole
- 19 merits. What we've shown is a likelihood of
- 20 success on the merits. We haven't won on the
- 21 merits yet.
- JUSTICE GORSUCH: All or nothing.
- JUSTICE JACKSON: Can I try it another
- 24 way? I mean, I -- I asked you before what was
- 25 the standard, and now you're saying that you

- 1 think that all applications are
- 2 unconstitutional, which I think is your burden
- 3 to establish.
- 4 So, if we come up with some scenarios
- 5 in this context in which we can envision it not
- 6 being unconstitutional, why don't you lose?
- 7 MR. CLEMENT: First of all, that's not
- 8 the standard with all due respect. I mean, this
- 9 Court has never applied the Salerno standard in
- 10 a First Amendment case.
- 11 And this would be the worst First
- 12 Amendment case in this Court's history if you
- 13 started down that road because you can always
- 14 put in some provision into a statute that's
- innocuous and then you say, well, there's a
- 16 couple of fine things in there.
- 17 You look at it section by section and
- 18 these sections are pernicious from a First
- 19 Amendment standard, can't have content about a
- 20 political candidate. There's no constitutional
- 21 application to that.
- 22 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Thank you,
- 23 counsel.
- Just so I understand precisely, your
- 25 position is that the only issue before us is

- 1 whether or not the speech that is regulated
- 2 qualifies as -- not to beg the question -- the
- 3 expression that's before us is not speech?
- 4 MR. CLEMENT: I -- I think that's one
- 5 way to put it. Obviously, you have two
- 6 questions presented. You're going to be able to
- 7 decide whatever you think is fairly included in
- 8 those questions presented.
- 9 I'm just pointing out that as an
- 10 artifact of the way my friend's litigated this
- 11 case, you do not have a record on everything
- 12 that might be interesting for intermediate
- 13 scrutiny, and it's not my fault. It is based
- 14 precisely on their representations to the courts
- 15 below that they did not want to get into the
- intermediate scrutiny thing, they wanted to tee
- 17 up the expressive activity thing.
- 18 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: If -- if the
- 19 appropriate standard is not Salerno, could you
- 20 articulate what you think is the appropriate
- 21 standard?
- MR. CLEMENT: I think the -- the
- 23 appropriate standard is whether the First
- 24 Amendment -- the statute that implicates the
- 25 First Amendment has a plainly legitimate sweep.

1	CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Thank you.
2	Justice Thomas?
3	JUSTICE THOMAS: Could you again
4	explain to me why, if you win here, it does not
5	present a Section 230 problem for you?
6	MR. CLEMENT: If we win here, we avoid
7	Section 230 problems, I think, Your Honor, and
8	the reason is that 230 is a protection against
9	liability. It's a protection against liability
LO	because Congress wanted us to operate as
L1	publishers, and so it it it wanted us to
L2	exercise editorial discretion, and so it gave us
L3	liability protection.
L4	But liability protection and First
L5	Amendment status don't go hand in hand. I don't
L6	think the parade organizer in Hurley was
L7	responsible for the parade floats that go
L8	went into its parade. Historically, newsstands
L9	and others aren't responsible for the materials.
20	So so I don't think you have to
21	sort of say it's one or the other. I mean, I
22	think the 230 protection stands alone.
23	JUSTICE THOMAS: So what is it that
24	you are editing out that fits under Section 230?
2.5	MR. CLEMENT: So, in some of these

- 1 I mean, it depends on -- you know, in some
- 2 cases, it is terrorist material. In other
- 3 cases, it's kids that are telling other kids,
- 4 hey, you should do this Tide pod challenge. In
- 5 some cases, it's kids that are encouraging other
- 6 kids to commit suicide.
- 7 There's a whole bunch of stuff that we
- 8 think is, you know, offensive within the terms
- 9 of 230 that we're exercising our editorial
- 10 discretion to take out.
- 11 JUSTICE THOMAS: Well, but 230 does
- 12 not necessarily touch on offensive material. It
- touches on obscene, lewd, lascivious, filthy,
- excessively violent, harassing, or otherwise
- 15 objectionable. Do you think --
- MR. CLEMENT: It's that last one.
- 17 (Laughter.)
- 18 JUSTICE THOMAS: Well --
- MR. CLEMENT: I mean, we could have a
- 20 fine debate about, you know, the -- you know,
- 21 the last, you know, sort of -- you know, how
- 22 much of that --
- JUSTICE THOMAS: Right.
- 24 MR. CLEMENT: -- you -- you sort of --
- 25 you know, what -- what -- what's the Latin for

- 1 that, the company you keep and all of that. I
- 2 mean, we could have that fine debate in some
- 3 other case, but we would certainly take the
- 4 position that we're protected in those judgments
- 5 under 230.
- 6 JUSTICE THOMAS: Well, I think you'd
- 7 make that, the ejusdem doctrine, do a lot of
- 8 work. But let's put that aside.
- 9 Tell me again exactly what the
- 10 expressive conduct is that, for example, YouTube
- 11 engages in when it -- it -- it -- or, I'm sorry,
- 12 Twitter deplatforms someone. What is the
- 13 expressive conduct and to whom is it being
- 14 communicated?
- MR. CLEMENT: So, when they, you know,
- let's say deplatform somebody for violating
- 17 their terms of use or for continuing to post
- 18 material that violates the terms of use, then
- 19 they are sending a message to that person and to
- 20 their broader audience that that material --
- JUSTICE THOMAS: How would you know
- 22 someone's been deplatformed? Is there a notice?
- MR. CLEMENT: Typically, you do get a
- 24 notice of that, and there's a provision --
- JUSTICE THOMAS: No, I mean the

- 1 audience, the other people.
- MR. CLEMENT: Well, they're going to
- 3 see that they're not there anymore. They're no
- 4 longer in their feed --
- 5 JUSTICE THOMAS: Well, but the --
- 6 MR. CLEMENT: -- and, presumably --
- 7 JUSTICE THOMAS: -- the message could
- 8 be they didn't want to be there anymore.
- 9 They're tired of it. They're exhausted.
- 10 MR. CLEMENT: Well, and -- and -- and
- 11 here's the thing. I mean, you know, that --
- 12 that message is then going to be carried over
- in -- you know, this isn't just about who gets
- 14 excised from the platform. It's all about what
- 15 material people see on their individualized sort
- of -- you know, when they tap into Facebook or
- 17 Twitter or -- or -- or YouTube.
- 18 And what they're not going to see is
- 19 they're not going to see material that violates
- 20 the terms of use. They're not going to see a
- 21 bunch of material that -- that glorifies
- terrorism. They're not going to see a bunch of
- 23 material that glorifies suicide.
- JUSTICE THOMAS: Is there any
- 25 distinction between action or editing that takes

- 1 place as a result of an algorithm as opposed to
- 2 an individual?
- 3 MR. CLEMENT: I don't think so, Your
- 4 Honor. These algorithms don't spring from the
- 5 ether. They are essentially computer programs
- 6 designed by humans to try to do some of this
- 7 editorial function and it's --
- 8 JUSTICE THOMAS: Well, but what do you
- 9 do with a deep-learning algorithm which teaches
- 10 itself and has very little human intervention?
- 11 MR. CLEMENT: You still had to have
- 12 somebody who kind of created the universe that
- that algorithm is going to look at.
- 14 JUSTICE THOMAS: So who's speaking
- then, the algorithm or the person?
- 16 MR. CLEMENT: I think, you know, the
- 17 question in these cases would be that Facebook
- is speaking, that YouTube is speaking, because
- 19 they're the ones that are using these devices to
- 20 run their editorial discretion across these
- 21 massive volumes.
- 22 And the reason they're doing this,
- and, of course, they're supplementing it with
- lots and lots of humans as well, but the reason
- 25 they have to use the algorithms, of course, is

- 1 the volume of material on these sites, which
- 2 just shows you the volume of --
- JUSTICE THOMAS: Okay.
- 4 MR. CLEMENT: -- editorial discretion.
- 5 JUSTICE THOMAS: Yeah, and, finally --
- 6 I'm sorry to keep going, Mr. Clement -- exactly
- 7 what are they saying?
- 8 MR. CLEMENT: So --
- 9 JUSTICE THOMAS: What is the algorithm
- 10 saying? I don't know. I'm not on any, you
- 11 know. But what is it saying?
- MR. CLEMENT: It's saying --
- 13 JUSTICE THOMAS: Is it a consistent
- 14 message? What -- I mean, usually -- when we had
- 15 Hurley, the -- it was their parade and they
- 16 didn't want certain people in their parade. You
- 17 understood that.
- What are they saying here?
- 19 MR. CLEMENT: They are saying things
- 20 like Facebook doesn't want pro-terrorist stuff
- 21 on our site.
- JUSTICE THOMAS: I didn't -- I'm talk
- 23 -- we're not talking about terrorists here.
- MR. CLEMENT: Well --
- 25 JUSTICE THOMAS: Those aren't --

- 1 terrorists aren't complaining about it.
- 2 MR. CLEMENT: Well, I think, actually,
- 3 we are talking about terrorism here because I
- 4 think, if these laws go into effect --
- 5 JUSTICE THOMAS: But I thought that
- 6 was a crime. I mean, under -- they -- as I
- 7 understood Florida, they said that they -- they
- 8 -- one provision in the Act says they -- nothing
- 9 that's inconsistent with Section 230. It seems
- 10 to me that it is consistent with Section 230.
- MR. CLEMENT: So, Your Honor, it is --
- 12 you know, there are things like, if -- if you
- have a video on how to build a bomb to blow up,
- 14 you know, a church or something, maybe that's
- prohibited by sort of, you know, the -- that --
- 16 that kind of illegality provision. But, if
- there's something glorifying the attacks of
- October 7, and one of these companies wants to
- 19 keep that off of the sites, or is there
- 20 something on there that they want to -- that
- 21 sort of glorifies sort of, you know -- sort of
- 22 incredibly thin teenage bulimia and they want to
- 23 keep that off their site, they -- they have the
- 24 right to do that. And that's an important
- message.

1 And just like in Hurley, the message 2 that they are sending is a message about what 3 they exclude from their -- their forum. 4 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Justice Alito? JUSTICE ALITO: There's a lot of new 5 6 terminology bouncing around in these cases, and 7 just out of curiosity, one of them is "content moderation." Could you define that for me? 8 MR. CLEMENT: So, you know, look, 9 content moderation to me is just editorial 10 11 discretion. It's a way to take the -- the --12 the -- all of the content that is potentially posted on the site, exercise editorial 13 discretion in order to make it less offensive to 14 15 users and advertisers. 16 JUSTICE ALITO: Is it -- is it 17 anything more than a euphemism for censorship? Let me just ask you this. If somebody in 1917 18 was prosecuted and thrown in jail for opposing 19 20 U.S. participation in World War I, was that content moderation? 21 2.2 MR. CLEMENT: So, if the government's 23 doing it, then content moderation might be a 24 euphemism for censorship. If a private party is 25 doing it, content moderation is a euphemism for

- 1 editorial discretion. And there's a fundamental
- 2 difference between the two.
- JUSTICE ALITO: For editorial
- 4 discretion, are you affirmatively saying --
- 5 never mind. No -- no further questions.
- 6 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Justice
- 7 Sotomayor?
- JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: Mr. Clement, I'm
- 9 -- I'm now sort of trying to take all of this
- in, and I think that I came into this very
- 11 differently than you have. I came into this
- thinking there are different functionalities by
- 13 websites. So some host news, like the news feed
- 14 in Facebook. Some host -- like Justice Barrett
- was talking about and others, Gmail or -- where
- they're just letting people contact each other,
- 17 direct messaging.
- 18 And I was thinking that since I think
- 19 rightly this law seems to cover all of that,
- 20 that it's so broad, how -- but it might have
- 21 some plainly legitimate sweep, it might be okay
- 22 to require direct messaging to give you notice,
- 23 to be consistent, to pay attention to 30-day
- 24 registration. Some of these provisions might be
- 25 okay for those functions.

1 But you're saying to me that's not 2 true. Can you articulate very succinctly why you think, at this stage on a facial challenge, 3 that we can say there is no plainly legitimate 4 sweep, that this particular law, after we sort 5 it all out below, will still survive? 6 7 Now I think the court below said -and you try to take that out from Justice 8 9 Kagan's answer -- maybe I don't want to, okay, is it because this law was passed with viewpoint 10 11 discrimination in mind? That's what the court 12 below said. The -- the -- the court 13 MR. CLEMENT: below said that. And that would be a sufficient 14 15 basis to take out the whole law. 16 The law is also shot through with 17 content-based provisions. I think that's enough to take out the whole law. It also -- the 18 19 entire law, every provision we challenge is speaker-based in its limited reach. 20 21 And what this Court's cases clearly 2.2 say, including NIFLA, which my recollection is 23 was a facial challenge, says that when you look 24 at speaker-based distinctions, you can then open 25 the lens a little bit and see if those

- 1 speaker-based provisions are infused with
- viewpoint discrimination or other discriminatory
- 3 influences.
- 4 And if you do that here -- I mean, you
- 5 don't have to get past the governor's official
- 6 signing statement to say -- to understand that
- 7 -- the restrictions on this statute. I mean,
- 8 you know, it -- it's one thing to say, well,
- 9 they're only getting the big companies. But,
- when the governor is telling you we're going
- 11 after the viewpoints of the -- of the Silicon
- 12 Valley oligarchs, then all of a sudden, limiting
- it to the biggest companies starts to tell you
- that this is targeted like a laser beam at the
- 15 companies that they don't like the editorial
- 16 discretion that was being exercised.
- 17 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Justice Kagan?
- JUSTICE KAGAN: I mean, let me ask the
- 19 -- the same kind of question in a different way.
- 20 Suppose that, instead of this law, you -- you --
- 21 you had a law that was focused, it excluded the
- 22 kind of curated news feeds, where your argument
- about editorial discretion sort of leaps out.
- So this law didn't touch those. But
- it said, you know, with respect to Gmail and

- direct messaging and Venmo and Dropbox and Uber,
- 2 with respect to all of those things, a site
- 3 could not discriminate on the basis of
- 4 viewpoint, just as maybe a site couldn't
- 5 discriminate on the basis of race or sex or
- 6 sexual orientation or what have you. So it just
- 7 added viewpoint to the list.
- 8 Wouldn't that be all right?
- 9 MR. CLEMENT: I actually don't think
- 10 it would be all right because all of those
- 11 things are still in the expressive business.
- 12 And I also think --
- 13 JUSTICE KAGAN: Well, do you think
- 14 that -- you know, suppose it didn't say
- viewpoint; it just said you can't discriminate
- on the basis of, you know, all the usual
- 17 protected characteristics. Is that all right?
- MR. CLEMENT: That would probably be
- 19 all right, but it wouldn't save the whole
- 20 statute from being --
- 21 JUSTICE KAGAN: Well, so this is just
- 22 on this statute. You know, it's just -- it's a
- 23 -- it's a statute about -- it excludes YouTube
- and Facebook, you know, the Facebook news feed.
- MR. CLEMENT: Right.

1 JUSTICE KAGAN: But it's just direct 2 messaging, Venmo, all of those kinds of things. 3 And it just said, you -- you know, we're not 4 going to let you exclude on the basis of race and sex and we're also not going to let you 5 6 exclude people on the basis of viewpoint. 7 MR. CLEMENT: So, I mean, the first part of that statute I don't think my clients 8 9 would even challenge. I mean, whether there's 10 an abstract First Amendment right to have the 11 black authors table for black history month --12 JUSTICE KAGAN: And also on the basis 13 of viewpoint. 14 MR. CLEMENT: When -- when you throw 15 viewpoint into there, then I think, you know, 16 I'd have to ask my clients whether they'd 17 challenge that statute. But, obviously, that's 18 not the -- the -- the statute we have here. 19 And if you think about --20 JUSTICE KAGAN: I guess what I'm 21 saying is in part it is the statute you have 2.2 here. 23 MR. CLEMENT: I -- I -- I --JUSTICE KAGAN: And that's -- and --24 25 and -- and -- and that gives you your plainly

- 1 legitimate sweep, because all it's saying is
- 2 that when you run a service where you're not
- 3 speaking, unlike in Facebook feed, where your
- 4 editorial discretion argument is good because
- 5 the -- the -- the platform is engaged in speech
- 6 activities.
- Well, when you're running Venmo,
- 8 you're not engaged in speech activities. And
- 9 so, when a state says to you, you know what, you
- 10 have to serve everybody, irrespective of whether
- 11 you like their political opinions or not, then
- it seems you have a much less good argument, but
- 13 this statute also says that, doesn't it?
- MR. CLEMENT: Not really, Justice
- 15 Kagan. And I think we're in danger of losing
- 16 sight of the actual statute. So let me take you
- 17 to Petition Appendix 97A and the definition of
- 18 "censor" used in the statute.
- 19 It says, "censor includes any action
- 20 taken by a social media platform to delete,
- 21 regulate, restrict, edit, alter, inhibit the
- 22 publication or republication of, suspend a right
- 23 to post, remove, or post an addendum to any
- 24 content or material posted by a user. The term
- also includes actions to inhibit the ability of

- the user to be viewable or to interact with
- 2 another user of the social media platform."
- 3 Censor is all about the expressive
- 4 activity. Post-prioritization is all about it.
- 5 It specifically talks about a news feed, a feed,
- 6 a view, search results, and they give
- 7 essentially political candidates and
- 8 journalistic enterprises a right to sort of
- 9 non-discrimination, so they're going to pop up
- 10 there even though, like, I have no interest in
- 11 politics, I just want to look at, you know,
- 12 feeds about Italian bicycles, and I'm still
- going to get these Florida politicians popping
- in there? That's what the statute does.
- 15 And then you go through, shadow ban.
- 16 Shadow ban's not about any of the things you're
- 17 talking about. Shadow ban is all about content.
- 18 And then we go to journalistic enterprises.
- 19 They get pride of place.
- 20 Then we talk about
- 21 post-prioritization. That's all about how you
- 22 display the content. So like may -- maybe the
- 30-day provision, you could sort of say that,
- 24 well, that applies to, like, Uber, but even
- 25 then, if Uber wants to change its comment

- 1 policies because all of a sudden, you know, they
- did one thing to try to, you know, deal with one
- 3 set of issues and then a problem comes up and
- 4 there's a whole bunch of, like, people using the
- 5 comments in a really rude way, like, why
- 6 couldn't they change their editorial policy on
- 7 the -- on the comments? I just don't understand
- 8 it.
- 9 And then all of the duty-to-explain
- 10 provisions. The duty-to-explain provisions are
- 11 all driven by decisions to exclude conduct --
- 12 content. And that happens a billion times a
- quarter at YouTube. So that's a crushing blow.
- 14 It has nothing to do with some of the other
- things you're talking about.
- 16 JUSTICE KAGAN: Thank you.
- 17 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Justice
- 18 Gorsuch?
- 19 Justice Kavanaugh?
- 20 JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: Just pick up on
- the word "censorship" because I think it's being
- 22 used in lots of different ways.
- So, when the government censors, when
- the government excludes speech from the public
- 25 square, that is obviously a violation of the

- 1 First Amendment.
- When a private individual or private
- 3 entity makes decisions about what to include and
- 4 what to exclude, that's protected generally
- 5 editorial discretion, even though you could view
- 6 the private entity's decision to exclude
- 7 something as "private censorship."
- 8 MR. CLEMENT: Absolutely. That was
- 9 the whole thrust of this Court's decision in
- 10 Halleck. And I suppose the Hurley case might
- 11 have been a completely different case if that
- was an official City of Boston parade and the
- 13 City of Boston decided to exclude the group.
- 14 The whole reason that case came down
- the way it did unanimously is because it was a
- 16 private organization exercising its First
- 17 Amendment right to say we don't want GLIB in our
- 18 parade.
- 19 JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: How does -- how
- 20 does 303 fit into that?
- MR. CLEMENT: Well, I think 303 is
- just further evidence that, you know -- I mean,
- you know, obviously, I think 303, where 303 is
- 24 most relevant is that, you know, Colorado in
- 25 that case tried to rely on FAIR, much the way my

- 1 friends here rely on FAIR, and this Court made
- 2 clear in 303 Creative, no, it doesn't work that
- 3 way. You know, this is expressive activity.
- 4 And -- and -- and so -- you know, and
- 5 the fact that my friend's best case is FAIR, I
- 6 think, just shows how radical this statute is,
- 7 because this targets expressive activity in its
- 8 core.
- 9 If the Solomon amendment said to the
- 10 law schools, you have to give the military equal
- 11 time in the classroom, I think the case would
- have been 9/0 the other way. And that's
- 13 essentially what the -- what -- what Florida is
- 14 trying to do here.
- JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: And then, on the
- 16 procedural posture, I think this is important to
- 17 try to understand what's exactly before us, and
- 18 you've gotten questions on this, but I want to
- 19 nail it down for my -- my benefit, which is you
- said that they came in and opposed a PI solely
- on the ground that what was involved here was
- 22 not expressive activity or speech but, instead,
- 23 conduct.
- 24 Is that accurate?
- 25 MR. CLEMENT: That -- that -- that's

- 1 accurate. It came up in the context of how much
- 2 discovery we were going to have before we had
- 3 the preliminary injunction hearing, and in that
- 4 context, the State says, look, we -- we're going
- 5 to sort of, you know, kind of rest on this kind
- 6 of threshold question, as my friend said, and
- 7 that we'll limit discovery on both sides and
- 8 then, in the Eleventh Circuit, it was even more
- 9 clear because, in the Eleventh Circuit, the
- 10 position of the State of Florida was like, we're
- 11 not going to really engage on intermediate
- 12 scrutiny at all. We're -- we're putting all our
- 13 eggs in the expressive eggs basket.
- JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: So, if we think
- 15 that the statute does target expressive activity
- in some respects and we affirm in this case,
- what is left to Justice Gorsuch's question?
- 18 What's left to happen -- that just means it
- 19 can't go in place for the next year or two until
- 20 a final judgment. What -- what will happen in
- 21 the litigation?
- MR. CLEMENT: So there'll be
- 23 litigation on the merits. I don't even think
- 24 we're past the point where we could amend, so if
- 25 this Court tells us we sure better have an

- 1 as-applied challenge in there, I suppose we
- 2 could do that.
- 3 But the point is the litigation will
- 4 go on. There will be discovery. Unless --
- 5 unless Florida decides at that point that the
- 6 writing's on the wall and it tries to pass a
- 7 more narrow statute, but, otherwise, there would
- 8 be discovery, there would be, you know,
- 9 essentially, the whole nine yards. But, in --
- in the interim, I -- and -- and, you know, I
- just can't emphasize enough particularly that
- 12 \$100,000 civil penalty provision.
- JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: All that's before
- 14 us then is what should happen in the interim
- 15 before final judgment and it comes back to us
- 16 potentially a year or two from now. Should it
- 17 be in effect or not be effect until it comes
- 18 back to us?
- 19 MR. CLEMENT: Yeah.
- JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: Correct?
- MR. CLEMENT: If it comes back to us.
- 22 Yes.
- JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: If it came back to
- 24 us or it goes to the court of appeals. And what
- 25 will happen -- I mean, you've alluded to it, but

- 1 what will happen in that year, do you think?
- 2 Because I don't think we've heard much about
- 3 exactly what you're concerned about.
- In other words, you're very concerned
- 5 about this. That's obvious. But what -- what
- 6 are the specifics of that?
- 7 MR. CLEMENT: Well, I -- I mean,
- 8 honestly, if this statute goes into effect, we'd
- 9 sort of have to fundamentally change our
- 10 business models, and I think each company is
- 11 going to make their own judgment about how
- 12 they'd come into compliance.
- I think, you know, part of the irony
- 14 here is that as to one -- you know, they -- they
- say this is going to promote speech, but they
- 16 allow us to discriminate on the basis of content
- as long as we do it consistently.
- 18 So, you know, what -- what we might do
- 19 in the interim, at least some of these companies
- 20 might do is, you know, just, like, well, let's
- 21 do only puppy dogs at least in Florida until we
- 22 can get this straightened out because that's the
- one way that -- because, you know, these same
- 24 companies are getting hammered by people that
- 25 say we're not doing enough to keep material

- 1 that's harmful to children off of these sites.
- 2 And yet these laws make it impossible
- for us to keep material that's -- that's harmful
- 4 to children off of our sites unless we take so
- 5 much material off of our sites that nobody can
- 6 say that we're not being inconsistent or not
- 7 discriminating. And in Texas, it's viewpoint
- 8 discrimination.
- 9 JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: Could you just say
- a word about the word "consistency," what you
- 11 think that entails?
- 12 MR. CLEMENT: I have no idea. And one
- of the other cases -- you know, arguments we
- 14 have in this case, it's just not part of the
- 15 preliminary injunction you have before us is a
- 16 vagueness challenge.
- 17 And I think, when you're targeting
- 18 editorial discretion, to put a consistency
- 19 requirement -- I mean, if you tried to tell The
- 20 New York Times to be -- I mean, I don't -- I
- 21 haven't met anybody who thinks The New York
- 22 Times is a hundred percent consistent in its
- 23 editorial policy.
- But, if you put a state action
- 25 requirement that they editorialize consistently

- or somebody can sue them for \$1,000 or the state
- 2 can haul them into court, I think that would be
- 3 the most obvious First Amendment violation in
- 4 the world.
- 5 JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: Thank you.
- 6 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Justice
- 7 Barrett?
- 8 JUSTICE BARRETT: I have a practical
- 9 question. So let's assume that I agree with you
- 10 about YouTube and Facebook feeds, news feeds,
- 11 but that I don't want to say that Facebook
- 12 Marketplace or Gmail or DMs are not within the
- 13 statute's plainly legitimate sweep.
- If I -- if I ask you the question can
- you still win, I know that you'll say yes, but
- 16 how would I -- how would we write that opinion
- 17 given the standard --
- 18 MR. CLEMENT: Well, I --
- JUSTICE BARRETT: -- without having to
- 20 canvass whether all of those things would be
- 21 within the plainly legitimate sweep?
- MR. CLEMENT: Honestly, I'm not sure
- 23 -- well, I'm not sure you could reach that
- 24 result without definitively holding that that
- 25 stuff is within the plainly legitimate sweep of

- 1 the statute. You don't have the record for that
- 2 in part because of litigation decisions that
- 3 were made by the State of Florida. So I think
- 4 what you would do is you would affirm the
- 5 preliminary injunction, and then you would
- 6 perhaps lament the fact that the record here is
- 7 somewhat stunted, and then you would make clear
- 8 that there might be a possibility to modify the
- 9 preliminary injunction on -- on remand.
- Now, at that point, I think, when the
- 11 lower court sort of sees all the details about
- 12 how these things actually operate, they might
- 13 not have the same skepticism that you're
- 14 starting with. But I think there's lots of ways
- to write the decision that keeps the -- you
- 16 know, and, again, what's -- what's in place
- 17 right now is a preliminary injunction for the
- 18 benefit of my clients.
- So people that haven't sued yet, I
- 20 mean, you know, the statute in theory could
- 21 apply to them. But my clients have the benefit
- 22 of a preliminary injunction while this
- 23 litigation goes forward. And, obviously,
- 24 anything this Court says in its opinion that
- 25 suggests what the future course of that

- 1 litigation should be, you know, is -- is going
- 2 to be powerfully, you know, effective in terms
- of how this case gets litigated in the district
- 4 court.
- 5 JUSTICE BARRETT: Thank you.
- 6 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Justice
- 7 Jackson?
- JUSTICE JACKSON: So, Mr. Clement, I
- 9 just want to push back for a minute on the
- 10 private versus public distinction. I mean, I --
- I think we agree that the government couldn't
- 12 make editorial judgments about who can speak and
- what they can say in the public square.
- But what do you do with the fact that
- now, today, the Internet is the public square?
- 16 And I appreciate that these companies are
- 17 private companies, but if the speech now is
- occurring in this environment, why wouldn't the
- 19 same concerns about censorship apply?
- 20 MR. CLEMENT: So two reasons, Your
- 21 Honor. I mean, one is I really do think that
- 22 censorship is only something the government can
- do to you. And if it's not the government, you
- 24 really shouldn't label it "censorship." It's
- 25 just a category mistake.

1 But here's the second thing: You 2 would worry about this if websites, like the 3 cable companies in Turner, had some sort of bottleneck control where they could limit your 4 ability to go to some other website and engage 5 6 in speech. So, if the way websites worked was 7 somehow that if you signed up for Facebook, then Facebook could limit you to only 19 other 8 websites and Facebook could dictate which 20 9 websites you saw, then this would be a lot more 10 11 like Turner. 12 But, as this Court said in Reno in 13 1997, when it was confronted with an argument 14 about the then-fresh Turner decision, this Court 15 basically said the Internet is like the opposite 16 of Turner. You know, there's so much 17 information out there, it's so relatively easy to have a new website come on and, like, reality 18 19 tells us that, right? You know, like, X is not what Twitter was, and TikTok came out of 20 21 nowhere. And --2.2 JUSTICE JACKSON: All right. I think 23 I get your point. 24 MR. CLEMENT: Yeah. 25 JUSTICE JACKSON: Let me just ask you

- 1 about the illegitimate sweep point.
- 2 So what is illegitimate about a
- 3 government regulation that attempts to require
- 4 these companies to apply consistently their
- 5 procedures? I don't -- I guess I don't
- 6 understand why the enforcement of sort of
- 7 antidiscrimination principles is illegitimate.
- 8 MR. CLEMENT: So consistency when what
- 9 is being regulated -- as a -- as a government
- 10 mandate when what is being regulated is
- 11 expressive activity is, I think, a clear First
- 12 Amendment violation. And I don't think -- I
- mean, you know, some of these judgments are very
- 14 tricky judgments. You know, okay, well, we --
- we're going to -- we're going to take some of
- 16 the stuff sort of celebrating October 7 off, but
- 17 we want to have some --
- 18 JUSTICE JACKSON: All right. What
- 19 about a straightforward one, right? I
- 20 understood that one of these was no candidate
- 21 can be deplatformed. That seems pretty
- 22 straightforward.
- MR. CLEMENT: Right. And I think it's
- 24 straight --
- JUSTICE JACKSON: Right, and so why

2 principles with no candidate if some	ody is a	ı

isn't that enforcing antidiscrimination

- 3 candidate for office, they can't be
- 4 deplatformed?

1

- 5 MR. CLEMENT: So that means they can't
- 6 be deplatformed no matter how many times they
- 7 violate my client's terms of use, no matter how
- 8 horrible their conduct, no matter how
- 9 misrepresenting they are in their speech. We
- 10 still have to carry it and not just have to
- 11 carry it, but under this statute, we have to
- 12 give it pride of place.
- 13 And it doesn't take much to register
- 14 as a candidate in Florida. And so this gives a
- license to anybody, even if they're, you know,
- somebody who's only going to poll, you know,
- 17 2 percent in their local precinct, they can post
- 18 anything they want, they can cause us to
- 19 fundamentally change our editorial policies and
- 20 have to ignore our -- our terms of use where --
- JUSTICE JACKSON: Thank you.
- 22 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Thank you,
- 23 counsel.
- 24 General Prelogar.

1	ORAL ARGUMENT OF GEN. ELIZABETH B. PRELOGAR
2	FOR THE UNITED STATES, AS AMICUS CURIAE,
3	SUPPORTING THE RESPONDENTS
4	GENERAL PRELOGAR: Mr. Chief Justice,
5	and may it please the Court:
6	The First Amendment protects entities
7	that curate, arrange, and present other people's
8	words and images in expressive compilations. As
9	this Court's cases have have held, those
10	principles cover newspaper editors, parade
11	sponsors, and web designers. It also covers
12	social media platforms. Those platforms shape
13	and present collections of content on their
14	websites, and that inherently expressive
15	activity is protected by the First Amendment.
16	That doesn't mean, though, that every
17	business that transmits speech can claim First
18	Amendment protection for that conduct. For
19	example, telephone and delivery companies that
20	carry speech from point A to point B aren't
21	shielded by the First Amendment when they
22	provide that service. But that's because
23	they're not producing any expression of their
24	own. It's not because there's some kind of
25	common carrier or communications company

- 1 exception to the First Amendment.
- 2 None of this is to say that social
- 3 media platforms are immune from government
- 4 regulation. And governments at every level
- 5 obviously have an important interest in
- 6 facilitating communication and the free exchange
- 7 of ideas. But, in promoting that interest,
- 8 governments have to stay within the bounds of
- 9 the First Amendment. And these state laws which
- 10 restrict the speech of the platforms to enhance
- 11 the relative voice of certain users don't
- 12 withstand constitutional scrutiny.
- I welcome the Court's questions.
- 14 JUSTICE THOMAS: Normally, you are
- 15 defending regulations. But are you -- if -- if
- 16 -- if the U.S. Government did exactly what these
- 17 Petitioners -- Respondents are doing, would that
- 18 be government speech?
- 19 GENERAL PRELOGAR: So, if I'm
- 20 understanding the hypothetical correctly,
- Justice Thomas, if you're suggesting that the
- 22 government itself would open a forum and allow
- users to post messages on that, you know, I
- think that that would implicate First Amendment
- 25 principles because the -- because the government

- 1 might create -- be creating something like a
- 2 public forum where it would itself be bound by
- 3 the Constitution.
- I don't think that that would all
- 5 necessarily qualify as the government's own
- 6 speech.
- 7 JUSTICE THOMAS: But --
- 8 GENERAL PRELOGAR: But the critical
- 9 difference here, of course, is that these
- 10 platforms are private parties. They're not
- 11 bound by the First Amendment as an initial
- 12 matter.
- JUSTICE THOMAS: The -- Mr. Clement
- said the difference is that if the government
- does it, it is censoring. If a private party
- 16 does it, it is -- I forget -- content
- 17 moderation. These euphemisms bypass me
- 18 sometimes. But -- or elude me. The -- do you
- 19 agree with that distinction?
- 20 GENERAL PRELOGAR: Yes. I mean, the
- 21 -- the critical difference is that, as Justice
- 22 Kavanaugh observed, the government's bound by
- the First Amendment. And so, if it were to, for
- 24 example, dictate what kind of speech has to
- 25 appear and in what order, you know, that -- that

1 could create a First Amendment violation. 2 But, here, it's the private platforms 3 themselves that are making that expressive choice. And our recognition here is that 4 they're creating their expressive -- their own 5 6 expressive product in doing so. 7 JUSTICE THOMAS: Now --GENERAL PRELOGAR: These are websites 8 9 that are featuring text elements, speech 10 elements, photos, videos, and the platforms, 11 which are private parties not bound by the 12 Constitution, are deciding how they want that to 13 look, what content to put on it and in what 14 order. That's an inherently expressive 15 activity. 16 JUSTICE THOMAS: What are they saying? 17 GENERAL PRELOGAR: So it depends on the platform, the -- the various value judgments 18 19 that are embodied in its content moderation 20 standards, you know. The -- the -- I think there's a wide variety in the kind of content 21 2.2 that the platforms deem objectionable, the kind of content they think might be harmful or will 23 24 drive away users and advertisers. There's no 25 one single message that each platform is

- 1 conveying.
- 2 But I guess, if you wanted to look at
- 3 the lowest common denominator, you know, at the
- 4 very least, it seems like their content
- 5 moderation policies embody a judgment of this is
- 6 material we think might be of interest to our
- 7 users or that the users will find interesting
- 8 and -- and worthy of looking at.
- 9 So it's a lot like the parade in
- 10 Hurley in that circumstance, where the Court
- 11 specifically said maybe you're lenient, you let
- 12 a lot of content in, you can't identify a single
- discernable message from the parade as a whole,
- 14 but there is still the baseline of the parade
- sponsors signaling this is something that's
- 16 worthy of looking at in my parade.
- 17 JUSTICE GORSUCH: General, you
- indicate in your brief that NetChoice sometimes
- 19 errs by suggesting that the dissemination of
- 20 speech is always expressive activity. And I
- just wonder how we're supposed to deal with that
- 22 fact if I agree with you in this facial
- 23 challenge context and particularly when many of
- 24 the platforms, while reserving the right to
- 25 prohibit various kinds of posts, most of which

- 1 are consistent with Section 230, also say and
- 2 guarantee users "a right to express their ideas
- and opinions freely." I'm quoting from one of
- 4 them. And even if the platform disagrees and
- 5 they say that they "do not endorse and are not
- 6 responsible" -- again, I'm quoting from some of
- 7 these terms of service -- sure sounds a lot like
- 8 conduit, doesn't it?
- 9 GENERAL PRELOGAR: So I think there is
- 10 a big difference between a pure conduit, the
- 11 kind of company that is, you know, quite
- 12 literally engaged in carrying speech,
- transmitting it, whether that's across the
- 14 telephone wires or via telegraph or on a
- delivery truck like UPS and FedEx, a big
- 16 difference between that kind of conduct --
- 17 conduit and what the platforms are doing here,
- 18 because they're not just literally facilitating
- 19 users' ability to communicate with other users.
- 20 Instead, they're taking that and arranging it
- 21 and excluding it.
- JUSTICE GORSUCH: But some of them are
- 23 promising that they're not going to interfere,
- and they're promising you get to express your
- views freely and openly, and they're promising

- that they -- that -- and they're representing,
- 2 rather, that your views don't represent theirs
- 3 and everybody understands that.
- 4 And those -- those are their terms of
- 5 service. And -- and this is a facial challenge
- 6 again, and I'm -- I -- I just think
- 7 separating the wheat from the chaff here is
- 8 pretty difficult.
- 9 Can you help us with that?
- 10 GENERAL PRELOGAR: Sure. And, you
- 11 know, I think looking at their terms of service,
- 12 I -- it's certainly true that many of the
- 13 platforms have generally indicated that they
- 14 welcome a wide variety of views, but it would be
- incorrect to say that they're holding themselves
- out as forums for all possible speech.
- 17 Those same terms of service contain
- 18 the kind of editorial policies that are at issue
- 19 here. And the -- the state laws are narrowly
- 20 targeted on the kind of speech the platforms
- 21 want to include. So --
- JUSTICE GORSUCH: Yes, I --
- 23 GENERAL PRELOGAR: -- it wouldn't be
- 24 implicated in --
- 25 JUSTICE GORSUCH: -- I acknowledge

- 1 that their terms of service also include the
- 2 right to exclude certain -- certain speech, but
- 3 those are usually like the Section 230 things,
- 4 the way they discuss it, the lewd, lascivious,
- 5 obscene, the blah, blah, and after that,
- 6 they do seem to promise a whole lot of latitude.
- 7 And when you look at classic common
- 8 carriers, it's very similar. They don't give up
- 9 the right to exclude certain -- certain
- 10 activities or speech that might be detrimental
- 11 to their business or that might be otherwise
- 12 regulated. That -- that holds true for
- 13 telegraphs. It holds true for telephones even.
- But, beyond that, bare minimum,
- they're open to all comers, and that seems to be
- 16 how a lot of them are representing themselves to
- 17 the public at least.
- 18 GENERAL PRELOGAR: The key difference,
- 19 though, with common carriers, the kinds of
- 20 industries that have traditionally been
- 21 regulated, those in the transportation sector,
- 22 railroads, some of the communications companies
- and so forth, is that they're not creating any
- 24 kind of expressive speech product in providing
- 25 their service, and so government regulation that

1 says don't discriminate based on content --2 JUSTICE GORSUCH: Well, the telegraph 3 companies argued just the opposite back in the day --4 GENERAL PRELOGAR: But I think that 5 6 those claims failed --7 JUSTICE GORSUCH: -- and they lost. GENERAL PRELOGAR: -- because, 8 9 although they are transmitting the messages, 10 they aren't themselves creating any speech on 11 the side. 12 JUSTICE GORSUCH: Oh, they said they 13 They -- in fact, they curated a lot of 14 the speech or tried to, including political 15 speech which they didn't agree with. 16 GENERAL PRELOGAR: I think it's wrong 17 to call that curation. It's certainly true they tried to adopt certain discriminatory 18 19 policies --JUSTICE GORSUCH: Well, whatever --20 whatever euphemism one wishes to choose. 21 2.2 GENERAL PRELOGAR: But they weren't 23 taking that speech out and putting it into a

compilation that's expressive. That's the

24

25

difference here.

1	JUSTICE GORSUCH: On on that
2	GENERAL PRELOGAR: This is a a
3	JUSTICE GORSUCH: Okay, okay. So
4	GENERAL PRELOGAR: Yeah.
5	JUSTICE GORSUCH: if they're not
6	if the if the expression of the user is
7	theirs because they curate it, where does that
8	leave Section 230? Because the protection
9	there, as I understood it and Justice Thomas
LO	was making this point was that Section 230
L1	says we're not going to treat you as publishers
L2	so long as you are not it's not your
L3	communication in whole or in part is what the
L4	definition says.
L5	And if it's now their communication in
L6	part, do they lose their 230 protections?
L7	GENERAL PRELOGAR: No, because I think
L8	it's important to distinguish between two
L9	different types of speech. There are the
20	individual user posts on these platforms, and
21	that's what 230 says that the platforms can't be
22	held liable for.
23	The kind of speech that we think is
24	protected here under the First Amendment is not
2.5	each individual post of the user but, instead.

- 1 the way that the platform shapes that expression
- 2 by compiling it, exercising this kind of
- 3 filtering function, choosing to exclude none of
- 4 those things above --
- 5 JUSTICE GORSUCH: Let me interrupt you
- 6 there, I'm sorry, but -- but I understand it's
- 7 not their communication in whole, but it's --
- 8 why isn't it their communication in part if it
- 9 -- if it's part of this larger mosaic of
- 10 editorialized discretion and the whole feel of
- 11 the website?
- 12 GENERAL PRELOGAR: Well, I don't think
- that there is any basic incompatibility with
- immunizing them as a matter of Congress's
- 15 statutory choices and recognizing that they
- 16 retain First Amendment protection --
- 17 JUSTICE GORSUCH: Isn't the whole
- 18 premise -- I'm sorry --
- 19 GENERAL PRELOGAR: -- for the First
- 20 Amendment --
- 21 JUSTICE GORSUCH: -- the whole premise
- of Section 230 that they are common carriers,
- 23 that -- that they're not going to be held liable
- in part because it isn't their expression, they
- are a conduit for somebody else?

1 GENERAL PRELOGAR: No, not at all, 2 Justice Gorsuch. I think, you know, to the extent that the states are trying to argue that 3 Section 230 reflects the judgment that the 4 platforms aren't publishing and speaking here, 5 there would have been no need to enact Section 6 7 230 if that were the case. 8 Congress specifically recognized the 9 platforms are creating a speech product. 10 are literally, factually publishers. 11 Congress wanted to grant them immunity. And it 12 was for the purpose of encouraging this kind of editorial discretion. That's the whole point of 13 14 the good samaritan blocking provision, 15 230(c)(2)(A). 16 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: General, 17 there's been a lot of talk about the procedural posture of the case, how it was litigated below, 18 19 what's available if it -- it goes back, when it 20 goes back. I'd like your views on that. 21 GENERAL PRELOGAR: Yes. So we 2.2 presented our arguments in this case taking the 23 way it had been litigated at face value, and what that means is that below Florida treated 24 25 this law as though the central provision and

- 1 scope was focused on the -- the true social
- 2 media platforms, the thing that -- the website
- 3 you have in mind when I use that term, things
- 4 like YouTube and X and Facebook.
- 5 And Florida's presentation to the
- 6 lower courts was this law isn't a regulation of
- 7 their speech at all and so it's valid.
- 8 So I understand the force of the
- 9 questions that the Court has been asking today
- 10 about are there other types of websites that
- 11 might be covered, could this extend to direct
- messaging. You know, we don't really have a dog
- in that fight. To the extent that there are
- 14 those other applications of the law out there,
- that's not how Florida sought to defend it.
- 16 And to Justice Barrett's question, you
- 17 know, what should the Court do with this, it's
- 18 been litigated one way and now it looks like
- maybe there are other possible applications you
- 20 would have in mind, I would urge the Court to
- 21 take a really narrow approach here.
- 22 Florida defended this law on the basis
- that it could control what the true social media
- 24 platforms are doing with respect to their
- 25 expressive websites, and if I were the Court, I

1 would really want to reserve judgment on the 2 application to e-commerce sites, to -- to 3 companies like Uber, which don't seem to be creating a comparable type of expressive 4 5 product. And I think the Court could save those 6 7 issues for another day or for further factual development in this case while looking at the 8 decision on the record that was created based on 9 10 those litigation judgments by the parties. 11 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: Am I correct --12 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Justice Thomas 13 14 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: I'm sorry. 15 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: -- anything 16 further? 17 Justice Alito? 18 JUSTICE ALITO: Yeah, I'm baffled by 19 your -- your -- your answer to the -- the Chief 20 Justice. Didn't Florida argue that this -- that 21 a preliminary injunction should not be issued 2.2 because the plaintiffs had not shown that they 23 were likely to succeed on their facial

challenge? Did they not make that argument?

GENERAL PRELOGAR: They made that

24

- 1 overarching argument, but they didn't go further
- 2 and say and the reason for that is because
- 3 here's direct messaging. It was lawful at that
- 4 time to have --
- 5 JUSTICE ALITO: All right. Well, do
- 6 you think that issue is not before us?
- 7 GENERAL PRELOGAR: I think it would be
- 8 hard for the Court to figure that issue out
- 9 because there's a lot of lack of clarity --
- JUSTICE ALITO: Oh, well, it may be
- 11 hard for us to figure out, but my question was,
- is the issue before us?
- 13 GENERAL PRELOGAR: I think that the
- 14 way Florida litigated this case makes it
- difficult to say that the issue is properly
- 16 before you. Usually, the Court holds a party to
- the arguments it pressed below and that were
- 18 passed upon below, and there is no court in this
- 19 case that has considered questions about other
- 20 types of platforms or about other types of
- 21 functionality.
- 22 JUSTICE ALITO: If the record is
- insufficient to allow us to comfortably decide
- 24 whether the facial stand -- facial challenge
- 25 standard or an overbreadth standard is met,

- 1 isn't that the fault of the plaintiffs, and
- 2 isn't the remedy to vacate and remand for all of
- 3 that to be fleshed out, and that would not mean
- 4 -- that wouldn't say anything necessarily about
- 5 what will happen in the near future.
- It would mean that it would be
- 7 litigated and perhaps, if the plaintiffs
- 8 developed the record in the way that Florida
- 9 thinks they should and provides a -- a list of
- 10 all of the -- all of the NetChoice members who
- are covered by this and goes through all of the
- 12 functions that they perform and assesses whether
- the law is unconstitutional in every application
- or whether it has a legitimate scope that is
- 15 constitutional, then they would be entitled to a
- 16 preliminary injunction.
- 17 GENERAL PRELOGAR: So I -- I certainly
- don't want to resist the idea that if this Court
- 19 thinks those issues are properly before it and
- 20 affect the analysis of the facial challenge,
- 21 notwithstanding the way the parties litigated
- 22 the case, I -- I don't want to stand in the way
- 23 of that.
- I do think there would be a lot of
- value, though, in the Court making clear that

- 1 with respect to Florida's defense of this law in
- 2 the lower courts, namely, the idea that the
- 3 state really can control the curation and
- 4 editorial function of the true social media
- 5 platforms with respect to their expressive
- 6 products, that seems to me a type of provision
- 7 that is invalid in all of its applications with
- 8 respect to those platforms.
- 9 JUSTICE ALITO: Could I just ask you
- 10 to comment on a few things I understood Mr.
- 11 Clement to say.
- 12 So I understood him to say that an
- 13 email -- that the email function could be denied
- on the basis of -- access to that could be
- 15 denied on the basis of viewpoint. Direct
- 16 messaging could be denied on the basis of
- 17 viewpoint. Do you -- do you agree with that?
- 18 GENERAL PRELOGAR: No, we disagree
- 19 with that. We think that both direct messaging
- 20 and email service seems a little more like the
- 21 pure transmission of communications, so we would
- 22 likely put those in the box of phone company,
- 23 the telegraph company, Internet service
- 24 providers, and so forth.
- We don't think that that's an

- 1 inherently expressive product in the same way as
- 2 the main website that has the news feed and
- 3 that's curating the stories and deciding how to
- 4 prioritize them.
- 5 JUSTICE ALITO: Do you -- do you agree
- 6 that discrimination on the basis of bigness
- 7 violates the First Amendment?
- 8 GENERAL PRELOGAR: No, I don't think
- 9 that on -- that on its own, simply trying to
- 10 regulate based on the size of a company is -- is
- 11 always a First Amendment problem.
- 12 JUSTICE ALITO: Do you agree that a
- private party cannot engage in censorship? Let
- 14 me give you an example. Suppose that a private
- law school says that any student who expresses
- 16 support for Israel's war with Hamas will be
- 17 expelled. Is that -- would that be censorship,
- or would that be content moderation?
- 19 GENERAL PRELOGAR: So I think the --
- JUSTICE ALITO: Because it's a private
- 21 party.
- 22 GENERAL PRELOGAR: Yeah. So I guess
- 23 the first-order question would have to be, is
- there some kind of regulation that prohibits the
- law school from acting in that way? So, if

- 1 you're thinking about a public accommodations
- 2 law, for example --
- JUSTICE ALITO: No. I'm just saying
- 4 -- I'm just talking about terminology.
- 5 GENERAL PRELOGAR: Oh, colloquial
- 6 terminology? You know, I --
- JUSTICE ALITO: That's -- that's not
- 8 censorship; that's content moderation --
- 9 GENERAL PRELOGAR: I -- I -- I think
- 10 that --
- 11 JUSTICE ALITO: -- because it's a
- 12 private party?
- 13 GENERAL PRELOGAR: -- the semantics of
- it don't matter. You could say that the parade
- in Hurley was censoring the -- the GLIB
- 16 contingent that wanted to march or that the
- 17 newspaper in Tornillo was censoring the
- 18 candidate who wanted to publish his speech.
- 19 You know, I think that the particular
- word you use doesn't matter. What you have to
- 21 look at is whether what's being regulated by the
- 22 government is something that's expressive by a
- 23 private party, and, here, we think you have
- 24 that.
- JUSTICE ALITO: Well, I mean, the

- 1 particular word that you use matters only to the
- 2 extent that some may want to resist the
- 3 Orwellian temptation to recategorize offensive
- 4 conduct in seemingly bland terms. But, anyway,
- 5 thank you.
- 6 (Laughter.)
- 7 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Justice
- 8 Sotomayor?
- 9 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: General, I think
- 10 I'm finally understanding the argument, but let
- 11 me make sure I do, okay?
- 12 When I came in, I had the reaction
- 13 Justice Alito did, which is we should vacate and
- 14 remand. And I have been thinking about what
- does that do to the preliminary injunction,
- 16 because I agree with you, as I understand what
- 17 the State did below, was to say we don't have to
- 18 offer you any justification for any part of our
- 19 law because everybody of these social media
- 20 companies are common carriers.
- 21 And I think what's clear is -- from
- 22 our questioning -- that that's not true, that
- 23 there are many functions that are expressive
- that we can't say are common carriers. But,
- 25 even if we did say they were like common

- 1 carriers, the issue would be one of what's the
- 2 level of scrutiny.
- 3 And the State said there's no level of
- 4 scrutiny we're going to address. They basically
- 5 said we can do anything we want to common
- 6 carriers and to any of the expressive
- 7 platforming or deplatforming things.
- 8 But I don't even think that's true.
- 9 They can't come in and -- and I'm not sure they
- 10 can -- do any of these things or some of these
- 11 things even to common carriers if it is a sort
- of content or viewpoint content exclusion.
- So a common carrier doesn't have to
- 14 permit unruly behavior. It doesn't have to
- 15 permit -- it can throw somebody off the train if
- they are threatening somebody else or if they're
- 17 doing other things.
- So I guess what you're saying is let's
- 19 keep the injunction in place, vacate and
- 20 remand -- affirm on the preliminary injunction
- 21 but vacate and remand on the application of this
- law and how based on what level of scrutiny
- given the function that's at issue, correct?
- 24 GENERAL PRELOGAR: So we do think that
- 25 the Court should hold the parties to the way

- 1 they litigated this case and teed it up for the
- 2 Court's review. And it's uncommon for the Court
- 3 to start considering new arguments that weren't
- 4 presented by the party defending its law below.
- 5 But, if I can respond for a moment on
- 6 the common carrier point, Justice Sotomayor,
- 7 because I think you've put your finger on a
- 8 really important response here to many of the
- 9 arguments that Florida is making.
- 10 They suggest that the designation of a
- 11 platform as a common carrier or not has some
- 12 kind of talismanic significance. But it's
- 13 completely irrelevant to answering the First
- 14 Amendment question because it's not like
- 15 companies that are treated as common carriers
- 16 have no First Amendment rights with respect to
- 17 their expressive activities.
- 18 You know, you can take a railroad like
- 19 Amtrak and you can regulate it as a common
- 20 carrier with the transportation of passengers,
- 21 but if it creates some kind of magazine for
- those passengers to peruse, that's entitled to
- 23 -- to full First Amendment protection.
- 24 And the reason that the
- 25 non-discrimination mandate in the common carrier

- 1 scenario usually poses no problem under the
- 2 First Amendment is there's no speech or
- 3 expressive activity in carrying passengers or in
- 4 carrying communications.
- 5 It's entirely different with respect
- 6 to the activity that Florida is seeking to
- 7 regulate because that is inherently expressive.
- 8 It's putting together literally a website with
- 9 pictures and video and text and arranging it.
- 10 And that looks just like the kind of protected
- 11 editorial and curatorial activity the Court has
- 12 recognized in other cases.
- So whether you say they're a common
- 14 carrier or not we think is entirely beside the
- 15 point.
- 16 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Justice Kagan?
- 17 JUSTICE KAGAN: I think I want to try
- again on this question of, like, where does this
- 19 leave us? Because suppose that I agree with
- 20 pretty much what you said. Let's just take that
- 21 as an assumption, which is, you know, when
- 22 Florida is trying to regulate Facebook news
- feed, well, it can't do that because Facebook
- 24 news feed is itself providing a kind of speech
- 25 product.

1	But, when Florida is trying to
2	regulate Gmail, well, maybe it can do that
3	because Gmail is not in the business of
4	providing that sort of speech product. And if
5	you take it if we again assume that this
6	statute covers a variety of things that are
7	Gmail-like, direct messaging and and Uber
8	and, you know, things that are not creating
9	speech products, and we have this First
10	Amendment doctrine that says, if you can find a
11	legitimate sweep, we can't overrule something
12	facially, but you don't really want to keep
13	you you don't want really want to allow
14	this law to go into effect because of the
15	unconstitutional applications that you're
16	talking about with respect to all these
17	companies that are creating speech products,
18	what do we do?
19	GENERAL PRELOGAR: So I guess, if you
20	were confident that the state law had these
21	applications and that the particular provisions
22	would regulate the kinds of companies that
23	you're referring to that aren't creating an
24	expressive speech product, then I think that
25	that would poke holes in the theory of facial

- 1 invalidity.
- 2 But I don't think you can have that
- 3 certainty because that's not how Florida
- 4 litigated this case below. It's not as though
- 5 it said this statute is not invalid on its face
- 6 because it applies to Gmail or other --
- 7 JUSTICE KAGAN: I take your point. We
- 8 could just say, gosh, we can't -- we can't even
- 9 think about those questions because this was
- 10 litigated in a certain way. So that's one
- 11 option.
- But suppose we think it's pretty
- 13 obvious that this covers a lot of stuff that
- does not look like Facebook feed and we wanted
- 15 -- I mean, suppose we were to -- you know, we --
- 16 we can take notice of that, then what?
- 17 GENERAL PRELOGAR: Okay. So I think,
- 18 at that point, what I would do if I were the
- 19 Court is make clear that with respect to the
- 20 issues Florida did present and that the Eleventh
- 21 Circuit and the district court resolved, Florida
- is wrong to say that it can apply these
- 23 provisions to the social media companies that
- 24 are engaged in creating an expressive product
- 25 and make that much clear.

1	Otherwise, I think, if the Court just
2	vacates and sends it back, it'll be right back
3	up here on in an emergency posture, again on
4	an as-applied basis, with respect to one of
5	those companies. So I think the Court can
6	decide that much. That was the issue that was
7	litigated below and decided.
8	And then, if you think that there are
9	some additional questions about the scope of the
10	Florida law and whether it might have valid
11	applications along the lines we've been
12	discussing, you know, I don't have a particular
13	interest on behalf of the United States in what
14	you do with the preliminary injunction in the
15	meantime. I think there's a lot of force to the
16	idea that this is backed up by \$100,000 in
17	penalty per violation, and that could have a
18	huge chilling effect on any protected speech out
19	there that's occurring.
20	But, you know, I think the Court could
21	say there are some unresolved issues about
22	concrete applications of this law and await
23	further factual development on that.
24	JUSTICE KAGAN: Thank you.
25	CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Justice

- 1 Gorsuch? JUSTICE GORSUCH: This is a facial 2 3 challenge, right? It's an all-or-nothing deal. 4 How is a court supposed to make as-applied 5 rulings in a facial challenge on remand? 6 GENERAL PRELOGAR: I would do it based 7 on the party presentation principle and the fact --8 JUSTICE GORSUCH: No, I got the first 9 10 point. 11 GENERAL PRELOGAR: Yeah. Yeah. 12 JUSTICE GORSUCH: The first --13 GENERAL PRELOGAR: So I might run out 14 of options --15 JUSTICE GORSUCH: Yeah. 16 GENERAL PRELOGAR: -- beyond that, 17 Justice Gorsuch.
- 20 GENERAL PRELOGAR: I -- I agree that

JUSTICE GORSUCH: After the first one,

- 21 these are hard questions asked --
- JUSTICE GORSUCH: Right. So the first
- 23 -- it's the first one you --

18

19

I --

- 24 GENERAL PRELOGAR: Now I suppose you
- 25 could certify to the Florida Supreme Court the

- 1 unresolved issues of Florida law if you think
- 2 that that is necessary to actually reach a
- 3 disposition in this case.
- 4 JUSTICE GORSUCH: Okay. Thank you.
- 5 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Justice
- 6 Kavanaugh?
- 7 JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: I just want to
- 8 follow up on Justice Alito's questions, and --
- 9 and he'll have the opportunity since this is
- 10 continuing to follow up on mine if he wants to.
- 11 (Laughter.)
- 12 JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: But I think he
- asked a good, thought-provoking, important
- 14 question and used the term "Orwellian."
- When I think of "Orwellian," I think
- of the state, not the private sector, not
- 17 private individuals. Maybe people have
- different conceptions of "Orwellian," but the
- 19 state taking over media, like in some other
- 20 countries. And in Tornillo, we made clear, the
- 21 Court made clear, that we don't want to be that
- 22 -- that country, that we have a different model
- here and have since the beginning, and we don't
- 24 want the state interfering with these private
- 25 choices.

1	Now Tornillo then dealt with and
2	this is my question. Tornillo dealt with the
3	idea, well, newspapers have become so
4	concentrated and so big that maybe we should
5	have a different rule. In Tornillo, in the
6	Court's opinion, Chief Justice Burger's opinion
7	for a unanimous court talked about those
8	those changes. I mentioned those before.
9	He says, "Those changes have placed in
LO	a few hands the power to inform the American
L1	people and shape public opinion. The abuses of
L2	bias and manipulative reportage are said to be
L3	the result of vast accumulations of unreviewable
L4	power in the modern media empires. In effect,
L5	it is claimed the public has lost any ability to
L6	respond. The monopoly of means of communication
L7	allows for little or no critical analysis of the
L8	media."
L9	And then, though, he and he says,
20	"From this premise, it is reasoned that the only
21	effective way to ensure fairness and accuracy to
22	provide for some accountability is for
23	government to take affirmative action." And
24	then he goes on and explains no, we're not going
25	to do that. The First Amendment stands against

- 1 that. "However much validity may be found in
- 2 these arguments, at each point, the
- 3 implementation of a remedy calls for some
- 4 mechanism, either government or consensual. And
- 5 if it's governmental, that's just one brings
- 6 about a confrontation with the express
- 7 provisions of the First Amendment. Compelling
- 8 editors or publishers to publish that which
- 9 reason tells them should not be published is
- 10 what is at issue in this case."
- And so he says for the Court in 1973,
- no, we're not -- we don't have a big exception
- 13 to the idea that the First Amendment
- 14 distinguishes the state from the private sector
- 15 and private individuals.
- Now here's my question. We're 50
- 17 years later. How does that principle
- 18 articulated in Tornillo apply to the current
- 19 situation, the current bigness?
- 20 GENERAL PRELOGAR: So I think that
- 21 Tornillo does establish a bright-line
- 22 proposition that the -- the state, even if it
- 23 has these concerns about market power and
- 24 dominance and control, cannot directly overtake
- 25 the editorial function and prevent a private

- 1 party that's creating an expressive product from
- 2 making those kinds of judgments about how to
- 3 present that product.
- 4 But, at the same time, I think that
- 5 there are legitimate concerns here about the
- 6 kind of power and influence that social media
- 7 platforms wield. And I want to emphasize it's
- 8 not like the government lacks tools to deal with
- 9 this. It's not as though it can't regulate at
- 10 all. There is a -- a whole body of government
- 11 regulation that would be permissible that would
- 12 target conduct, things like antitrust laws that
- 13 could be applied or data privacy or consumer
- 14 protection, things that we think wouldn't come
- into any conflict with the First Amendment at
- 16 all.
- 17 And even in a situation where the
- 18 government does think that it's necessary to
- 19 regulate in a manner that's going to affect
- 20 protected speech rights, that's not the end of
- 21 the inquiry. You still have a chance as the
- 22 government to establish that your regulation can
- 23 pass constitutional muster like it did in the
- 24 Turner case that you were referring to earlier.
- 25 So I want to be very clear that we are

- 1 not suggesting that governments are powerless to
- 2 respond to some of the concerns that Justice
- 3 Alito mentioned. You know, I think one natural
- 4 place to go as a government is to disclosure, to
- 5 ensuring that if you think that platforms have
- 6 Orwellian policies, you at least make sure users
- 7 have information about how they're acting, what
- 8 their policies are, the kind of generalized
- 9 disclosure requirements here that were not
- 10 invalidated by the lower courts and aren't
- 11 before this Court.
- 12 JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: On Turner, the key
- was content-neutral there, right?
- 14 GENERAL PRELOGAR: Yes. So Turner
- 15 concluded that the interest -- the governmental
- 16 interest --
- 17 JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: Or one key.
- 18 GENERAL PRELOGAR: -- that was
- 19 asserted there, as you put it, was unrelated to
- the suppression of expression.
- 21 And the problem here, you know, my
- 22 friend suggested that Florida has precisely the
- 23 same interest. But, here, the interest that
- 24 Florida has asserted in affecting these content
- 25 moderation choices is to change the speech on

- 1 the platforms. It doesn't like the way that the
- 2 platforms are moderating content and it wants
- 3 them to create a new expressive product that
- 4 reflects the state's judgments about what should
- 5 go on the website, whether that's candidate
- 6 speech or speech by journalistic entities or
- 7 otherwise.
- 8 And that is just not an interest
- 9 that's unrelated to the suppression of
- 10 expression. So we think the Court should apply
- intermediate scrutiny here and find that the
- 12 State can't get out of the starting gate with
- 13 that interest.
- JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: Thank you.
- 15 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Justice
- 16 Barrett?
- 17 JUSTICE BARRETT: General, I asked Mr.
- 18 Clement at the end this practical question,
- 19 which Justice Kagan also asked you, and so I
- just want to be sure that I'm understanding
- 21 maybe exactly your answer to Justice Kagan. It
- 22 was different than Mr. Clement's to me.
- 23 You were pointing out to Justice Kagan
- that if we just vacate and send it back, it's
- 25 going to be right up here in an emergency

- 1 posture on an as-applied challenge. So you were
- 2 encouraging us to address at least this question
- of whether, like, the Facebook news feed or
- 4 YouTube, et cetera, is expressive.
- 5 But, if I think there are real
- 6 problems with some of these other applications,
- 7 which may be legitimate, do you think it's an
- 8 option to say, you know, that we think that some
- 9 of these editorial applications would be
- 10 unconstitutional, but because we don't know
- about these other applications, they might be
- within the statute's legitimate sweep, that
- we're going to vacate and remand anyway and send
- it back for the court to sort out all of those
- 15 other applications?
- 16 GENERAL PRELOGAR: So I think that
- would be one possible approach here. You know,
- 18 I want to express strong agreement with the
- 19 instinct I think that is -- is -- underlies that
- 20 question that the Court shouldn't do more than
- is necessary here with respect to the types of
- 22 applications that we've been discussing,
- e-commerce, you know, Gmail, or -- or websites
- or email servers and that kind of thing.
- I do think they present a really

- distinctive set of issues. And so, if you think
- 2 that those issues are properly in this case,
- 3 I -- I don't think the Court has received the
- 4 briefing, frankly, to try to take a stab at
- 5 resolving them, but it seems like it would be a
- 6 reasonable thing to do to send it back for
- 7 further factual development and consideration by
- 8 the lower courts.
- 9 JUSTICE BARRETT: Okay. And one other
- 10 question and this is about Section 230.
- 11 When you were talking to Justice
- 12 Gorsuch, you were pointing out the distinction
- 13 between the post and the post's content for
- 14 which, you know, the -- the platform would not
- 15 be liable, and then the feed, and you were
- 16 saying, well, the speech -- the speech that is
- the platform's is not what's on the post, and
- 18 that's -- you know, the platform can't be liable
- 19 for that.
- So could a platform be liable then,
- 21 say, if its algorithm or its feed boosted things
- 22 like, say, the Tide pod challenge? That's
- 23 different. Is that within Section 230?
- 24 GENERAL PRELOGAR: Yeah. So I -- I
- 25 think that this is, you know, a difficult issue

- about how 230 might apply with respect to kind
- of decisions that the platform is -- is making
- 3 itself with respect to how to structure its
- 4 service.
- 5 And I want to be careful here because
- 6 I have to confess that I haven't gone back
- 7 recently to look at the brief we submitted in
- 8 the Gonzalez case last term that I think touched
- 9 on some of these issues, but I do think that
- 10 there are circumstances where, of course, if the
- thing that's causing harm is the platform's own
- 12 conduct in how it structures its service, that's
- 13 something that might not be immunized under
- 14 Section 230.
- 15 I think all of this is separate and
- 16 apart from the First Amendment issue in this
- 17 case, though, because, here, whether or not you
- think that, you know, recognizing that they have
- 19 a speech product affects the proper
- 20 interpretation of the statute under 230 and
- 21 means that there are some situations where they
- 22 won't have immunity, that is a completely
- 23 distinct question from whether they are creating
- a speech product that warrants First Amendment
- 25 protection.

1	JUSTICE BARRETT: I totally agree.							
2	But I also think there are a bunch of land							
3	mines. And if that's a land mine, if what we							
4	say about this is that this is speech that's							
5	entitled to First Amendment protection, I do							
6	think then that has Section 230 implications fo							
7	another case, and so it's always tricky to write							
8	an opinion when you know there might be land							
9	mines that would affect things later.							
10	GENERAL PRELOGAR: Yes. And I I							
11	certainly would think the Court could try to							
12	carefully cabin it and make clear that it's not							
13	opining on the specific statutory terms in 230							
14	or whether this First Amendment characterization							
15	of the expressive compilation fits within the							
16	provision that Justice Gorsuch cited earlier							
17	about creating speech in whole or in part, and							
18	the Court could very clearly outline that in its							
19	decision to try to caution lower courts away							
20	from conflating those two issues.							
21	JUSTICE BARRETT: Thank you.							
22	CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Justice							
23	Jackson?							
24	JUSTICE JACKSON: General, I hear you							
25	struggling valiantly to set aside other kinds of							

- 1 applications in response to a number of the
- 2 questions, and I guess I can't figure out why
- 3 those other applications aren't in this case.
- I mean, I think Florida defended the
- 5 law as NetChoice challenged it, and NetChoice
- 6 brought a facial challenge. And I had
- 7 understood that to mean -- I mean, first, I was
- 8 a little surprised that the government's brief
- 9 didn't focus on that, but I had understood that
- 10 to mean that NetChoice, number one, bears the
- 11 burden in this case and, number two, that
- 12 NetChoice has to, you know -- I guess Mr.
- 13 Clement and I had a difference of opinion as to
- 14 how you say it, but that burden is to show that
- there's either no valid application of this law
- or that the law has a legitimate sweep.
- So, if we can identify other valid
- 18 applications, if we see worlds in which Uber
- 19 and, you know, money services or whatnot could
- 20 be regulated, I don't understand why that just
- 21 doesn't mean that NetChoice has not met its
- burden and so that's the answer.
- 23 GENERAL PRELOGAR: Well, I think you
- 24 would have to conduct it at a more granular
- level, Justice Jackson, because it's not just

1 about what are the universe of platforms out 2 there and what functionality do they offer. 3 You'd really have to parse the challenged provisions of the Florida law and 4 ask: Are those platforms, you know, engaged in 5 any kind of the relevant conduct? And I think 6 7 that --8 JUSTICE JACKSON: I agree with you 9 100 percent, but the question is, isn't it 10 NetChoice's burden to have presented the case to 11 us in that way? If we don't have that 12 information, again, I say, don't they lose? 13 GENERAL PRELOGAR: So I want to say 14 again that we don't have a particular stake in 15 how you think about their own litigation 16 decisions on both sides, but this case very much 17 was teed up in the lower courts as being all about what they called the Big 3 social media 18 19 companies. That's clearly the central aim of 20 this law. It was focused not on the Ubers of 21 the world and their comment boxes but on the 2.2 core function of creating an expressive website 23 that principally contains user-generated 24 components, the text and the photos and so

forth, and that the provisions that are

- 1 challenged here are the ones that are focused on
- 2 the type of editorial discretion that those
- 3 types of platforms are engaged in.
- 4 So I don't think it's as easy to say
- 5 maybe we can look in the dark recesses of this
- 6 law and peek around a corner and find some
- 7 possible valid application. That's not how
- 8 Florida sought to defend the law. And I think
- 9 it would go down a complicated road to allow the
- 10 core provisions of this statute to take effect.
- 11 JUSTICE JACKSON: I understand,
- 12 General, but the confusion --
- 13 GENERAL PRELOGAR: Yeah.
- 14 JUSTICE JACKSON: -- I think, is that
- the law on its face is really broad. We've said
- 16 that. And other people, many people, have, you
- know, noticed that it could apply to all sorts
- 18 of things. And yet you say it was litigated
- 19 below as if it was narrow. I appreciate that.
- 20 But we have a facial challenge on the -- on the
- 21 table.
- 22 GENERAL PRELOGAR: Yeah.
- JUSTICE JACKSON: And to the extent
- the entire law goes, then I suppose maybe these
- other lawful applications would go too. And

- isn't that problematic when you're talking about
- 2 facial challenges?
- 3 GENERAL PRELOGAR: Well, you are
- 4 looking at this in the posture of a preliminary
- 5 injunction, so I don't think that the Court is
- 6 definitively resolving and -- and, you know,
- 7 kind of issuing the final say on exactly what
- 8 the status of this Florida law is.
- 9 But -- but, look, I want to agree, I
- 10 have some sympathy here. In preparation for
- 11 this argument, I've been working with my team to
- say, does this even cover direct messaging?
- Does this even cover Gmail? And we've been
- 14 trying to study the Florida law and figure it
- out ourselves. We think there's a lot of
- 16 ambiguity about exactly what the state law
- 17 provisions require.
- I don't think, though, that that's a
- 19 basis to not resolve the central issue in the
- 20 case, which is, with respect to what we know the
- 21 state law does, it would require these social
- 22 media platforms that are creating the
- 23 compilation of third-party speech to
- 24 fundamentally alter their product that they're
- offering. We think that's an infringement of

speech and the Court should say so. 1 2 JUSTICE JACKSON: Thank you. CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Thank you, 3 4 counsel. Rebuttal, Mr. Whitaker? 5 REBUTTAL ARGUMENT OF HENRY C. WHITAKER 6 7 ON BEHALF OF THE PETITIONERS MR. WHITAKER: First, on the 8 9 procedural posture, the fact that there's no record in this case is entirely NetChoice's 10 11 fault. It was NetChoice who insisted in 12 district court on litigating the PI very fast. 13 In fact, we actually wanted to slow it down and 14 take discovery. And what NetChoice -- we 15 actually even offered to voluntarily stay the 16 law while we did that. And NetChoice says, no, 17 we want to go fast. And they -- and the district court obliged them, went fast. There 18 19 was no meaningful opportunity to take discovery. 20 And, in fact, when we appealed, we 21 tried to say, hey, let's litigate this case 2.2 while it's on appeal and do discovery. And they 23 said, no, we want to stay discovery even while 24 it's on appeal. And the district court obliged.

So the fact that there's no record in this case

- is not Florida's fault. It is NetChoice's
- 2 fault.
- 3 Second, there are clearly
- 4 constitutional applications of this statute, and
- 5 contrary to what my friend said, it does apply
- 6 to Uber. And he read you the definition of
- 7 "censorship" on 97a, and right before that is
- 8 the definition of "deplatforming." And Uber --
- 9 if Uber deplatforms a user, that is covered by
- 10 our law. If users -- if Uber says to a
- journalistic enterprise, I don't like the cut of
- 12 your jib, the broadcast you -- you did last
- 13 week, that is covered by our law. And so that
- 14 -- that is something that is there.
- 15 There -- and there are also -- you
- 16 know, it's not just Gmail. It's also WhatsApp.
- 17 There are messaging functions. Those are
- 18 constitutional applications. And the
- 19 consequences of my friend's argument is really
- 20 quite sweeping. My friend seems to think that
- 21 -- that even a traditional common carrier has a
- 22 First Amendment right, I guess, to -- to censor
- 23 anything. I guess that means that Verizon can
- turn around tomorrow and have a First Amendment
- 25 right to kick all Democrats or all Republicans

- 1 off of the -- the platform, and that is -- that
- 2 would have sweeping consequences that I -- I do
- 3 not think is supported because Verizon has no
- 4 message in deplatforming or censoring its users.
- 5 And that principle is distinct from
- 6 what my friend from the United States is saying
- 7 because she's talking about, oh, well, they
- 8 arrange material on the site in various ways.
- 9 But that doesn't speak to -- at all to whether
- 10 they have a constitutional right to censor
- 11 because just because you have to carry content
- or carry a particular user, you could still
- 13 arrange it.
- 14 And I think that's the fundamental
- 15 conflation -- conflation that the United States
- does in its brief. It ignores the distinction
- 17 between the hosting function and the
- organizational function, and that's something
- 19 that I think the Court needs to keep separate in
- 20 its -- in its mind. And I would -- I would
- 21 commend to the Court Professor Volokh's article
- 22 cited on page 24 of our brief that -- that makes
- 23 this distinction.
- Thank you.
- 25 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Thank you,

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