SUPREME COURT OF THE UNITED STATES

IN THE SU	PREME COURT OF THE	I UNITED STATES
		-
MARK E. PULSIFER)
	Petitioner,)
V.) No. 22-340
UNITED STATES,)
	Respondent.)
		_

Pages: 1 through 112

Place: Washington, D.C.

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4	Petitioner,)
5	v.) No. 22-340
6	UNITED STATES,)
7	Respondent.)
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10	Washington, D.C.
11	Monday, October 2, 2023
12	
13	The above-entitled matter came on for
14	oral argument before the Supreme Court of the
15	United States at 10:05 a.m.
16	
17	APPEARANCES:
18	SHAY DVORETZKY, ESQUIRE, Washington, D.C.; on behalf
19	of the Petitioner.
20	FREDERICK LIU, Assistant to the Solicitor General,
21	Department of Justice, Washington, D.C.; on behalf
22	of the Respondent.
23	
24	
25	

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1	PROCEEDINGS
2	(10:05 a.m.)
3	CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: We will hear
4	argument this morning in Case 22-340, Pulsifer
5	versus United States.
6	Mr. Dvoretzky.
7	ORAL ARGUMENT OF SHAY DVORETZKY
8	ON BEHALF OF THE PETITIONER
9	MR. DVORETZKY: Mr. Chief Justice, and
10	may it please the Court:
11	The natural reading of
12	Section 3553(f)(1) is that "and" means "and."
13	It joins together enumerated criteria. To be
14	safety valve eligible, a defendant must not
15	have (A), (B), and (C), all three. That's what
16	ordinary grammar says and the surrounding text
17	confirms. Congress used "and" to join
18	(f)(1)(A) through (C) just as it used "and" to
19	require a defendant to satisfy each of (f)(1)
20	through (5). This reading makes sense.
21	The historic First Step Act made the
22	safety valve available for many more nonviolent
23	drug offenders. Taken together, (A) through
24	(C) exclude violent recidivists with a history
25	of committing serious crimes while (f)(2)

- 1 through (f) disqualify current violent
- 2 offenders.
- The government needs "and" to mean
- 4 "or" or it needs the Court to insert the words
- 5 "does not have" into the statute three times.
- 6 But asking for a rewrite isn't statutory
- 7 interpretation. The government's surplusage
- 8 and policy arguments don't change that.
- 9 There is no surplusage because the
- 10 statute and the guidelines contemplate that not
- 11 every sentence for a prior offense earns
- 12 criminal history points.
- 13 As for policy, the government focuses
- on whether someone with serial -- serious
- criminal history could still satisfy (f)(1).
- 16 But the safety valve isn't a
- 17 get-out-of-jail-free card. Serious recidivists
- 18 will likely have a career offender enhanced
- 19 quidelines range at or above the mandatory
- 20 minimum, and judges can and do exercise their
- 21 discretion to impose appropriate sentences.
- 22 If Congress wanted to disqualify
- defendants for having any of (A), (B), or (C),
- 24 all it had to do was say "or." That would have
- 25 unequivocally expressed a distributive meaning,

1 just as Congress did elsewhere in 3553(f). 2 Letting the government get to "or" 3 when Congress said "and" would encourage Congress to be sloppy with the most basic 4 English words, leaving square corners far 5 behind and, in the criminal context, where 6 7 fairness matters most. The Court should hold 8 Congress to what it wrote. 9 I welcome the Court's questions. 10 JUSTICE THOMAS: From your argument, 11 it appears you do not accept the argument that 12 "and" could have a distributive reading and a joint reading? 13 14 MR. DVORETZKY: Not in this context, 15 Justice Thomas, not -- not in the context --16 not in the structure of a conjunctive negative 17 proof like what we have here in this statute. 18 JUSTICE THOMAS: In what context can 19 it have a distributive meaning? MR. DVORETZKY: So I think the 20 21 government gives a number of examples where, 2.2 again, not in a conjunctive negative proof 23 context, you might hear "and" to be "or." I think what's going on in a lot of those 24 25 examples, it's almost like your brain is

- 1 auto-correcting from "and" to "or." The proper
- 2 word actually would be "or" because, again,
- 3 "and" ordinarily connects things together.
- 4 But sometimes people use English in a
- 5 less precise way, and, again, you might
- 6 understand that to mean "or." That doesn't
- 7 mean that it's syntactically correct, and that
- 8 doesn't -- that's not the standard that
- 9 Congress ought to be held to when it's writing
- 10 a statute, let alone a criminal statute.
- 11 JUSTICE KAGAN: So is that what -- I
- mean, let me give you a hypothetical, and tell
- me if you think it falls into that category.
- So you're going in for a medical test
- and you receive something from the hospital,
- and it says, to receive this test, the patient
- should not, and then, you know, it has, like, a
- 18 list of things that the patient shouldn't do,
- 19 and it says the patient shouldn't eat any food,
- 20 drink any liquids, and smoke.
- 21 So I'm going to assume, Mr. Dvoretzky,
- that you're not a smoker. Do you feel
- 23 perfectly able to eat and drink as much as you
- 24 want?
- 25 MR. DVORETZKY: No. And that is a

- 1 situation where I would hear that "and" to be
- 2 an "or," but there are a couple things about
- 3 that -- first of all, in your hypothetical,
- 4 that's all the text that we have to work with,
- 5 whereas, in 30 -- 3553(f), we have --
- 6 JUSTICE KAGAN: Well, let's keep it
- 7 with my text, because you have some arguments
- 8 about other texts and the government has some
- 9 arguments about superfluity and anomalies, so
- 10 let's just keep it to the text itself.
- MR. DVORETZKY: So, if we're focused
- just on your hypothetical, I -- I probably -- I
- would hear that to be an "or" rather than an
- 14 "and."
- 15 JUSTICE KAGAN: Obviously, because the
- 16 context tells you that it's an "or" rather than
- an "and," that -- and -- and the reason
- that it's different from an example like "drink
- 19 and drive, "which is, you know, your example,
- 20 is there's something that connects those two
- 21 things so that we know that the harm comes from
- the relationship between the two, whereas, in
- this case, we know that the harm follows from
- any one of the things.
- So, either way, you're using context

- 1 to establish meaning, aren't you?
- 2 MR. DVORETZKY: Well, the -- the other
- 3 thing that we know from your hypothetical, if
- 4 I'm going in for a medical test, my mindset
- 5 going into the medical test, I'm not taking any
- 6 chances with the instructions that the doctor
- 7 gives me. If there's any ambiguity about
- 8 whether "and" means "or," I'm going to take the
- 9 safer course because I want to make sure that
- 10 my medical test goes properly.
- 11 So there is the context of the person
- who is giving you that instruction that I think
- also would lead you to take the safer choice
- there, which is to treat the "and" as an "or."
- JUSTICE BARRETT: But, Mr.
- 16 Dvoretzky --
- 17 MR. DVORETZKY: Yeah.
- 18 JUSTICE BARRETT: -- can I ask you --
- 19 you know, I hear you saying to Justice Kagan,
- and you said this to Justice Thomas, that your
- 21 brain corrects "and"/"or." And when Justice
- 22 Thomas asked you about whether the distributive
- 23 understanding of "and" is grammatically
- 24 correct, you kind of seemed to say no because
- 25 you keep going to this example where your brain

- 1 changes "and" to "or." So I just wanted a
- 2 clear answer from you on that.
- 3 So you -- do you think that the
- 4 distributive understanding of "and" is
- 5 grammatically correct?
- 6 MR. DVORETZKY: I think it can be
- 7 grammatically correct in certain contexts but
- 8 not in this context.
- 9 JUSTICE BARRETT: So what about the
- 10 corpus linguistics brief that says in
- 11 38 percent of the time -- I understand -- and
- 12 you rely heavily on the fact that over
- 13 50 percent of the time, people understood it in
- its joint sense, but 38 percent of the time,
- they understood it in its distributive sense.
- 16 MR. DVORETZKY: So -- so they did, and
- 17 the corpus linguistics scholars concluded that
- 18 it was unnatural for "and" to have a
- 19 distributive meaning in that sense. By
- 20 contrast, they also concluded that a hundred
- 21 percent of people would understand "or" to be
- 22 distributive when used in a negative proof.
- So, if you said, as -- as Reading Law
- 24 does, Justice Scalia and Professor Garner, in
- order to qualify, you must not have (A), (B),

- or (C), that would be unequivocally clear to
- 2 express a distributive meaning, and it would be
- 3 unnatural to use "and" even though some people
- 4 might hear it that way and understand it to be
- 5 distributive even in that kind of a negated
- 6 conjunction.
- 7 JUSTICE GORSUCH: You -- you've been
- 8 wanting to have the chance to explain why the
- 9 context here is different and point to your
- 10 contextual clues in this statute that are
- 11 different from some of the hypotheticals you've
- 12 heard. I'd just like to hear those.
- MR. DVORETZKY: Sure. So there --
- there are a few points that I would make.
- 15 First of all, the presumption of
- 16 consistent usage. Congress used "and" to
- 17 connect (f)(1) through (f), just as it used
- "and" to connect (f)(1)(A) through(C). And so,
- in both instances, that needs to have a
- 20 consistent joint meaning, particularly since
- 21 3553(f) is all one long sentence.
- 22 By contrast -- and this goes to the
- 23 meaningful variation canon -- Congress used
- 24 "or" throughout the statute as a disjunctive
- 25 term. Look, for example, at 3553(f)(4), a

- 1 defendant satisfies that provision if he was
- 2 not an organizer, leader, manager, or
- 3 supervisor and was not engaged in a continuing
- 4 criminal enterprise. So Congress knows how to
- 5 use "or" and "and" to mean different things,
- 6 and that's what it did in 3553.
- 7 In addition to that, the government's
- 8 argument is that "does not have" from the
- 9 beginning of 3553(f)(1) gets distributed to A,
- 10 B, and C.
- JUSTICE GORSUCH: But it comes --
- 12 MR. DVORETZKY: It's that --
- JUSTICE GORSUCH: -- before the --
- 14 before the dash.
- 15 MR. DVORETZKY: It comes before the em
- 16 dash. So there are a couple of reasons why the
- 17 em dash doesn't support that distribution in
- 18 addition to the obvious preliminary point that
- 19 the statute doesn't say does not have A, does
- 20 not have B, and does not have C.
- One, Congress itself didn't think that
- the em dash distributed the language before it.
- 23 If it did, then it would not have had to repeat
- in A, B, and C the phrase "as determined under
- 25 the Sentencing Guidelines." Congress could

- 1 have instead said, the defendant does not have,
- 2 as determined under the Sentencing Guidelines,
- 3 em dash A, B, C. Instead, Congress repeated
- 4 that every time. So Congress didn't think the
- 5 em dash was distributive.
- 6 Second, it --
- 7 JUSTICE GORSUCH: So that's your own
- 8 superfluidity argument on your end.
- 9 MR. DVORETZKY: Well, I actually don't
- 10 think it's a super -- superfluidity argument.
- 11 JUSTICE GORSUCH: No, no, no. For the
- 12 government's, it would be pointless to have
- 13 that language repeated but for your
- 14 interpretation?
- 15 MR. DVORETZKY: But for the fact that
- 16 the em dash doesn't distribute --
- 17 JUSTICE GORSUCH: Right.
- 18 MR. DVORETZKY: -- what comes before.
- 19 JUSTICE KAGAN: But, Mr. Dvoretzky --
- MR. DVORETZKY: Yeah.
- 21 JUSTICE KAGAN: -- I mean, let me make
- 22 sure I understand your argument first. If
- it -- if it said the defendant isn't eligible
- for relief if he doesn't have A, doesn't have
- 25 B, and does not have C, you agree that the

- 1 government wins, is that right?
- 2 MR. DVORETZKY: Yes, because that
- 3 would be setting out three independent
- 4 conditions.
- 5 JUSTICE KAGAN: Right. So -- so --
- 6 so, when we look at this statute, I mean, isn't
- 7 what is most likely to have gone on here is
- 8 that Congress made a completely ordinary
- 9 drafting decision which said does not have A,
- 10 does not have B, and does not have C? Who
- 11 writes like that?
- What we usually do is we try to make
- writing efficient and not repetitive, and so we
- take out terms that apply to everything and put
- it in a format where we don't have to keep
- 16 repeating it. Put it in exactly this format.
- I -- I mean, you know, we do this in
- 18 our ordinary writing. Congress does it in
- 19 writing statutes. We don't keep on repeating a
- 20 verb when the verb applies to everything.
- 21 So that's what Congress did here. It
- 22 just took out the -- rather than say "does not
- 23 have three times, it took it out and put it in
- 24 prefatory language, followed by three things
- 25 that you shouldn't have.

1 MR. DVORETZKY: Two points, Justice 2 Kagan. One, yet Congress did repeat under --3 under -- "as determined under the Sentencing Guidelines" three times, which it didn't have 4 to under that -- under that approach. 5 6 Second, though, if you look at 7 3553(f), the opening paragraph, that also ends with an em dash. So, if the em dash 8 9 distributes what's come -- what comes before to 10 each of (f)(1) through (5) -- I mean, I'm 11 sorry, if the em dash in (f)(1)(A) distributes 12 "does not have" to each of A, B, and C, then the em dash at the end of 3553(f) also ought to 13 14 be understood to distribute what precedes that 15 em dash to each of (f)(1) through (5). If that's right, then a defendant who satisfies 16 17 any one of those (f)(1), (2), (3), (4), or (5), would qualify for relief. 18 19 So, for example --JUSTICE BARRETT: Well, "does not 20 21 have" --2.2 JUSTICE GORSUCH: You --23 JUSTICE BARRETT: -- would have a 24 distributive meaning there too, as Judge Oldham said? In that -- in that dash after (f), you 25

- 1 know, if the Court finds at sentencing after
- 2 the government has been afforded an
- 3 opportunity, et cetera, that could have a
- 4 distributive meaning, and then it wouldn't be
- 5 Calvinball, you know, as -- as you've been
- 6 saying. You could say it's distributive in
- 7 both situations.
- 8 MR. DVORETZKY: So I think what gets
- 9 distributed before the em dash -- the -- the
- 10 government on page 38 of their brief explains
- 11 the em dash rule that they're advocating for,
- the distributive rule that they're advocating
- for. They say that each item after the em dash
- must be a logical and grammatical continuation
- of the prefatory clause so that the two can be
- 16 read together without regard to the rest of the
- 17 provision, as if it were complete.
- 18 And so what would actually get
- 19 distributed goes all the way back to the court
- 20 shall impose a sentence without regard to --
- 21 JUSTICE BARRETT: It doesn't have to.
- 22 It could just be the clause that's preceded by
- the comma, if the court finds that. I mean, I
- 24 get -- I -- I think this is a very hard case.
- I think it's a very hard case, so I don't mean

- 1 to suggest that it's clear.
- 2 All I'm saying is that there is a way
- 3 to read it that would be perfectly consistent
- 4 by treating that last clause as distributive.
- 5 MR. DVORETZKY: I think that would not
- 6 allow the distribution to be a complete
- 7 sentence in the same way that starting it
- 8 earlier would --
- 9 JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: You --
- 10 MR. DVORETZKY: -- and that --
- 11 JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: -- you agree that
- determining whether the "and" distributes
- depends on context as a general matter,
- 14 correct?
- MR. DVORETZKY: As a general matter, I
- do, but I think that the key context to look to
- 17 is the surrounding text in the first instance.
- 18 JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: Okay. But you
- 19 agree that context matters?
- MR. DVORETZKY: Yes.
- JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: Okay. And the
- 22 government says that one of the problems
- 23 contextually with your interpretation, it -- it
- 24 would mean that offenders with more serious
- 25 violent records, violent offense records, would

- 1 be eliqible for the safety valve, while
- 2 offenders with less serious violent offense
- 3 records would not be eligible, and the
- 4 government says that would defy common sense.
- 5 In addition to the superfluity
- 6 argument they make, that seems to me a serious
- 7 contextual issue that you have to deal with.
- 8 So how -- how do you deal with that?
- 9 MR. DVORETZKY: So, Justice Kavanaugh,
- 10 Congress didn't have a reason to be concerned
- about joining A, B, and C for a few reasons.
- 12 One, it knew that defendants would
- 13 still have to satisfy the rest of (f)(2)
- 14 through (f), which focuses on the -- whether
- 15 the instant offense is a violent crime or not.
- 16 And Congress could guite rationally have
- 17 thought that was the focus.
- In addition to that, as I said in my
- 19 introduction --
- 20 JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: Do you accept my
- 21 premise, though, that -- that your
- 22 interpretation would mean offenders with more
- 23 serious violent offense records would be
- 24 eligible and with less serious violent offense
- 25 records would not be eligible in certain

1 circumstances? 2 MR. DVORETZKY: I -- I was going to say I -- I don't accept that as a categorical 3 4 proposition. 5 JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: In certain 6 circumstances? 7 MR. DVORETZKY: It -- there -- you can find individual cases where that would be true, 8 9 but as Chief Judge Pryor explained in the 10 Garcon case, Congress legislates at a macro level, not at a micro level. That can lead to 11 12 particular cases where results might be 13 anomalous. 14 The reason that it doesn't defy common 15 sense, though, to use the phrase that I think 16 you used in your question, Congress knew that, 17 first, a defendant would have to satisfy (f)(2) through (f), and, second, the safety valve 18 19 itself, all that means is that courts exercise 20 discretion to impose proportionate sentences --21 JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: On --2.2 MR. DVORETZKY: -- based on a variety 23 of factors, including criminal history. And so 24

JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: (f)(2) through (f)

- don't have anything to do with criminal
- 2 history, though, per se, right?
- 3 MR. DVORETZKY: They -- they don't.
- 4 And Congress could quite rationally, given the
- 5 history of the -- the -- given the history of
- 6 mandatory minimums and what Congress was trying
- 7 to achieve here, wanted to focus more on the
- 8 nature of the instant offense than on criminal
- 9 history. But even as to criminal history,
- 10 district judges can and do take that into
- 11 account.
- 12 JUSTICE JACKSON: Don't they --
- JUSTICE KAGAN: Well, but, presumably,
- 14 they --
- 15 JUSTICE JACKSON: -- have to under the
- 16 Sentencing Guidelines? I mean, the safety
- valve just removes the mandatory minimum, but
- don't the judges then have to look at the
- 19 guidelines, and wouldn't you expect that a
- 20 defendant who had a number of serious criminal
- 21 violent priors, the guidelines would take
- 22 account of that in terms of what the ultimate
- 23 sentence was going to be?
- MR. DVORETZKY: You -- you would
- 25 expect that. You might also expect that a

- 1 serious violent recidivist would qualify for a
- 2 career guidelines enhancement.
- JUSTICE KAGAN: I mean --
- 4 JUSTICE JACKSON: And would you have
- 5 --
- 6 JUSTICE KAGAN: -- presumably, this
- 7 provision was meant to make some amount of
- 8 sense, right? Congress would not have just
- 9 said: Well, whatever, we -- we'll just, you
- 10 know, repeat some nonsense because we know that
- 11 district courts have discretion in the end.
- 12 They meant this gatekeeping provision to be a
- serious gatekeeping provision with serious
- 14 criteria that meant something.
- 15 And the question is: Why would
- 16 Congress -- why -- I mean, I guess what you're
- saying is you don't have an explanation for why
- 18 Congress would say it's okay if you have a
- 19 gazillion three-point offenses so long as you
- don't have a two-point violent offense.
- MR. DVORETZKY: Justice Kagan, we do
- have an explanation, which is that Congress,
- again, legislating at a macro level, could have
- 24 rationally thought that the combination of A,
- 25 B, and C was serving a gatekeeping function --

```
1
              JUSTICE GORSUCH: And, counsel --
 2
              MR. DVORETZKY: -- to keep --
 3
              JUSTICE GORSUCH: -- I -- I mean,
      why are you resisting the obvious conclusion
 4
      that the Ninth Circuit came up with, which is,
 5
 6
      if you have a three-point violent offense, you
7
     have a two-point violent offense, and,
      therefore, there is no -- this anomaly
8
 9
     dissipates completely?
10
              MR. DVORETZKY: Well, on that point,
11
      I -- I think the better reading of the statute
12
      is that two points means two points and three
13
     points means three points. The Sentencing
14
     Guidelines distinguish in that way between
15
     two-point offenses and three-point offenses.
16
      So I don't know that you need --
17
              JUSTICE GORSUCH: So you think the
18
     Ninth Circuit was wrong in a case that favors
19
     you? Alas --
20
              MR. DVORETZKY: I -- I --
21
              JUSTICE GORSUCH: -- here we are, day
2.2
      one.
23
              MR. DVORETZKY: -- I -- I think
24
      the better reading of the statute -- the better
      reading of the statute is that two and three
25
```

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1
     are --
 2
              JUSTICE GORSUCH: Okay. So you
 3
      embrace --
              MR. DVORETZKY: -- mutually exclusive,
 4
 5
     but --
 6
              JUSTICE GORSUCH: -- you embrace the
7
      anomaly?
              MR. DVORETZKY: Well, I -- I -- so I
8
9
      think there are two points associated with
10
     this. One is the -- the surplusage point,
11
     which we haven't talked about. The other is
12
     the anomaly. On the anomaly, I think there can
13
     be situations where that would happen. I don't
14
     think that makes Congress's statute here
15
     irrational.
16
              JUSTICE JACKSON: And, indeed --
17
              JUSTICE GORSUCH: Right. It doesn't
18
              JUSTICE JACKSON: -- isn't that what
19
      just -- isn't that --
20
21
              JUSTICE GORSUCH: It -- it --
2.2
              JUSTICE JACKSON: -- what Judge Pryor
     said in the Garcon case? I mean, I -- I took
23
24
     you to be sort of embracing his philosophy as
     to how the guidelines work relative to the
25
```

- 1 mandatory minimums and that it is not
- 2 irrational at all for Congress to be making the
- 3 amendment that they were making in this case,
- 4 which was intended to broaden the -- the
- 5 availability of the safety valve.
- 6 MR. DVORETZKY: That's right, Justice
- 7 Jackson. It was intended to broaden the
- 8 availability of the safety valve, in
- 9 recognition of the fact that mandatory
- 10 minimums, applying automatically without regard
- 11 for the offenders' particular circumstances,
- 12 are unfair and unjust, and so Congress wanted
- 13 to move away from that --
- 14 JUSTICE ALITO: Are you talking about
- 15 --
- MR. DVORETZKY: -- but that -- I'm
- 17 sorry.
- 18 JUSTICE ALITO: Just -- I'm sorry.
- 19 Finish what you were --
- MR. DVORETZKY: No, no. Please.
- 21 JUSTICE ALITO: -- finish what you
- 22 were saying.
- MR. DVORETZKY: No, please.
- JUSTICE ALITO: I didn't mean to
- 25 interrupt. You mentioned surplusage. Could we

1 talk about that? If (B) and (C) made (A) 2 100 percent surplusage, what would you say? 3 MR. DVORETZKY: I would -- even in 4 that circumstance, as Judge Newsom, for example, said in Garcon, you would still have 5 6 to adhere to the ordinary meaning of "and" in 7 -- in this situation, and the surplusage would 8 not matter. But (B) and (C) don't make (A) 9 surplusage, and I think that's for the reason 10 11 that Chief Judge Pryor, who was a former acting 12 chair of the Sentencing Commission, explained 13 in Garcon. That is that not every sentence for 14 a prior offense earns criminal history points. 15 JUSTICE ALITO: Well --16 MR. DVORETZKY: You can have --17 JUSTICE ALITO: -- okay. I understand 18 that argument. Suppose I think that if it made 19 it a hundred percent surplusage, that would be 20 a pretty strong argument against you. Let's 21 just take that as an assumption. 2.2 Would you draw a distinction between 23 that situation, where it's a hundred percent 24 surplusage, and the situation where it's 25 99 percent surplusage or 98 percent surplusage?

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1
               MR. DVORETZKY: I don't know that I
 2
      would because, either way, the surplusage canon
      isn't an absolute rule, and it doesn't justify
 3
      in this case overriding the ordinary meaning of
 4
      "and." The other -- the other textual cues
 5
 6
      that we've talked about and argued about in our
7
     brief, the Senate's drafting manual here is
 8
      also a relevant consideration. The manual says
 9
     that "and" indicates that something is included
10
      in a class only if it meets all of the
11
      criteria, whereas "or" says that something is
12
      included only if it meets one or more of the
13
     criteria.
14
               So the point is that Congress, by
     default, following that drafting manual, uses
15
      "and" in its joint sense.
16
17
               JUSTICE JACKSON: And, counsel --
              MR. DVORETZKY: So even if you had --
18
               JUSTICE JACKSON: -- didn't -- didn't
19
      -- didn't --
20
               JUSTICE GORSUCH: I -- I -- go.
21
2.2
               JUSTICE JACKSON: -- didn't Congress
23
     actually contemplate the difference between
24
      "and" and "or" in this very context? And by
     that, I mean, are you familiar with the
25
```

- 1 enactment history? My understanding is that
- 2 Congress looked at a bill in the previous cycle
- 3 that would have done exactly -- almost exactly
- 4 what happened here with respect to increasing
- 5 to four points, including (B) and (C), and in
- 6 that draft document, they used the word "or."
- 7 And yet, here now, on the enactment of this, we
- 8 have "and."
- 9 So that suggests to me at least that
- 10 Congress was consciously determining that there
- 11 was a difference between "and" and "or."
- 12 MR. DVORETZKY: Sure. And I think
- 13 that there are a number of different
- indicators -- we can go through the list --
- that Congress understood the difference between
- 16 "and" and "or," and these are the words that it
- 17 wrote, and the words that it wrote have to be
- 18 given effect even in the face of surplusage.
- 19 I don't think there is --
- JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: Well, if we're
- 21 going to go -- if we're going to go into the
- legislative history, though, when Senator
- 23 Grassley introduced the bill that became law,
- 24 the Judiciary Committee report on that said
- 25 that it would exclude offenders with

- 1 three-point felony convictions or prior
- 2 two-point violent offenses. So, if we're going
- 3 to go down that road, which I'm not saying we
- 4 should, but if we're going to go down that
- 5 road, I'm not sure that that fully helps you.
- 6 MR. DVORETZKY: So I think that
- 7 particular legislative history that you're
- 8 focused on, Judge -- Justice Kavanaugh, is a
- 9 little bit mysterious because the rest of it
- 10 also says that offenders will not be eligible
- 11 for the safety valve "absent a judicial finding
- that those prior offenses substantially
- overstate the defendant's criminal history and
- danger of recidivism."
- So, while the statement that you're
- referring to used "or" rather than "and," the
- 17 statement also suggests -- and I'm not quite
- 18 sure where Congress was getting this -- that
- 19 courts could exercise discretion to trigger the
- 20 safety valve notwithstanding a defendant's
- 21 criminal history.
- JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: Counsel, I think
- 23 it may have come from the legislation they had
- 24 been looking at. That exact language that you
- just read came from the Sentencing Reform Act

- of 2015 that used the "or" between (A), (B),
- 2 "or" (C). But then it gave a discretion to the
- 3 sentencing judge to ignore it.
- 4 It actually supports your position
- 5 that Congress knew that the "or" should be
- 6 there but only if the court could deviate.
- 7 MR. DVORETZKY: Right.
- 8 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: When it decided to
- 9 take away the power to deviate, it raised up
- the qualifications by doing (A), (B), "and"
- 11 (C).
- 12 MR. DVORETZKY: Right. And all of
- that accords with the purpose of the First Step
- 14 Act to move away from mandatory minimums
- towards considering the offender's individual
- 16 circumstances in a particular case, which, of
- 17 course, would include criminal history.
- 18 District judges obviously apply the
- 19 guidelines. As the Federal Defenders' brief
- shows, I think at pages 7 to 8, district judges
- 21 routinely depart upward where it's called for
- 22 based on a defendant's criminal history. The
- career offender guidelines lead to sentences
- 24 routinely of 25 years to life. And so the
- 25 Sentencing Guidelines will account for the kind

- of individualized circumstances that Congress
- 2 wanted.
- JUSTICE GORSUCH: On that score, I
- 4 just wanted to take this case as an example to
- 5 test it in my own mind, and I went back and
- 6 looked at the presentence report and things
- 7 like that. And as I understand it, 15-year
- 8 minimum, 180 months, for some reason, your
- 9 client got 162, I'm not sure why. Maybe you
- 10 can tell me. And that -- so that would be the
- 11 15-year mandatory minimum.
- 12 The safety valve gets him with his
- 13 criminal history approximately, my -- my law
- 14 clerks tell me, between 120 and 150 months. He
- was over 60 years old when he's sentenced, so
- 16 we're talking about whether he might be free
- 17 when he's 70, 73, or 75. Is that what we're --
- 18 what's really at stake here?
- 19 MR. DVORETZKY: That's right. This is
- 20 a 60-year-old offender. He does have a
- 21 criminal history. That criminal history would
- 22 be taken into account under the Sentencing
- 23 Guidelines. And nobody is talking about him
- 24 not serving a serious prison term. This is --
- JUSTICE GORSUCH: He's going to be at

- 1 least 70 years old when he's released. He'll
- 2 be under parole, I assume, for a good bit
- 3 thereafter, supervised release. And -- and the
- 4 judge, of course, could depart or vary upward
- 5 if the judge wished to.
- 6 MR. DVORETZKY: That -- that's right.
- 7 If the court wanted to do that, it could.
- 8 JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: Would you have a
- 9 different rule for a 22-year-old offender?
- 10 MR. DVORETZKY: No, but the -- but the
- 11 point, Justice Kavanaugh, is that Congress
- 12 wanted individualized circumstances --
- JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: Then why have --
- MR. DVORETZKY: -- to be taken into
- 15 account.
- 16 JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: -- why have the
- 17 criminal history disqualification at all? At
- 18 least my understanding of the statistics is
- of -- based on 2021, of 11,000 offenders who
- 20 met the non-criminal history requirements
- 21 pre-First Step Act, 6,000 would be
- 22 disqualified. Under the government's
- interpretation, only 4,000 would be
- 24 disqualified. So a substantial number, 2,000.
- But, under yours, only 300 or so would

- 1 be disqualified, which basically eliminates the
- 2 criminal history disqualification in 98 percent
- 3 of the cases.
- 4 MR. DVORETZKY: So to -- to --
- 5 JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: So why keep it at
- 6 all? Given the -- as you rightly say, the
- 7 individualized discretion that sentencing
- 8 judges use, why -- why have all this if it's
- 9 really not going to make a difference, as
- 10 Justice Gorsuch says, in a lot of cases?
- MR. DVORETZKY: If I could, two -- two
- 12 points, one conceptual, one on the facts.
- 13 Conceptually, look, Congress could
- have thought that the combination of (A), (B),
- and (C) was a particularly egregious
- 16 combination, and that at a macro level was what
- it was targeting. It could still serve some
- 18 purpose. Congress didn't know when it passed
- 19 that what the numbers would look like.
- Second, on a factual level, in
- 21 response to those numbers, those numbers, the
- 22 2.8 percent or whatever it is, that's
- 23 calculating things under the Ninth Circuit's
- 24 Lopez interpretation. It's not calculating the
- 25 numbers using the approach that we're

- 1 advocating and that Chief Judge Pryor adopted
- 2 in Garcon, which allows old offenses to be
- 3 counted under (B) or (C) even if they don't
- 4 count towards the criminal history total in
- 5 (A).
- 6 So we actually don't know what the
- 7 numbers would look like when you apply the
- 8 approach that we're advocating for those.
- 9 JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: Well, it would be
- 10 even fewer --
- 11 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Thank you.
- 12 JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: Never mind.
- 13 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Thank you,
- 14 counsel.
- Justice Thomas, anything further?
- 16 Justice Alito?
- 17 JUSTICE ALITO: Well, just out of
- 18 curiosity, I wonder if I can ask you a question
- 19 about how you think language works in general.
- 20 Let's just forget about special rules that
- 21 apply to statutory interpretation for a moment
- 22 and just talk about how language works in
- 23 general and your understanding of that.
- 24 If I say something and it's ambiguous
- and you're trying to figure out whether I mean

- 1 A or B, to what degree do you take into account
- whether A or B makes more sense?
- 3 MR. DVORETZKY: I might take it into
- 4 account, but the other thing I would take into
- 5 account is my relationship with you as the
- 6 speaker.
- 7 So, if -- to Justice Kagan's
- 8 hypothetical, if my doctor tells me, don't do
- 9 A, B, and C, my relationship with the doctor is
- 10 I want to pass -- I want the medical test to go
- 11 well, and I assume that my doctor is being very
- 12 cautious and conservative, because my doctor
- is, so I'm going to -- that's the context.
- 14 It's the relationship with the speaker that's
- letting me turn an "and" into an "or" there.
- In this situation, if Congress --
- 17 JUSTICE ALITO: No, I think that's
- 18 a -- that's a -- that's a fair answer. So we
- 19 have -- you have to take into account some
- image of the speaker and your relationship to
- 21 the speaker.
- 22 So who is the speaker that we're
- 23 talking about when we're trying to understand a
- 24 statute that is enacted by Congress, and what
- 25 attributes do we attribute to that speaker?

1 MR. DVORETZKY: So I think that 2 actually raises two different questions, I think. 3 JUSTICE ALITO: All right. Who is the 4 5 speaker? 6 MR. DVORETZKY: So I think the speaker 7 is Congress. JUSTICE ALITO: Okay. 8 MR. DVORETZKY: But --9 10 JUSTICE ALITO: And -- and what is our 11 image of -- of this speaker? What 12 characteristics does this speaker have? 13 MR. DVORETZKY: It -- that feels like a loaded question. I -- I -- I --14 15 (Laughter.) 16 JUSTICE ALITO: Why is it a loaded --17 well, no, I don't mean to be derogatory of 18 Congress. I'm not -- I'm not looking for a 19 derogatory answer or necessarily a complimentary one. But, if that's how language 20 21 works, don't we have to have some image of 2.2 who -- who's the -- the speaker of this speech 23 that we are interpreting? 24 MR. DVORETZKY: Well, the -- the

speaker in this case is an institution.

Т	JUSTICE ALITO: Right.
2	MR. DVORETZKY: But the institution is
3	also speaking in the context of a criminal
4	case. And where we have basic words like "and"
5	and "or," I think you hold the the
6	institution, the maker of laws, to a higher
7	standard of precision than I would hold my
8	doctor, who I know has my best interests at
9	heart and is trying to make me well.
10	And so, in that situation, where
11	Congress knows how to use "and" or "or," and,
12	again, particularly in a criminal context,
13	where fairness is at stake, you hold Congress
14	to the ordinary meaning of the word "and,"
15	which is not a distributive meaning in this
16	kind of a context.
17	JUSTICE ALITO: I mean, I think that
18	the move to textualism in our interpretation of
19	statutes was enormously beneficial and it
20	eliminated a lot of abuses that previously
21	occurred, but, in the end, we are just
22	interpreting language.
23	Everybody I assume in this courtroom
24	today speaks the English language, and all
25	we're trying to do is understand some words in

- 1 the English language, and it just seems to me
- 2 that a lot of these arguments that we've heard
- 3 -- I mean -- I mean, the people here who
- 4 haven't studied the case must think this is --
- 5 this is gibberish. It might as well be -- it
- 6 might as well be Greek with all this stuff
- 7 about distributive and em dash and all of that.
- 8 Is it necessarily that complicated?
- 9 MR. DVORETZKY: So I -- I don't think
- 10 it's complicated because I think that the
- 11 natural way to express what Congress wanted to
- express here would have been "or." Using "and"
- 13 to express that any of the three would
- 14 disqualify you is unnatural. And -- and so I
- think that really is the key point, is that
- we're holding Congress to what the ordinary
- 17 understanding of these terms is.
- 18 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Justice
- 19 Sotomayor?
- 20 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: I want to go back
- 21 to that point. And as I understood you
- 22 earlier, when Congress wanted to use the
- 23 distributive form, it generally did it. It did
- 24 it in (f)(2) by using the defendant did not use
- 25 violence or credible threats of violence or

- 1 possess a firearm or other dangerous weapon or.
- When it wanted to do a "not" in
- 3 (f)(4), it wrote, contrary to Justice Kagan's
- 4 expectation, in a very cumbersome way, it said,
- 5 the statute requires a defendant was not an
- 6 organizer or leader and was not engaged, and it
- 7 went on and on.
- 8 So, here, the anomaly would be
- 9 Congress changing course just for this one
- 10 provision and changing "and" to mean "or." I
- 11 think that's your basic point. But assume that
- 12 we have two ways of reading this statute, that
- 13 you could accept that there was a possibility
- of reading "or" to mean "and."
- Where does the Rule of Lenity come
- 16 into this?
- 17 MR. DVORETZKY: If at the end of the
- 18 day you conclude, taking into account all of
- 19 the various textual cues that are available
- 20 here, that this statute is just -- is
- 21 grievously ambiguous -- that's the standard
- 22 that the Court has used -- then, at that point,
- 23 the Rule of Lenity calls for Mr. Pulsifer to
- 24 win, favoring the defendant.
- 25 And if Congress wants to change "and"

- 1 to "or" in a revision of this statute, that's a
- 2 very easy change for them to make, but the
- 3 burden of that ought to be on Congress, not on
- 4 defendants whose liberty is at stake in the
- 5 face of a -- a seriously ambiguous statute.
- 6 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: So where does
- 7 surplusage and common sense come into that?
- 8 Meaning, if all of the grammatical indicators
- 9 suggest that "and" means and and "or" means or
- 10 and the two are not the same, does that
- 11 constitute a grievous enough ambiguity to say
- that lenity should play a part here?
- MR. DVORETZKY: I -- I -- I think it
- 14 does. I think that alone is enough to conclude
- that "and" means and, even if there were
- 16 surplusage, which I -- which I don't think
- 17 there is.
- 18 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: So assume there's
- 19 not, because I think Justice Alito was saying,
- 20 I don't know. Can you quantify that surplusage
- 21 here? The number of cases that would fall into
- 22 your exception, is it a lot? Is it a little?
- 23 I'm not sure.
- MR. DVORETZKY: Meaning the -- the
- 25 number of cases where somebody would satisfy B

_	and C but not A:
2	JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: Exactly.
3	MR. DVORETZKY: So so I can't
4	quantify it, but Chief Judge Pryor and Judge
5	Wood and others in the lower courts have given
6	a number of examples where that could happen.
7	You could have somebody with old offenses that
8	qualify under B or C or tribal convictions or
9	something subject to the single sentence rule.
LO	And the guidelines in those
L1	situations, you could have points associated
L2	with those offenses that don't add to the
L3	criminal history total, which is what A is
L 4	focused on.
L5	How many of those cases there will be
L6	I don't know, but Congress could quite
L7	rationally have thought that B and C were
L8	serving a different purpose than A.
L9	JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: Thank you.
20	CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Justice Kagan?
21	JUSTICE KAGAN: I want to go back to
22	Justice Alito's line of questioning, and you
23	said that the the the difference between
24	my hypothetical and this case has to do with
25	the relationship between the speaker and the

- 1 person listening to the injunction or the
- 2 prohibition or whatever you want to call it.
- 3 MR. DVORETZKY: That's one difference,
- 4 yeah.
- 5 JUSTICE KAGAN: Yeah. And -- and I
- 6 think that that might be one difference. But
- 7 another difference, which is the one I
- 8 suggested before, has to do with the
- 9 relationship of the items on the list.
- 10 And this is why "don't drink and
- drive" is so powerful, because, automatically,
- we understand that the harm that's being sought
- 13 to be averted is the combination of the two,
- whereas other lists, you can see that the harms
- 15 are much more independent, that things are
- independently disqualifying and would -- were
- meant to be independently disqualifying.
- 18 And that's why the three-point/
- 19 two-point anomaly seems so significant to me,
- 20 because what that suggests is that these were
- 21 meant -- you know, when you -- when you take
- the intersection of those, it doesn't work
- 23 under your reading and it does work under the
- 24 government's reading.
- So I want you to respond to that view.

1	MR. DVORETZKY: I I think the
2	answer when you say it doesn't work, Justice
3	Kagan, I I think what you mean by that is
4	it's leading to an anomalous result in this
5	particular case, that it
6	JUSTICE KAGAN: Well, not just
7	MR. DVORETZKY: that doesn't
8	JUSTICE KAGAN: in this particular
9	case. It leads to an anomalous result in the
10	case of anybody who has lots of three-point
11	offenses, both violent and non-violent, let's
12	say, but does not have, just happens not to
13	have a two-point violent offense.
14	MR. DVORETZKY: But it doesn't lead to
15	anomalous results in a whole other class of
16	cases where Congress might rationally have
17	JUSTICE KAGAN: Well, that's true.
18	But this anomaly suggests that those two
19	features, the three-point criterion and the
20	two-point violent criterion, were meant to
21	operate independently, each one being
22	disqualifying.
23	MR. DVORETZKY: I that's one
24	inference, but I don't think that's the only
25	inference that you could draw from A, B, and C.

1 Congress could have thought that A, B, and C 2 combined were worse than any of them alone. 3 Now, yes, that could lead to a situation where a -- a seemingly more serious 4 offender qualifies under (f)(1) as opposed 5 6 to -- as opposed to somebody who's a less 7 serious offender. Congress didn't have a particular 8 reason to be concerned about that because that 9 offender would still have to satisfy (f)(2) 10 11 through (5), and even then, the Sentencing 12 Guidelines would take into account that person's criminal history and the district 13 14 judge would take into account that criminal 15 history when determining the sentence. 16 So Congress had no reason to think 17 that as a result of that supposed anomaly there would be unjust results in the real world. 18 19 JUSTICE KAGAN: Thank you. 20 MR. DVORETZKY: Congress was --21 JUSTICE KAGAN: I'm sorry. 2.2 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Justice 23 Gorsuch?

got it right. Tell me where I go wrong, okay?

24

25

JUSTICE GORSUCH: Let me see if I've

1 The -- the two arguments we've heard 2 this morning on the other side so far are that 3 there's a surplusage problem you have, but everybody seems to admit there isn't a 4 hundred percent surplusage. It's some --5 something less than that, so it's not really a 6 7 surplusage argument of the kind we normally adopt or -- or take seriously. 8 And the second is the 9 two-point/three-point violent offender anomaly, 10 which is in the nature of or in the direction 11 12 of an absurdity argument, but it never really 13 gets there. And so everybody's dropped the --14 the -- the label that it's an absurdity. They 15 tried to pursue that below, but nobody really 16 argues that, takes it seriously here. It's a 17 policy argument. It's a policy argument, and 18 it's an imperfect one because one could 19 abstract at a policy level. Okay. That's on one side. 20 On the other side, "and" means and, 21 2.2 plain language. Everybody in the room does 23 understand that concept. Number two, there is a distributive --24 25 examples elsewhere in the statute. (f)(2) is

- 1 distributive, as Justice Sotomayor pointed out,
- 2 so Congress knows how to distribute when it
- 3 wants to distribute.
- 4 And then, three, lenity, which is the
- 5 word that we dare not utter but which Chief
- 6 Justice Marshall back in Wiltberger said
- 7 applies before you get to things like
- 8 legislative history and what Congress might
- 9 have wanted and policy arguments.
- 10 And the fact of the matter is, at the
- end of the day, what we're really talking about
- 12 here is whether mandatory minimums send people
- away for lifes, life sentences, effectively,
- for many people, or whether the guidelines,
- 15 which are not exactly the most
- defendant-friendly form of sentencing known to
- man, themselves apply.
- That's what's at stake here. What am
- 19 I missing?
- 20 MR. DVORETZKY: That -- that summation
- 21 was better than my introduction.
- 22 (Laughter.)
- MR. DVORETZKY: I don't think you're
- 24 missing anything, Justice Gorsuch.
- JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: You agree --

1 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Justice 2 Kavanaugh? 3 JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: -- you agree, however, that context is relevant, you said 4 that earlier, in determining whether the "and" 5 6 distributes. I just want to make sure you 7 still agree with that. MR. DVORETZKY: I --8 9 JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: You said that earlier. 10 11 MR. DVORETZKY: I agree with it, and I 12 think that the key context is the surrounding statutory text. That's what -- that's what you 13 look for -- look to first. 14 15 I don't think that policy 16 considerations, as Justice Gorsuch was 17 explaining in his question, are the relevant context to consider here. 18 19 JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: And then the 20 second --21 MR. DVORETZKY: "Context," I think, is 22 a very broad term. 23 JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: And then I have a 24 fact question and then one broader question

raised by Justice Gorsuch's comment.

1 On the fact question, how many 2 individual uses or dosages does 141 grams of 3 meth get you? I mean, I'm sure you acknowledge meth is a serious problem in many communities 4 in the United States. And what's your sense of 5 6 141 grams? And the government can talk about 7 this as well. MR. DVORETZKY: I -- I honestly don't 8 9 have a sense to give you the answer to that 10 question. You could certainly imagine that 11 being a relevant consideration taking into --12 taken into account at sentencing, but I -- I 13 can't quantify that for you. 14 JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: And then, on the 15 sentencing guidelines, those are -- are not 16 mandatory, correct? 17 MR. DVORETZKY: They -- they are --18 they're not mandatory. 19 JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: Right. So --20 MR. DVORETZKY: But --21 JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: -- so the 22 reference to the Sentencing Guidelines, a lot 23 of judges would sentence under the Sentencing 24 Guidelines in certain cases. And that happens. 25 I guess the broader point there is the reason

- they're mandatory minimums -- there are
- 2 problems with them, as you identify, but I want
- 3 to give you a chance to respond to the
- 4 counterpoint, which is that Congress uses them
- 5 in some circumstances because, with the
- 6 hundreds and hundreds of federal district
- 7 judges around the country, they think that some
- 8 judges might sentence certain serious offenders
- 9 to too light a sentence, and so they wanted to
- 10 prevent that from happening in certain kinds of
- 11 cases.
- 12 So the discretion doesn't seem like a
- total answer to the concern that Congress would
- 14 have about cases like this.
- MR. DVORETZKY: Well, of course, the
- 16 government can and does appeal sentences when
- 17 they think that the sentence ought to have been
- 18 higher in those circumstances, but --
- 19 JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: That -- that
- 20 almost -- you -- you know and I know that
- 21 almost never works, but what's your other
- 22 argument then?
- MR. DVORETZKY: I mean, I think that
- this goes back to the purpose of the First Step
- 25 Act. This was a once-in-a-generation

- 1 sentencing reform, passed in a bipartisan
- 2 manner, signed by President Trump, where the
- 3 motivating force here was to move away from
- 4 mandatory minimums.
- 5 Yes, it did -- Congress did not
- 6 completely eliminate mandatory minimums from
- 7 the U.S. Code. If it had, we wouldn't have
- 8 this case. Congress chose this rather
- 9 complicated First Step Act solution to the
- 10 problem. But the problem it was trying to
- 11 solve was moving away from numerous instances
- of unfair and unjust mandatory minimums and
- 13 giving district courts the discretion, which,
- by and large, overwhelmingly they exercise
- 15 properly --
- JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: Right.
- 17 MR. DVORETZKY: -- to take into
- 18 account individual circumstances.
- 19 JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: Okay. Thank you
- 20 very much.
- 21 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Justice
- 22 Barrett?
- JUSTICE BARRETT: Mr. Dvoretzky, I
- 24 wanted to give you a chance to respond to the
- 25 government's argument that lenity doesn't apply

1 to a safety valve statute. So lenity clearly 2 applies to penalty-imposing provisions, like sentencing -- like sentencing provisions, and 3 so one could say, while that principle would 4 say that, you know, this -- this statute is 5 6 part of the sentence and so it applies, and I 7 assume that would be your answer, but I asked my law clerk if she could find any examples of 8 situations like this. You just told Justice 9 Kavanaugh the point of the First Step Act was 10 11 to afford relief. 12 And so it actually feels more to me 13 like the argument would be a remedial statute 14 should be construed broadly, rather than 15 lenity, which is like a harsh statute should be 16 construed more narrowly. So can you give any 17 examples of situations in which lenity has applied to a situation like this? 18 19 MR. DVORETZKY: So, as you said, 20 Justice Barrett, lenity has applied to sentencing cases. I'm not thinking of an 21 2.2 example of a sentencing case where we're 23 dealing with a safety valve kind of structure 24 because, as my -- as part of my colloquy with 25 Justice Kavanaugh, I was saying this was a

- 1 convoluted way for Congress to do this.
- 2 But either way you want to look at it,
- 3 whether it is lenity in favor of the defendant,
- 4 the defendant having to satisfy all three in
- 5 order to be disqualified, or if you want to
- 6 look at it as Congress wanted to grant broad
- 7 relief here from mandatory minimums, so,
- 8 therefore, we ought to construe "and" to mean
- 9 and and not limit the class of defendants who
- 10 are eligible for that broad relief, I think,
- 11 either way, it leads you to the same
- 12 conclusion.
- 13 And, either way, Congress knows how to
- 14 use "and" and "or." It ought to be held to
- 15 those ordinary meanings. And if it were to
- 16 disagree with this Court's decision in our
- favor, Congress is free to amend the statute.
- 18 JUSTICE BARRETT: Okay. And then I
- 19 have one other question that's related to this
- 20 surplusage argument.
- Do the guidelines use that phrase? I
- 22 mean, I don't -- I don't want to go toe to toe
- with Chief Judge Pryor on what the Sentencing
- 24 Guidelines allow and not, but I'm having a hard
- 25 time getting my mind around this because,

- 1 intuitively, it does seem like the surplusage
- 2 argument makes more sense, and it seems to me
- 3 like the argument that you can have a
- 4 three-point offense that doesn't earn criminal
- 5 history points because it's too old seems like
- 6 it's kind of bending over backwards to find a
- 7 way to make it not superfluous.
- 8 So, I mean, do the guidelines use that
- 9 phrase, "three-point offense"?
- 10 MR. DVORETZKY: The -- the guidelines
- don't use the phrase "three-point offense," but
- 12 I think you get there both from the statute and
- from the guidelines. The statute itself draws
- this distinction. In (f)(1)(A), it talks about
- 15 a four-point criminal history total -- point
- 16 total. But then it excludes a one-point
- 17 offense.
- 18 So the statute in (A) is -- is coming
- 19 -- has this concept that you can have a
- one-point offense that actually doesn't count
- 21 towards the criminal history total. That
- 22 understanding of a one-point offense then
- 23 carries through to (B) and (C) for a
- three-point offense and two-point offense.
- The quidelines are consistent with

- 1 that in a couple of respects. One, as Chief
- 2 Judge -- Chief Judge Pryor said, the guidelines
- 3 do use the term "offense" and they talk about
- 4 sentences from offenses not counting. That is
- 5 what 4A1.2 does.
- 6 And so the guidelines are really
- 7 setting up an order of operations. Under
- 8 4A1.1, you assign points to a sentence based on
- 9 its length. Under 4A2, however, you then say
- 10 that certain sentences and offenses don't
- 11 count. And so the guidelines have that
- 12 concept.
- Lastly, there's Note 3 to 4A2 which we
- 14 highlight in our brief. That confirms that the
- 15 guidelines contemplate that points can be
- 16 associated with an offense without being
- 17 counted. So, for purposes of the single
- 18 sentence rule, the -- that -- that comment
- 19 tells you that if -- if an offense would have
- 20 gotten two points, it can still serve as a
- 21 predicate for the career offender guidelines.
- 22 That idea of an offense that would have gotten
- 23 two points if they had counted is this concept
- that Congress employed here in the statute.
- JUSTICE BARRETT: So how many did

- 1 Mr. Pulsifer have? How many three-point
- 2 offenses? Because he -- well, I'll -- I'll
- 3 just tell you. Looking at the PCR -- I mean
- 4 the PSR, I think he had two three-point
- 5 offenses that counted, counted because they
- 6 weren't stale, and then one that was too old.
- 7 Is that correct?
- 8 MR. DVORETZKY: That -- I think that's
- 9 right.
- 10 JUSTICE BARRETT: Okay. But then he
- 11 argued below that he only had two three-point
- offenses. So he didn't make this argument that
- 13 he had three three-point offenses, right?
- MR. DVORETZKY: He didn't need to
- 15 argue this one way or another. What he -- what
- 16 he needed to argue and did argue is that he
- didn't have a prior two-point violent offense.
- 18 JUSTICE BARRETT: But I think he said
- initially that he had two three-point offenses.
- 20 So you would say now -- your position now is
- 21 that he has three three-point offenses?
- MR. DVORETZKY: For purposes of this
- 23 statute, yes.
- JUSTICE BARRETT: Okay. Thank you.
- 25 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Justice --

1 MR. DVORETZKY: But not for purposes 2 of (A). 3 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: -- Jackson. JUSTICE JACKSON: Yeah. So I'd like 4 to go back to Justice Kagan's conception of 5 this in -- in terms of the focus on the 6 7 anomaly, and I guess I don't see it as 8 anomalous given the context of the point of the 9 statute. 10 And I think you sort of responded to 11 Justice Kagan and Justice Kavanaugh in this 12 way, but I -- I guess maybe you can help me to understand. I -- I thought this statute was 13 14 about relieving discretion or relieving the 15 mandatory minimum and thereby giving judges 16 discretion. 17 So, to the extent that the First Step 18 Act wanted to do that -- I don't think anybody 19 disputes that -- isn't it conceivable that 20 Congress still just wanted to identify 21 particular circumstances in which the mandatory 2.2 minimum should apply on the basis of criminal 23 history and they could do the -- that as 24 narrowly as they wanted to, correct? 25 MR. DVORETZKY: Yes. That's right.

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1
               JUSTICE JACKSON: I mean, right?
 2
     Like, it just -- it doesn't seem to me to be
 3
      anomalous that Congress picked out a particular
      circumstance, as you described it in your
 4
      introduction, a situation in which a person had
 5
     all three of these circumstances would be one
 6
 7
      in which Congress still intended for the
8
     mandatory minimum to apply.
               But, in other circumstances, even if
 9
      they involve serious offenses, even if they
10
11
      involve, Congress was willing to allow for
12
      judges to have discretion under those
13
      circumstances to take into account what the
14
      quidelines would have said or whatever.
15
               I don't understand why that's, like, a
16
     harm or anomalous or anything.
17
               MR. DVORETZKY: No, I -- I think
18
      that's right. And I think that's especially
19
      right when we're only talking about (f)(1) as
     playing the initial gatekeeping role. You
20
      still would have to satisfy (f)(2) through (5).
21
2.2
               JUSTICE JACKSON: Correct.
23
               MR. DVORETZKY: And even then --
24
               JUSTICE JACKSON: So we already --
25
               MR. DVORETZKY: -- you get -- I'm
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- 1 sorry.
- JUSTICE JACKSON: Yes. Correct. So
- 3 we already take care of really --
- 4 MR. DVORETZKY: Right.
- 5 JUSTICE JACKSON: -- terrible people
- 6 in this particular situation. And I would
- 7 think -- I would think that a situation in
- 8 which you had a two-point offense in your
- 9 background would be the kind of thing that
- 10 Congress might hone in on as making sure
- 11 because, otherwise, it could be kind of a
- 12 borderline situation.
- So Congress would say: Okay, we want
- 14 to make clear that the mandatory minimum should
- still apply if a person has more than four and
- 16 they had at least a three -- three-point
- 17 offense, however it's defined. I under -- I
- 18 take Justice Barrett's point about that, but I
- do think the guidelines lead you to identify
- 20 three-point offenses.
- 21 But Congress could say: Look, we're
- 22 lifting the emphasis on criminal history.
- We're -- we -- this has been a problem, you
- 24 know, keeping people from -- the court from
- 25 considering raising -- alleviating the

- 1 mandatory minimums, so we're not going to have
- 2 a focus on criminal history anymore.
- 3 However, there could be a situation in
- 4 which we want to make clear, because it's so
- 5 borderline we can't trust district judges to
- 6 necessarily apply the mandatory minimum in this
- 7 particular circumstance, so let us make clear
- 8 that if the person has four criminal history
- 9 points or more, if they have a three-point
- 10 offense in their background, and if they have a
- 11 two-point offense that is violent, you still
- 12 have to apply the mandatory minimum in that
- 13 situation.
- I don't see that as, like, crazy or
- 15 making the statute not make sense.
- 16 MR. DVORETZKY: I -- I think that's
- 17 right. And while -- while the government in
- 18 its argument may disagree and prefer a
- 19 different policy outcome, that really is at
- 20 that point a policy debate.
- 21 And if the government -- the other
- thing I would add is, if the government's view
- 23 were correct that any of A, B, or C were
- independently disqualifying, you could have
- 25 people disqualified as in the Lopez case, for

- 1 example, for a 14-year-old offense for
- 2 spray-painting a building. That would be a --
- 3 a three-point offense.
- 4 JUSTICE JACKSON: Which would seem to
- 5 undermine Congress's purpose of allowing for
- 6 district courts to not have to apply the
- 7 mandatory minimum --
- 8 MR. DVORETZKY: Right.
- 9 JUSTICE JACKSON: -- in some
- 10 situations.
- 11 MR. DVORETZKY: The -- the
- 12 government's argument is that under our
- interpretation, the First Step Act is doing too
- 14 much. Under their interpretation, the First
- 15 Step Act, I would argue, is doing too little.
- 16 Either way, that's a policy debate, and --
- 17 JUSTICE JACKSON: One that Congress
- 18 could fix very clearly if we say it's "and" by
- just changing it to "or," correct?
- 20 MR. DVORETZKY: That's right. Either
- 21 way, that's a policy debate and Congress could
- amend the statute, and it would be very easy
- for it to do so simply using "and" and "or."
- JUSTICE JACKSON: Thank you.
- 25 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Thank you,

Т	counsel.
2	Mr. Liu.
3	ORAL ARGUMENT OF FREDERICK LIU
4	ON BEHALF OF THE RESPONDENT
5	MR. LIU: Thank you, Mr. Chief
6	Justice, and may it please the Court:
7	"And" is conjunctive in 3553(f)(1).
8	The question is, what does "and" conjoin?
9	It joins together three independently
10	disqualifying conditions by distributing the
11	phrase "does not have." That's the only
12	interpretation that avoids rendering the first
13	subparagraph entirely redundant and the only
14	interpretation that assigns (f)(1) a coherent
15	gatekeeping role.
16	What's inexplicable about Petitioner's
17	reading is that it would disqualify only those
18	defendants with a rare combination of
19	characteristics, including a prior violent
20	offense of exactly two points. So a defendant
21	convicted of a violent offense would actually
22	prefer to receive a longer sentence worth three
23	points to avoid being disqualified. That makes
24	no sense.
25	Petitioner's counterarguments fall

- 1 into three buckets. First, he argued in his
- 2 brief that the distributive interpretation is
- 3 textually impermissible. But grammar, usage,
- 4 and legal drafting guides say otherwise, and
- 5 the law is filled with distributive uses of
- 6 "and." Petitioner this morning attempts to
- 7 distinguish these as -- as cases involving
- 8 negative conditions, but that's just a
- 9 distinction without a difference.
- 10 Second, Petitioner argues that the
- 11 distributive use of "and" is less common. But,
- 12 according to leading grammar authorities, "and"
- is usually distributive, including when
- 14 combined with the negative. And even if that
- weren't true, even if, for example, 40 percent
- of the "ands" in the world were distributive,
- 17 the job of the interpreter would be to figure
- out whether, in context, this case falls within
- 19 that 40 percent rather than to simply accept
- 20 Petitioner's reading.
- 21 Third and finally, Petitioner argues
- that Congress could have more clearly expressed
- the government's interpretation by using "or."
- 24 But Congress could have more clearly expressed
- 25 Petitioner's interpretation by, for example,

- 1 using the phrase "does not have" at least one
- of the following. And if Congress had used
- 3 "or," you can bet that defendants would be
- 4 accusing the government of reading "or" to mean
- 5 "and" by requiring that defendants not have A,
- 6 not have B, and not have C.
- 7 In any event, this Court has held that
- 8 the mere possibility of a clearer phrasing
- 9 can't defeat a meaning that's clear in context.
- 10 Because "and" in context joins together three
- independently disqualifying conditions, the
- 12 Eighth Circuit should be affirmed.
- I welcome the Court's questions.
- JUSTICE THOMAS: Mr. Liu, would you
- 15 tell us exactly when we are to use the -- the
- 16 distributive approach reading as opposed to the
- 17 joint reading?
- 18 MR. LIU: Well, the answer is it
- 19 depends. It depends on the context.
- JUSTICE THOMAS: Well, see, that's the
- 21 problem. We're not getting direction or
- 22 guidance as to when it depends. The -- it's
- 23 almost as though this is a substantive due
- 24 process of the word "and," that we just make it
- up as we go along.

1 I -- I -- I think you have to give us 2 more than that. At least Petitioner says the 3 natural -- the more natural reading or almost a default reading is "and" is conjunctive in a --4 in a joint sense. 5 MR. LIU: Yeah. Well, if you look at 6 7 the grammar books, they say the opposite. They say, when "and" is used, even when combined 8 9 with a negative -- this is the Cambridge 10 Grammar of the English language -- they say 11 "and" is more often distributive. So I think 12 that that's a fair starting point. 13 But then I think you do need to look 14 at the context of the statute. "And" -- "and" is a relationship word. It's a word that 15 16 connects other words. So you can't just look 17 up "and" in the dictionary in isolation to know what it connects. The only way to figure out 18 19 what it connects is to actually read the other words around "and" in this statute. 20 21 And, here, we think we have two 2.2 extremely strong contextual indicators that 23 Congress here intended "and" to be 24 distributive. One is our surplusage argument, and the other is the argument that if you adopt 25

- 1 Petitioner's reading, the provision doesn't
- 2 make any sense.
- 3 JUSTICE JACKSON: What about the use
- 4 of "and" at the end of 3553(f)? I mean, if
- 5 you're right, then is it the government's
- 6 position that (1), (2), (3), (4), and (5) are
- 7 also distributive?
- 8 MR. LIU: No. We think "and" is doing
- 9 the same work in both places. In the main list
- of things, (f)(1) through (5), what "and" is
- doing is creating an eligibility checklist.
- 12 The Court must find (1), must find (2), must
- find (3), must find (4), must -- and must find
- 14 (5).
- What it's doing is the exact same
- 16 thing in the subsidiary checklist. The
- defendant must not have A, must not have B, and
- 18 must not have C.
- In both places, it's requiring that
- 20 all the criteria be satisfied.
- 21 JUSTICE JACKSON: But only if you put
- in "must not have" three times. In other
- words, if you don't repeat "must not have,"
- then it seems to me that one is saying that the
- 25 defendant does not have all of those three.

1 MR. LIU: That's true. Our whole --2 our whole case depends on whether you 3 distribute the "does not have" or you don't. What I'm saying is, if you apply --4 5 JUSTICE JACKSON: Well, what do you --6 MR. LIU: -- the same --7 JUSTICE JACKSON: -- what do you say about the fact that we have within this 3553 --8 and I'm looking at (f)(4) now -- a circumstance 9 10 in which Congress has repeated, you know, the 11 defendant was not an organizer and was not 12 engaged in? So wouldn't we have expected for 13 Congress to do that same sort of thing if it 14 meant for these things to be distributed in 15 (1)? 16 MR. LIU: Well, Congress did do the 17 exact same thing in (f)(1). The only difference is formatting. The only difference 18 19 is formatting and style. 20 What Congress did in (f)(1) was say: 21 Look, (A), (B), and (C) are pretty long. I 2.2 mean, this would be a very long -- much longer 23 than (f)(4). And so, to help the reader figure 24 out what the independent conditions are, we're 25 going to split it up.

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1 But the principle --
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- 2 JUSTICE JACKSON: So how -- how do you
- 3 explain the prior bill that actually used the
- 4 word "or" and had these same criteria? I mean,
- 5 we do have a change. It's not as though
- 6 Congress always used "and," and so we're trying
- 7 to figure this out in that sense.
- 8 MR. LIU: I think the only -- the only
- 9 change is the criteria that -- that the author
- 10 thought were being connected.
- 11 JUSTICE JACKSON: No, there's a change
- in the language of the prior bill and this
- 13 bill --
- MR. LIU: Right.
- 15 JUSTICE JACKSON: -- with respect to
- 16 the use of "and" and "or."
- MR. LIU: And my guess is, when they
- put in "or," they thought that (A), (B), and
- 19 (C) should be read in a package because, when
- 20 they're read as a -- as a single unit with
- 21 brackets, then "or" makes sense.
- But, at some point, I think whoever
- 23 wrote this thought: Actually, I think the
- 24 criteria is does not have (A), does not have
- 25 (B), and does not have (C).

1 JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: Well, I think 2 there are different -- the House had the "or" 3 and the Senate always had the "and," correct? 4 MR. LIU: Right. I mean, look, I don't think we should be looking --5 6 JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: I don't know if 7 that is -- that's not a full answer, but it's -- it's relevant to trying to figure out what 8 the difference was. 9 10 MR. LIU: I think it's relevant, and 11 my -- my -- my deep -- I guess I have two 12 deeper fundamental points. First, I don't 13 think we should be relying on this sort of 14 legislative history at all. But, second --15 JUSTICE JACKSON: But why is that? I -- I -- can you just -- why? Why not? I mean, 16 17 we're trying to understand what, I thought, 18 Congress intended this to mean, and so it seems 19 to me at least -- at least relevant what they 20 had previously drafted as they looked at these 21 various issues. 2.2 MR. LIU: Yeah, I don't think so 23 because, in the context of this case, everyone 24 agrees -- I mean, we've been accused of this 25 throughout the brief -- that the same thing can

- 1 be rephrased as an "or." So the fact that it
- 2 was rephrased as an "or" I don't think moves
- 3 the needle at all.
- 4 Anytime someone is speaking and uses a
- 5 connector, they have in mind what's being
- 6 connected. When they used "or," I would say
- 7 that Congress --
- 8 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: Mr. Liu --
- 9 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Mr. Liu --
- 10 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: -- Mr. Liu, could
- 11 you point me to one statute -- we spend a lot
- of time with common language, but I've been
- looking at your brief and all the statutes you
- 14 cited where you say that "and" also meant "or,"
- but all of them were framed in the affirmative.
- 16 As examples, "executive" means -- 5 U.S.C.
- 17 Section 105, "executive agency" means an
- 18 executive department, a government corporation,
- 19 and an independent establishment.
- 20 Or sometimes examples are framed in
- 21 the negative, such as 26 U.S.C. Section 17 --
- 170(f)(16)(D), which provides that the term
- "household items" does not include food,
- 24 paintings, antiques, and other objects of art,
- jewelry and gems, and collection.

1 But I can't find another statute except this one where a list of criteria is 2 3 framed in the negative and we distribute that 4 negative the way you have. Point me to one 5 other statute. MR. LIU: Well, I think that the --6 7 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: You can't do it in this one. 8 9 MR. LIU: I think the example Your Honor just gave qualifies. The -- the 10 11 provision in the Internal Revenue Code says, to 12 qualify as a household item eligible for a 13 deduction --14 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: That's a list of 15 examples. I'm talking about criteria that 16 disqualify you. I want an example like this 17 one. 18 MR. LIU: I think -- I think the 19 household items one is just like this one. I think 34 U.S.C. 20 --20 21 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: All right. 22 -- we're -- we're going to fight on the 23 starting premise. 24 JUSTICE GORSUCH: Counsel --

CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: I --

1 JUSTICE GORSUCH: Oh, I'm sorry, 2 Chief, you -- go ahead. 3 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: I was just going to say, if you could discuss for a little 4 while, Mr. Dvoretzky talked about his doctor 5 6 and Congress, and I think Justice Alito made 7 the very important point that we have to focus 8 on who -- who we're talking to or who we're 9 listening to. 10 What do you -- what do you think about 11 that? I mean, does Congress really, when 12 they're drafting these things, focus as much as 13 we have been focusing today on the grammatical 14 structure and differences, or should we take it 15 in a more colloquial sense, or how should we --16 MR. LIU: So I -- Mr. Chief Justice, I 17 think the government wins whether you take a 18 literal or hyper-literal or colloquial understanding of what Congress is saying, 19 20 either way. 21 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Okay. But --2.2 but, as a general starting point, what should 23 we do? I mean, obviously, we --MR. LIU: Yeah. Well, look --24 25 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: -- we've said

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     we treat the language --
 2
              MR. LIU: -- I --
 3
               CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: -- as being
      used in a common manner, but --
 4
              MR. LIU: I think the most important
 5
 6
      thing to know about our relationship with
7
      Congress is that we presume Congress to be
 8
      rational. We presume Congress to be an
 9
      intelligent drafter of opinion -- of -- of --
10
      of -- of statutes. That's why we apply canons
11
      like consistent usage and -- and meaningful
12
     variation, and that's why we -- this Court has
      said that it's this Court's role to make sense,
13
14
      rather than nonsense, out of the corpus juris.
15
               CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Well, but you
16
      can't really say -- go so far as to say that it
17
      would be irrational for Congress to write the
      statute the way your friend wants to write it.
18
19
               MR. LIU: I do think the -- the -- the
20
      way Petitioner frames it, it is -- it is
      incoherent. It is inexplicable. It is -- it
21
2.2
      is -- it can't be explained.
23
               I mean, just think of this
24
     hypothetical that we provide in our brief:
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defendants commit the same three-point offense.

- 1 Then one defendant goes on to commit a series
- of murders, all three-point violent offenses.
- 3 The second defendant goes on to -- to commit
- 4 just one more offense, a mid-level robbery, a
- 5 two-point violent offense.
- 6 If -- if there was any sense to this
- 7 statute, if -- if, as my friend says, this
- 8 statute cares about recidivism and violence,
- 9 then the first -- the first defendant would be
- 10 the one that's disqualified.
- JUSTICE GORSUCH: Counsel, that's --
- 12 MR. LIU: But, under his reading, only
- 13 the second is.
- JUSTICE GORSUCH: -- that -- that --
- that's a good policy argument, but you don't
- argue that it rises to the level of absurdity
- 17 that would trigger our absurd doctrines -- our
- 18 absurdity canons, right?
- 19 MR. LIU: We do think it would be
- 20 absurd. We don't think we need to --
- JUSTICE GORSUCH: You haven't made
- 22 that argument.
- MR. LIU: Well, we don't think we need
- 24 to because absurdity kicks in only when a court
- 25 needs to disregard the literal text of a

- 1 statute. And there is a textual --
- 2 JUSTICE GORSUCH: So -- so you don't
- 3 invoke that canon, and -- and one could imagine
- 4 a rational Congress coming to this conclusion.
- 5 It's not the conclusion you think most
- 6 rational, but a whole bunch of lower court
- 7 judges have found it rational.
- 8 And then you have a -- a superfluidity
- 9 argument that isn't entirely leakproof, right?
- 10 It -- it's -- it's a partial superfluidity
- 11 argument.
- MR. LIU: No, it's a hundred percent.
- 13 It's a hundred percent.
- JUSTICE GORSUCH: A hundred percent?
- MR. LIU: The entire subparagraph (A)
- 16 is superfluous.
- 17 JUSTICE GORSUCH: So Chief Judge Pryor
- is -- is wrong as well that one could read the
- 19 statute rationally to -- every -- every offense
- 20 has a point but that not all of them are
- 21 counted under A1, 2?
- MR. LIU: That's right. I mean, his
- view of the guidelines can't be squared with
- 24 the text of the guidelines or the text of the
- 25 statute.

JUSTICE JACKSON: Can you explain that 1 2 a little bit more, please? 3 JUSTICE GORSUCH: Oh, I'm sorry, before that, I had one last question if it's 4 all right. 5 6 JUSTICE JACKSON: Mm-hmm. 7 JUSTICE GORSUCH: Which is, when we're trying to figure out the most natural reading 8 of a statute and whatever standard we talked 9 about, what should we account for the fact that 10 11 the government didn't make this argument until 12 this Court in this case, that below, in the Eighth Circuit, it argued that "and" means 13 14 "or"? You -- you started this argument by 15 saying we agree "and" is conjunctive, but in 16 the Eighth Circuit, the argument was it's 17 disjunctive. 18 MR. LIU: No, I think we made -- we --19 JUSTICE GORSUCH: Should that weigh in 20 our consideration of what --MR. LIU: -- we made the two arguments 21 2.2 in the alternative. We made the distributive 23 argument in our response brief in the Eighth Circuit, and that's why the Eighth Circuit 24

accepted it. We used the word "distributive"

- 1 in our brief.
- 2 JUSTICE JACKSON: Counsel, I'd like to
- 3 get back to the -- whether or not this comports
- 4 with the guidelines. Guidelines 101 is order
- of operation. And 4A1.1, one of the things I
- 6 noticed in the government's brief was the
- 7 insistence on inverting 4A1.1 and 1.2, which is
- 8 actually not the way in which the guidelines
- 9 operate. You start with 1.1, which allows us
- 10 to determine which prior sentences are eligible
- 11 for points. You get three points for a certain
- 12 set of characteristics; that is, if the
- sentence is over one year and a month, you get
- 14 two points, et cetera.
- Once you have identified those, then
- 16 you go on for 1.2 and determine which count,
- 17 which of those count for the purpose of the
- 18 criminal history. So, given that -- and I
- 19 think that's incontrovertible -- how is it that
- Judge Pryor's view of the way in which this
- 21 works is inconsistent with the guidelines?
- MR. LIU: So, with respect, Justice
- Jackson, I don't think it's uncontrovertible.
- I don't think the probation office or any
- 25 government attorney has ever applied these two

- 1 quidelines in that fashion.
- JUSTICE JACKSON: I'm sorry, what's
- 3 not uncontrovertible? You don't go in order of
- 4 operation?
- 5 MR. LIU: Correct. That when -- when
- 6 you apply -- when -- when someone is
- 7 applying 4A1.1, they're applying 4A1.2 to
- 8 determine which offenses should be --
- 9 JUSTICE JACKSON: Ultimately. But,
- 10 second, after they do 4A1.1.
- 11 MR. LIU: No, I don't think so.
- 12 JUSTICE JACKSON: There's an order of
- 13 operation.
- MR. LIU: I respectfully disagree,
- 15 Justice Jackson. I think the clearest evidence
- of this is on 4a of our statutory appendix,
- where you have the application notes too 4A1.1,
- and all of the application notes for when you
- 19 add three points or add two points or add one
- 20 point incorporate 4A1.2.
- Now, if it were true that you look at
- 4A1.1, you push it away, and then you subtract
- those points, it wouldn't make sense to build
- into the commentary for when you add them all
- 25 the rules in 4A1.2. In other words, what this

- 1 commentary is saying is, before you add points,
- 2 see if you -- you're supposed to be counting --
- JUSTICE JACKSON: All right. Well, if
- 4 -- if --
- 5 MR. LIU: -- that offense in the first
- 6 place.
- 7 JUSTICE JACKSON: -- if I disagree
- 8 with you, do you lose on that point? In other
- 9 words, if the Court decides that there is an
- order of operation, that you can identify
- 11 offenses based on the points that are
- 12 attributed to them under 4A1.1 and then you
- determine whether or not they're counted under
- 14 4A1.2, does the government's surplusage,
- whatever the argument is, do you lose on that
- 16 point?
- 17 MR. LIU: If the Court concludes that
- there is such a thing as a two-point offense
- 19 that doesn't add points to the defendant's
- total, then, yes, we do not have a surplusage
- 21 argument.
- JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: Can I ask you --
- JUSTICE KAGAN: Mr. Liu, can I -- can
- 24 I --
- 25 JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: Go ahead. You.

1 JUSTICE KAGAN: You know, I understand 2 your argument about the foreign sentences and 3 the old sentences, makes sense to me that you 4 don't add up the points if you're not going to 5 count them anyway. And, indeed, like, trying to figure 6 7 out what the points are for some foreign conviction strikes me as something that courts 8 don't do and we shouldn't ask them to do. 9 10 I'm not sure I understand your 11 argument on the single sentence rule. 12 MR. LIU: Sure. 13 JUSTICE KAGAN: I'm not sure I 14 understand Judge Pryor's view of the single 15 sentence rule either. 16 MR. LIU: Right. 17 JUSTICE KAGAN: So I start with not 18 understanding his view, and I end with not 19 understanding your response. So I'm just 20 wondering whether you can go over why you think 21 the single sentence rule does not operate 2.2 against you --23 MR. LIU: Well --JUSTICE KAGAN: -- putting aside this 24 25 -- the old sentence and the foreign -- the old

1 conviction and the foreign conviction rule? MR. LIU: So -- so the single sentence 2 3 rule in principle is the same as the foreign conviction and military conviction rule in that 4 it tells you what is your baseline for adding 5 6 points, for being the basis for adding points. 7 And what the single sentence rule says 8 is that when you have two sentences that are, 9 say, charged on the same indictment and the 10 defendant is sentenced on the same day, treat 11 that, count that -- those are literal --12 literal words -- count that as a single 13 sentence. 14 So then that's the basis on which you 15 move to the instruction in 4A1.1, which says 16 how many points to add. So, when you combine 17 those two, may -- maybe you get a sentence 18 that's three years instead of just one year. 19 So then you know when you get to 4A1.1 we're 20 going to add three points to that instead of 21 just the regular old one or two. 2.2 So that's how the single sentence rule 23 operates. But the principle is the same, which 24 is that you don't get to the point of adding 25 points --

1 JUSTICE KAGAN: Yeah. 2 MR. LIU: -- until you figure out what 3 you're counting. 4 JUSTICE KAGAN: Now, when Judge Pryor 5 says this is contradicted by the language of (1)(A), why -- why do you think that that's 6 7 wrong? MR. LIU: I think it's wrong because 8 (1)(A) has all over it the word "add." And so 9 10 there's no context in which, as I think Chief 11 Judge Pryor was supposing, that points are 12 assigned without adding them. There's only --13 JUSTICE JACKSON: No, I think she's 14 talking about 3553(f)(1)(A), Judge Pryor --15 MR. LIU: Oh, (f)(1)(A). 16 JUSTICE JACKSON: Yes, (f)(1)(A). 17 MR. LIU: Right. 18 JUSTICE JACKSON: Mm-hmm. 19 MR. LIU: There's an exclusion in the 20 text of (f)(1)(A) that says we're going to 21 exclude points resulting from one-point 2.2 offenses. 23 I don't see how that helps my friend 24 because the negative implication of that is 25 that all the two-point and three-point offenses

- 1 are being included in the total points.
- 2 And so that just reinforces that when
- 3 you have a two-point violent offense and a
- 4 three-point offense, that's not being excluded
- from the total, it's being included.
- 6 JUSTICE JACKSON: No, but the fact
- 7 that you could include or exclude is the
- 8 problem. In other words, just -- Judge Pryor's
- 9 point is Congress understood that there would
- 10 be offenses that are called one-point offenses,
- 11 are called two- or three-point offenses that
- 12 would not be included. And that undermines
- 13 your point because your surplusage argument
- 14 relies on the view that every three-point
- offense is only such because it is counted.
- So, to the extent that you can have a
- world in which something is a one-point
- 18 offense, but it is not counted, Judge Pryor at
- 19 least says that I think that -- sorry, he says
- 20 that that means that you're wrong about
- 21 surplusage.
- 22 MR. LIU: I -- I don't -- I don't
- think this helps my friend's argument at all.
- 24 In fact, I think it cuts against it. If you
- 25 read the exclusion, it says points resulting

- 1 from one-point offenses.
- 2 So the only offenses it has in mind
- 3 are -- are offenses that would actually --
- 4 actually result in points. What -- the problem
- 5 with Chief Justice Pryor -- Chief Judge Pryor's
- 6 vision is, is that there are some offenses out
- 7 there that would have resulted in points but
- 8 for the fact that they're not counted.
- 9 The text of -- of 3553(f)(1)(A)
- doesn't contemplate that. The only one-point
- offenses it contemplates are one-point offenses
- 12 that actually --
- 13 JUSTICE JACKSON: But what is the
- 14 government's position on that? Do you disagree
- that there's a world in which you -- you have
- an offense that would be assigned points, but
- those points aren't counted for the purpose of
- 18 the criminal history score?
- 19 MR. LIU: I mean, would be -- I mean,
- 20 sure, you can say would be, but --
- JUSTICE JACKSON: So then why aren't
- 22 those the three-point offenses that --
- MR. LIU: Oh.
- JUSTICE JACKSON: -- this statute is
- 25 talking about?

1 MR. LIU: Because, in -- in referring 2 to three-point and two-point offenses, the 3 statute's referring to offenses that actually give rise to two point and three points, just 4 like in the exclusion in (1)(A), it's referring 5 to one-point offenses that actually result --6 7 JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: Can --MR. LIU: -- in points that count 8 toward the total. 9 10 JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: -- can I -- can I 11 ask you a question to follow up on Justice 12 Thomas's original question? Because I think 13 that's really important. 14 MR. LIU: Yeah. 15 JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: So my 16 understanding is there's an established rule of 17 language and grammar that "and" distributes in 18 circumstances where the context establishes 19 that that's the better reading. 20 MR. LIU: Correct. 21 JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: Is there a more 22 precise phrasing you can put on that? The 23 context shows what? MR. LIU: Sure. And I -- I think 24 25 Justice Kagan provided a helpful heuristic.

- 1 read things like "don't drink and drive"
- 2 because there is something special about the
- 3 combination of drinking and driving. It is
- 4 particularly harmful. And so we're telling
- 5 people don't do the two in combination.
- 6 The problem here is that there is
- 7 nothing special about the combination of A, B,
- 8 and C except for its arbitrariness.
- 9 JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: But the premise to
- 10 your point, I think -- and this is important
- 11 and Justice Thomas raised it -- is the "and"
- 12 distributes sometimes.
- MR. LIU: Correct.
- JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: That's an
- 15 established rule, so we just have to figure out
- 16 when it is.
- 17 MR. LIU: Yeah. And --
- JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: And then, on
- 19 context, I think Justice Gorsuch has raised
- 20 important questions about policy, so you want
- 21 to distinguish the context that we should look
- 22 at from policy arguments, or how do we -- how
- do you respond to the concern that those are
- 24 just policy arguments and not relevant to the
- 25 context, particularly the anomaly --

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1 MR. LIU: Correct.
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- JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: -- issue and also
- 3 the number of offenders who would be
- 4 disqualified now.
- 5 MR. LIU: I want to make clear that
- 6 our con- -- our second contextual argument is
- 7 completely consistent with textualism. It's
- 8 consistent in three ways.
- 9 First, we're not arguing that purpose
- 10 should trump text. We are trying to figure out
- 11 as between two textually grammatically possible
- 12 readings which one is the best one in light of
- 13 context.
- 14 Second, we are not deriving purpose
- 15 from the subjective views of the legislature.
- 16 We are deriving purpose from what a reasonably
- objective user of words would glean from the
- 18 text and structure of this statute.
- 19 And, third, we are not defining this
- 20 purpose at a high level ab- -- of abstraction
- 21 like the broader the safety valve or the
- 22 narrower the better. This isn't about broader
- or narrower. It's about a line, any line, that
- 24 makes sense.
- 25 JUSTICE GORSUCH: That -- that --

- 1 that -- that -- in a -- in a textualist
- world, that would be an absurdity argument,
- 3 that this -- this --
- 4 MR. LIU: I don't -- I don't --
- 5 JUSTICE GORSUCH: Let me just finish
- 6 the question. You can have all the time to
- 7 respond you want.
- 8 MR. LIU: Fair enough.
- 9 JUSTICE GORSUCH: But absurdity, we
- 10 recognize that's a very high bar, and you
- 11 haven't invoked that canon directly. Now maybe
- 12 you want to here at the podium. Good luck with
- 13 that. But that's a very high bar.
- 14 You're saying: Hey, Congress wouldn't
- have done this because it wouldn't capture some
- 16 bad people. That seems to me at -- at heart
- one of two things: either an argument about
- intent, Congress couldn't have intended this,
- 19 wouldn't have intended this because it wouldn't
- 20 want bad people to get away, or, two, it's a
- 21 policy argument, you shouldn't want this to
- happen.
- 23 And either of those seem to me
- 24 straining at least your -- your claim that this
- is all consistent with textualism, especially

- 1 since you haven't identified a canon other than
- 2 absurdity that would be kind of a classic
- 3 textualist argument.
- 4 MR. LIU: Well, with respect, Justice
- 5 Gorsuch, I think we're relying on a traditional
- 6 tool of construction that this Court relies on
- 7 all the time.
- 8 JUSTICE GORSUCH: Which is what? It's
- 9 called common sense in your brief. I don't
- 10 know that canon, but I guess it's a -- a good
- one.
- MR. LIU: It's called construing the
- 13 structure and the text of the statute, gleaning
- 14 the evident purpose --
- JUSTICE GORSUCH: Purpose. So it is
- 16 purposivist?
- 17 MR. LIU: At -- at some level, yeah.
- 18 It's the -- I mean, I do want to --
- 19 JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: I thought the -- I
- 20 thought the point --
- JUSTICE GORSUCH: Okay. I appreciate
- 22 that concession.
- MR. LIU: Absolutely. Mm-hmm.
- JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: I thought the
- 25 point was there's an established -- I don't

- 1 know if you want to call it canon -- rule of
- 2 English grammar about how to read "and."
- 3 MR. LIU: That's correct. It's a --
- 4 it's a --
- 5 JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: Okay. So that
- 6 if -- if we accept that there's an established
- 7 rule of English grammar about how to read "and"
- 8 and you don't always read it literally because
- 9 that's not how people speak, then that's -- you
- don't need to get to absurdity because you're
- 11 trying to figure out whether the "and"
- 12 distributes or not. And then, in figuring that
- out, the established rule is you look at
- 14 context, right?
- MR. LIU: Exactly. And this has --
- 16 this has --
- 17 JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: But then what's
- 18 the -- you know, what context? That's --
- 19 MR. LIU: Right.
- JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: -- I think, what
- 21 Justice Gorsuch is zeroing in on.
- 22 MR. LIU: I -- I think it has to be --
- JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: That sounds like
- 24 absurdity when you're bringing context. But
- 25 maybe it being absurd is helpful to or close to

1 absurd is helpful in thinking about context. MR. LIU: Well, I think this is the 2 way the Court has approached other cases. 3 last term's decision in Jones versus Hendrix. 4 The Court there was construing 2255's saving 5 6 clause, and one of the indicators of context 7 that it relied on was the fact that the defendant's reading would mean that 8 9 non-constitutional claims, i.e. statutory 10 claims, would be given a superior remedy than 11 constitutional claims. The Court rejected that 12 because it called that result "strange and 13 bizarre." 14 In Abbott versus the United States, 15 which -- which we discuss in our brief, this 16 Court addressed the applicability of 924(c)'s 17 mandatory consecutive sentence regime. Under 18 defendant's reading in that case, the most 19 culpable drug offenders would be excused from 20 the mandatory minimum of 924(c), while the least -- less culpable ones would still be 21 2.2 subject to it. 23 JUSTICE JACKSON: But how do you --24 JUSTICE BARRETT: So --25 JUSTICE JACKSON: -- how do you -- go

- 1 ahead.
- 2 JUSTICE BARRETT: I -- I just want to
- 3 make sure you're -- you're not conceding that
- 4 absurdity applies because absurdity applies
- 5 when the actual plain meaning of the text would
- 6 lead to an absurd result. And we're at the
- 7 antecedent point --
- 8 MR. LIU: Correct.
- 9 JUSTICE BARRETT: -- of asking what
- 10 the text means --
- 11 MR. LIU: Correct.
- 12 JUSTICE BARRETT: -- relying on these
- kinds of things. But what do you do about the
- 14 corpus linguistics brief?
- 15 MR. LIU: I think the corpus
- 16 linguistics brief helps us. It helps us in
- 17 three different ways. Number one, the survey
- data and its analysis of the statutes in that
- 19 case just shows that this distributive reading
- 20 is textually permissible.
- 21 JUSTICE BARRETT: But less -- less
- 22 likely?
- MR. LIU: Less likely according to
- them, but I think the -- the job of a faithful
- 25 interpreter is to figure out whether -- you

- 1 know, if it's an 80 to 20 percent split or a 70
- 2 to 30, 60/40, the faithful interpreter needs to
- 3 figure out are we in the 20 percent, are we in
- 4 the 30 percent, are we in the 40 percent, or
- 5 are we in the other -- in the other box? It
- 6 would -- it would be to tolerate a huge error
- 7 rate if the Court simply assumed that because
- 8 70 percent of "ands" out there are joint, we're
- 9 just going to read every -- every "and" in the
- 10 world as joint. That would be a 30 percent
- 11 error rate.
- 12 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: Well, I looked at
- the Senate's manual, the Senate's legislative
- drafting manual, and it says, "in a statement
- in the negative, 'or' is almost always the
- 16 correct word." And I think that's what the
- 17 linguistic brief is telling us.
- 18 You're putting it at 20, 30, or 20.
- 19 But, if your alternative reading is almost
- 20 always incorrect, taking the negative of what
- 21 the Senate manual is saying, don't I need
- 22 something like absurdity?
- MR. LIU: I don't think so.
- JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: Don't you need --
- I mean, I just don't know how you get to your

- 1 point unless you get to absurdity.
- 2 MR. LIU: I think --
- JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: And then it's a
- 4 policy argument.
- 5 MR. LIU: -- the Senate manual also
- 6 says "use 'and' when you want to make clear
- 7 that something needs to satisfy all the
- 8 criteria." And that's, in our view, how
- 9 Congress used "and" here. The three criteria
- 10 are does not have (A), does not have (B) --
- 11 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: No, no, I think
- 12 you just hurt yourself. You use "and" when you
- want it to meet all criteria. I think that's
- 14 joint, all three.
- MR. LIU: And in our view, the
- 16 Petitioner doesn't -- Petitioner doesn't have
- 17 all three because he doesn't have (C). He has
- 18 two out of the three. So he does not have --
- 19 he -- he -- he doesn't have all three.
- JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: Before we go too
- 21 -- too far on this, the alternatives are not
- that the worst criminals are going to get a
- 23 safety valve because, as -- if someone has all
- 24 three of this, one could view the Senate as
- 25 saying this is what disqualifies you only.

- 1 That would be the worst in the eyes of the
- 2 Senate. You have to have (A), (B), and (C).
- 3 MR. LIU: Right.
- 4 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: And so what you're
- 5 saying is I happen to think that someone that
- 6 doesn't have (A), (B), and (C) but has more (B)
- 7 is worse, but that's your policy judgment,
- 8 isn't it?
- 9 MR. LIU: No. To -- to be clear, our
- 10 policy judgment, the -- our contextual argument
- isn't just the mere policy concern. It is a
- 12 fundamental statutory construction problem to
- 13 presume that Congress wrote a statute that
- 14 doesn't make any sense.
- 15 And we -- Justice Barrett, I thank you
- 16 for the clarification. We are not saying that
- 17 we need to resort to absurdity because our main
- 18 point is "and" is inherently contextual. It
- 19 has to be contextual because it is a word that
- 20 connects other words together. So the only way
- 21 to figure out what it's connecting is to read
- those other words in context.
- JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: Or it would mean
- 24 the same thing all the time.
- MR. LIU: But, to get back to Justice

- 1 Barrett's question about the -- -- or I -- or I
- 2 won't.
- 3 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: You can answer
- 4 her question.
- 5 MR. LIU: I was just going to finish
- 6 my -- my answer to her question about the
- 7 corpus linguistics brief. And I think the
- 8 other two points, just to round out my answer,
- 9 are that I think that brief itself acknowledges
- 10 that context matters.
- 11 On page 7, it gives an example of the
- 12 phrase "don't take drugs and alcohol." And the
- meaning of that changes depending on which
- 14 context you're saying it. And the fact that
- they can't rule out a distributive reading for
- 16 124 of the 125 statutes they studied also
- indicates that context matters.
- 18 And the last point I'll make on the
- 19 corpus linguistics brief is that the brief then
- 20 stops short of actually looking at context.
- 21 This is also on pages 6 and 7. They say that's
- 22 beyond the purview of this brief.
- 23 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Justice
- 24 Thomas, anything further?
- 25 Justice Alito?

1	JUSTICE ALITO: This case, to me,
2	raises a lot of general questions that may not
3	dictate a decision one way or the other, but or
4	this last point about the corpus linguistics
5	brief, we have I think this is a a very
6	promising tool, but I don't know that we have
7	decided how it can legitimately play a role in
8	our statutory interpretation cases. I mean,
9	this is an empirical fact that is being
LO	introduced into the case in an amicus brief.
L1	What guidance would you give us about
L2	the propriety of our relying on that?
L3	MR. LIU: Yeah, I think the Court
L4	needs to proceed with caution when presented
L5	with evidence like this, just like it's
L6	presented with evidence of any other sort of
L7	scientific study.
L8	I think, in the context of statutory
L9	interpretation, we are trying to figure out
20	what a reasonably objective user of words would
21	understand a text to mean. And often we think
22	of ourselves as occupying that role. And so
23	empirical studies aren't necessarily helpful
24	because we can just we can just
25	introspectively think about what that

- 1 reasonably objective user of words would
- 2 understand.
- JUSTICE ALITO: Well, I have no reason
- 4 to think this was not a study done under the
- 5 highest -- in accordance with the highest
- 6 criteria, but it is an interesting question,
- 7 what we're going to do with this down the road.
- 8 Are we going to have to make a determination
- 9 about the -- the methodology that was used in
- 10 every particular study of this kind that is
- 11 presented to us in an amicus brief?
- 12 MR. LIU: I -- I think that's --
- 13 that's a -- a valid question and -- and why I
- 14 would suggest the Court view it with caution.
- 15 I think, though, in this particular case, even
- if the Court does look at it, it -- it -- I
- think it helps the government's view because it
- only confirms what the grammar, usage, and
- 19 legal drafting books already say. So it's
- 20 simply reinforcing what -- what other sources
- 21 are saying about the meaning of these words.
- JUSTICE ALITO: On another point, do
- you think the absurdity canon is about anything
- 24 other than intent?
- 25 MR. LIU: I -- I think it is partly

- 1 based on this assumption that Congress is a
- 2 rational and intelligent drafter of -- of
- 3 statutes, and so, when we see a result that is
- 4 absurd, we presume that that is not one
- 5 Congress meant to embrace.
- 6 JUSTICE ALITO: It's an intent that's
- 7 attributed to Congress. We -- we assume that
- 8 they do not intend to write something that's
- 9 absurd.
- 10 MR. LIU: Correct.
- 11 JUSTICE ALITO: Right? So it is about
- 12 -- it is about intent?
- MR. LIU: Correct. It's -- it is --
- it is about intent, and it's -- it's intent
- against the backdrop of a body, Congress, that
- 16 we presume objectively to be reasonable.
- 17 JUSTICE ALITO: And if that is the
- 18 case, why would we draw a bright line between
- 19 absolute absurdity and mere absurdity?
- 20 MR. LIU: I don't think this Court's
- 21 -- draw such a line. I think when, as here,
- 22 there are two textually or grammatically
- 23 possible readings, the Court quite often tries
- 24 to make sense, rather than nonsense, of the
- 25 corpus juris, and that is a perfectly

- 1 legitimate way, as Scalia and Garner say, of
- 2 resolving this sort of statutory problem.
- 3 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Justice
- 4 Sotomayor?
- 5 Justice Kagan?
- 6 JUSTICE KAGAN: Mr. Liu, I -- I take
- 7 your point that there are two grammatically
- 8 permissible ways of understanding this, and I
- 9 certainly think that your superfluity and your
- 10 anomaly arguments are extremely serious.
- 11 At the same time, I think
- 12 Mr. Dvoretzky has a point of his own, which is
- that notwithstanding that there are two
- 14 grammatically permissible ways of understanding
- 15 this, that our -- that the most natural way of
- 16 communicating this idea is to use the word
- 17 "or." I would say it's sort of the most
- 18 natural way and also the way that prevents any
- 19 confusion. You know, we wouldn't be sitting
- 20 here if Congress had used the word "or."
- 21 So, in a context in which a
- 22 defendant's liberty is on the line, where --
- 23 I'm just going to assume that the Rule of
- Lenity applies, notwithstanding your argument.
- Why isn't that enough to get to Mr. Dvoretzky's

- 1 position?
- 2 MR. LIU: I think because it's at most
- just one more -- the fact that "or" might have
- 4 been a clearer way to express this, I think, at
- 5 most, that's just one more context --
- 6 contextual consideration that you put into the
- 7 balance.
- 8 And if you care about the
- 9 "unusualness" of using "and" instead of "or,"
- 10 well, then I -- I think what's even more
- 11 unusual are the problems with Petitioner's
- 12 reading. What's even more unusual than
- distributive use of "and" is the fact that the
- 14 very first subparagraph is surplusage and the
- 15 fact that this provision isn't going to be a
- 16 coherent measure of a defendant's criminal
- 17 history.
- 18 So, to the extent we are kind of
- 19 weighing unusualness against unusualness, I
- 20 think there's just a -- maybe just a little bit
- of unusualness here. I'm not really even
- 22 willing to concede that given what the books
- 23 say.
- But let's say you think there's a
- little bit of unusualness in using "and." It's

- 1 far outweighed by the unusualness of just
- 2 striking out an entire subparagraph and
- 3 rendering the rest incoherent.
- 4 JUSTICE KAGAN: Thank you.
- 5 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Justice
- 6 Gorsuch?
- 7 JUSTICE GORSUCH: In the unusualness
- 8 question, the government may have alluded to
- 9 this conjunctive distribution theory in its
- 10 Eighth Circuit brief, but, really, it argued
- that it was disjunctive and that "and" can mean
- 12 "or." That was the thrust of its brief. I've
- 13 got it in front of me.
- 14 That's certainly how the Eighth
- 15 Circuit understood the government's argument
- 16 below. They said -- they said that "The
- 17 parties discuss whether 'and' should be read
- 18 conjunctively or disjunctively, but we do not
- 19 believe that is the important question."
- The government also argued the "and"
- 21 versus "or" theory in Lopez in -- in front of
- 22 the Ninth Circuit. That's in its brief there
- 23 too. And I -- I -- I understand that this is
- 24 a -- a refined position and -- with the benefit
- 25 of the Solicitor General's office. And that --

- 1 that's great. And the government's entitled to
- 2 make whatever arguments it wants.
- But, when we're looking for plain
- 4 meaning, what ordinary people would understand
- 5 words to mean, isn't that some evidence that
- 6 the government itself took this long to really
- 7 figure out this particular theory?
- 8 MR. LIU: I don't -- I don't -- I
- 9 think it actually kind of proves the opposite.
- 10 I mean, the government looked at this from the
- 11 beginning, and the idea that A, B, and C are
- independently disqualifying was clear as day.
- 13 JUSTICE GORSUCH: On the basis of a
- completely different theory, that "and" means
- 15 "or," which you in your first sentence as you
- 16 got up, you said it's conjunctive before us.
- 17 And most of the argument below, I'm not going
- 18 to say all of it, most of it below was
- 19 disjunctive. And that's a difference. It's a
- 20 difference.
- 21 MR. LIU: I -- I --
- JUSTICE GORSUCH: And the government
- of the United States has a lot of resources,
- and the average criminal defendant doesn't.
- 25 They're one-off players, you're a repeat

- 1 player, and you've got a very sophisticated
- 2 reticulated third theory of the possible
- 3 meaning of the word "and," right? We're now up
- 4 to three.
- 5 And the fact that it took so long to
- 6 get to the third, what do we do with that?
- 7 MR. LIU: I -- I acknowledge that
- 8 there were different theories, one relying on
- 9 "and," one relying on "or" that were advanced
- 10 in the lower courts. I think that just
- 11 reflects what is a well-accepted principle that
- 12 any phrase, a negative statement involving
- "and" can be rephrased as a negative statement
- 14 involving "or."
- 15 And so, as we often do in -- in this
- 16 Court and in lower courts, we provide
- 17 alternative arguments. One way is to read the
- 18 "and" as distributive. The other way, if -- if
- 19 you want to go that route, is to read the "and"
- 20 to mean an "or." But the bottom line of both
- 21 -- of both interpretations were, as -- as the
- 22 bargain's theorem shows, logically equivalent.
- JUSTICE GORSUCH: But you -- you
- 24 reject the "or" theory as -- as incorrect at
- 25 this stage? You've not pursued it at any rate?

1 MR. LIU: Correct. There's no need --2 there's no need to do -- to read this "and" to mean an "or" because the -- the distributive 3 4 use of "and" is the more common use. 5 JUSTICE GORSUCH: Because you've got 6 this new theory. 7 All right, thank you. CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Justice 8 9 Kavanaugh? Justice Barrett? 10 11 JUSTICE BARRETT: I -- I'd just like 12 to follow up on that so that I understand the 13 lay of the land. I thought the government did 14 in some of the courts below make the 15 distributive theory because it's what Judge 16 Kirsch relied on in the Seventh. 17 MR. LIU: Yes. 18 JUSTICE BARRETT: It's what Judge 19 Kethledge relied on in the Sixth. 20 MR. LIU: We -- we -- in all those circuits, we did. Correct. 21 2.2 JUSTICE BARRETT: Okay. 23 MR. LIU: And we did -- we didn't --24 JUSTICE BARRETT: So it's just that

you didn't make it uniformly across the

- 1 circuits?
- 2 MR. LIU: We did not make it at the
- 3 panel stage in the Ninth Circuit.
- 4 JUSTICE BARRETT: Okay.
- 5 MR. LIU: But we have made it in -- in
- 6 the panel briefs in the other cases maybe with
- 7 the exception of Garcon at the panel stage.
- 8 But, in this case, we made both arguments in
- 9 our brief below. In the Ninth Circuit en banc,
- 10 we made both arguments. And in the -- in the
- 11 Seventh, Eighth, and --
- 12 JUSTICE BARRETT: Sixth.
- MR. LIU: -- Sixth Circuit cases, we
- 14 made -- we made the distributive argument as
- 15 well.
- 16 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Justice
- 17 Jackson?
- 18 JUSTICE JACKSON: So I appreciate that
- "and" can sometimes mean "or," but this is not
- 20 a conversation. This is a statute, and it's a
- 21 criminal statute with huge implications for the
- lives and well-being of the people who come
- 23 through the system.
- 24 And so I guess what I'm trying to
- 25 understand is why the imprecision in this

- 1 statute, the fact that you say that there are
- 2 two textually grammatically possible readings.
- Why doesn't that count against the
- 4 government? Justice Kagan said I'm going to
- 5 assume lenity applies. Can you help me
- 6 understand why it wouldn't?
- 7 MR. LIU: It wouldn't for two reasons.
- 8 I'll just say the first one briefly, but I --
- 9 I'll skip over it after saying it. We don't
- 10 think this is the type of penal law to which
- 11 lenity applies.
- Now, if you think this is the type of
- 13 --
- 14 JUSTICE JACKSON: But wait. Why?
- 15 Why? That's the thing I don't understand.
- 16 MR. LIU: It's because the -- the --
- 17 the definition of penal law that this Court has
- 18 embraced, and it goes all the way back to
- 19 Blackstone, encompasses laws that define a
- 20 crime or that increase or impose a punishment.
- 21 And this provision here does neither.
- 22 It relieves defendants of punishment. It is a
- 23 congressional act of lenity. And this Court
- 24 has never applied the Rule of Lenity --
- JUSTICE JACKSON: So you just --

- 1 you -- you reject -- even though it has to do
- 2 with punishment and the implications of it very
- 3 dramatically depending -- the level of
- 4 punishment that a defendant can get varies
- 5 dramatically depending upon whether or not it
- 6 applies, you say lenity is not a relevant or a
- 7 thing that we should consider?
- 8 MR. LIU: Correct. This Court has
- 9 never applied the Rule of Lenity to this type
- 10 of statute. It would be an extension of the
- 11 Rule of Lenity to a new context.
- 12 I would analogize this sort of
- 13 provision to say a statute that sets forth an
- 14 affirmative defense. An affirmative defense to
- 15 the substantive prohibition of a crime --
- 16 JUSTICE JACKSON: But in a civil -- in
- 17 a civil situation or in a criminal situation?
- 18 MR. LIU: In a criminal situation.
- 19 JUSTICE JACKSON: In a criminal
- 20 situation?
- 21 MR. LIU: Correct.
- JUSTICE JACKSON: An affirmative
- defense, you say no lenity?
- 24 MR. LIU: No lenity, because that's a
- 25 type of -- that's not a penal statute. That's

- 1 a -- that's not the type --
- JUSTICE JACKSON: Right. But that
- doesn't necessarily have to do with punishment.
- 4 I'm talking about we've determined this person
- 5 is guilty, he's getting a punishment, and this
- 6 statute relates to the range of applicable
- 7 penalties that apply to him.
- 8 Your -- the government's position is
- 9 still not a penal statute for the purpose of
- 10 lenity if there is ambiguity as to whether or
- 11 not it applies?
- 12 MR. LIU: Correct. And that's because
- 13 this -- the reading of this -- this statute can
- only benefit the defendant. It's not the type
- of statute that could make the defendant --
- 16 JUSTICE JACKSON: Yeah, but if you
- don't get it, you don't get the benefit. I
- 18 mean, there's a difference, right, in -- in
- 19 terms of your penalty presumably if you -- if
- 20 you get it versus you don't.
- 21 MR. LIU: Right. I mean --
- JUSTICE JACKSON: So it can harm the
- 23 defendant if you don't get it.
- 24 MR. LIU: It's certainly true that the
- defendant prefers one reading over the other.

- 1 But the type of -- what -- what the Rule of
- 2 Lenity cares about is the type of provision
- 3 we're talking about and whether it fits the
- 4 category of being penal. And a penal
- 5 sentencing provision is one that imposes a
- 6 punishment or increases it. This one doesn't
- 7 do either. It can only go down.
- Now the reason why we apply lenity in
- 9 the first context is because we want to be sure
- 10 before a defendant is made worse off that
- 11 that's what Congress intended and the defendant
- 12 had fair notice.
- But, when the only direction the
- 14 sentence can go is down, those -- those
- 15 provisions --
- 16 JUSTICE JACKSON: The defendant who
- doesn't get it is not made worse off if
- 18 everybody else -- their sentences can go down,
- 19 but his can't. You're saying he's not made
- 20 worse off?
- 21 MR. LIU: Not from the perspective of
- 22 this type of provision. The -- Congress's
- 23 enactment of this type of provision did not
- 24 make defendants worse off.
- JUSTICE JACKSON: Thank you.

1	CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Thank you,
2	counsel.
3	Mr. Dvoretzky, rebuttal.
4	REBUTTAL ARGUMENT OF SHAY DVORETZKY
5	ON BEHALF OF THE PETITIONER
6	MR. DVORETZKY: Mr. Chief Justice, I'd
7	like to start out with your question about
8	whether Congress focuses on grammar. I think
9	we have to assume that Congress focuses on
10	grammar. Congress as a speaker does not get
11	the benefit of colloquialisms. It's not the
12	there's no conversation that people are having
13	with Congress in the way that you do with a
14	doctor or somebody else.
15	The only conversation, if you want to
16	use that analogy, is the conversation that this
17	Court has with Congress by interpreting its
18	words to mean what they say, and if Congress
19	disagrees, it can carry on its part of the
20	conversation by changing the statute.
21	Otherwise, what we end up in is a
22	guessing game about whether Congress might have
23	meant this policy or that policy.
24	Instead, the Court should give
25	Congress clear rules of the road. And, in

- fact, the Court should -- should instruct
- 2 Congress to follow its own rules of the road,
- 3 namely, the Senate Drafting Manual, which in
- 4 this case would have called for the use of the
- 5 word "or" if Congress meant a distributive
- 6 meaning.
- 7 With respect to Mr. Liu's point that
- 8 "and" is distributive in grammar books, the
- 9 government has not come up with any examples of
- 10 "and" in a negated conjunction in the U.S.
- 11 Code. Reading Law tells us that when you have
- 12 the formulation that someone must not have A,
- 13 B, and C, that means all three.
- 14 The corpus linguistics study supports
- that conclusion, that if you had "or" there, it
- would be perfectly clear, and using "and" there
- 17 to express a distributive meaning is unnatural.
- 18 The -- the -- the government's best
- 19 example of a statute is the household items
- 20 provision in the Tax Code. First of all, as
- 21 Justice Sotomayor pointed out, that says "does
- 22 not include, "so it's giving -- it's setting
- forth a list of examples rather than criteria.
- Second, just looking at what it's
- 25 talking about, food, paintings, antiques, other

- 1 objects of art, jewelry and gems, there is
- 2 simply no way to combine those things, right?
- 3 There is no -- there is no such thing as edible
- 4 antique jewelry. It -- it -- it's beyond
- 5 absurd to think that there would be.
- 6 Here, it is not absurd to say that
- 7 Congress could have required (A), (B), and (C)
- 8 in combination. The government has policy
- 9 arguments for why Congress might not have
- 10 wanted that, but it's not absurd to think that
- 11 it did.
- 12 With respect to the policy, if you had
- an individual defendant who had, let's say, two
- 14 violent -- previous violent offenses in -- in
- 15 addition to the current drug offense, that
- 16 would make that defendant a career offender.
- 17 And if you walk through the guidelines, you end
- 18 up with a guidelines range for an offense level
- of 34 for someone like that and a criminal
- 20 history category of 6, which is 262 to 327
- 21 months. That is a serious long sentence.
- In addition, if you look at the
- 23 Sentencing Commission's 2022 data, there were
- 24 approximately 20,000 drug offenders. About
- 25 1,000 of them, so around 5 percent, were career

- 1 offenders.
- 2 Taking those two points together, what
- 3 that tells us is that you can have -- you will
- 4 have long sentences for the rare recidivist
- 5 that we've spent a lot of time talking today as
- 6 somebody who might somehow satisfy (f)(1).
- 7 It's entirely sensible that that is not what
- 8 Congress was focused on when it was seeking to
- 9 broaden discretionary sentencing and move away
- 10 from mandatory minimums.
- 11 Lastly, with respect to common sense,
- the government focuses a lot on common sense,
- but it's common sense that if Congress wanted
- 14 to say "or," it would have said "or." It knew
- 15 how to do that in other parts of this very
- sentence, of 3553(f). The -- Congress's own
- drafting manual says to do so, and that would
- 18 be the ordinary meaning -- that would be the
- ordinary term to use in order to express the
- 20 meaning that the government attributes to this
- 21 statute.
- The Court should again hold the court
- 23 to the ordinary meaning of the terms that it
- 24 chose, and it's important to do that because,
- 25 again, this is a -- this is a criminal statute

1	where fairness is at stake. Whether you view
2	that as lenity or whether you view that as the
3	breadth of a remedial statute, there's fairness
4	at stake and there's somebody's liberty at
5	stake. And if Congress wants to use
6	Congress needs to use terms clearly in order to
7	get the benefit of the government's
8	interpretation here.
9	CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Thank you,
LO	counsel. The case is submitted.
L1	(Whereupon, at 11:46 a.m., the case
L2	was submitted.)
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