SUPREME COURT OF THE UNITED STATES

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KEVIN	LINI	OKE,)			
			Pet	ition	ner	,)			
		v.) 1	10.	22-6	11
JAMES	R. I	FREEI	Ο,)			
			Resp	onde	ent	•)			

Pages: 1 through 86

Place: Washington, D.C.

Date: October 31, 2023

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1	IN THE SUPREME COURT OF THE	E UNITED STATES
2		
3	KEVIN LINDKE,)
4	Petitioner,)
5	v.) No. 22-611
6	JAMES R. FREED,)
7	Respondent.)
8		
9		
10	Washington, D.	C.
11	Tuesday, October 3	31, 2023
12		
13	The above-entitled matt	cer came on for
14	oral argument before the Supre	eme Court of the
15	United States at 11:47 a.m.	
16		
17	APPEARANCES:	
18	ALLON KEDEM, ESQUIRE, Washingt	con, D.C.; on behalf of
19	the Petitioner.	
20	VICTORIA R. FERRES, ESQUIRE, I	Port Huron, Michigan; on
21	behalf of the Respondent.	
22	MASHA G. HANSFORD, Assistant t	to the Solicitor General
23	Department of Justice, Was	shington, D.C.; for the
24	United States, as amicus o	curiae, supporting the
25	Respondent.	

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1	PROCEEDINGS
2	(11:47 a.m.)
3	CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: We'll hear
4	argument next in Case 22-611, Lindke versus
5	Freed.
6	Mr. Kedem.
7	ORAL ARGUMENT OF ALLON KEDEM
8	ON BEHALF OF THE PETITIONER
9	MR. KEDEM: Mr. Chief Justice, and may
10	it please the Court:
11	The dialogue between public officials
12	and their constituents is fundamental to our
13	democracy. Much of that conversation now takes
14	place online, with social media platforms
15	serving as the new town square, where public
16	officials provide important information about
17	what they're doing on the public's behalf and
18	soliciting comments in return. While public
19	officials retain First Amendment rights, use of
20	a private social media account does not immunize
21	an official's conduct from First Amendment or
22	constitutional scrutiny.
23	Under our test for state action, a
24	public official who creates a channel for
25	communicating with constituents about in-office

- 1 conduct and then blocks a user from that channel
- 2 must abide by the Constitution. This test,
- 3 which focuses on how the public official is
- 4 using and purporting to use that account, is
- 5 consistent with this Court's precedent under
- 6 which a public official who purports to act in
- 7 that capacity is a state actor. It also accords
- 8 with Section 1983 and the original understanding
- 9 of what it means to act under color of law.
- 10 The Sixth Circuit's duty and authority
- 11 test, by contrast, would provide ready means for
- 12 public officials to evade the Constitution.
- 13 Here, for instance, it would mean that the city
- 14 manager would be free to block from his Facebook
- 15 page any constituent who is a member of a
- disfavored race, religion, or political group,
- 17 free from constitutional constraint.
- 18 Our test avoids that result while
- 19 still leaving ample room for public officials to
- 20 communicate in their personal capacities.
- I welcome the Court's questions.
- JUSTICE THOMAS: Would you also win
- 23 under the doing your -- doing their jobs test?
- MR. KEDEM: Yes, we absolutely would,
- in part because, as has been pointed out, part

- of the job of any high-ranking executive
- 2 official -- and the city manager is essentially
- 3 just under the mayor in terms of being high up
- 4 in city government -- part of that job is
- 5 telling people about what you're doing.
- 6 And what Mr. Freed was doing with his
- 7 Facebook account, sometimes multiple times a
- 8 day, was informing the citizens about what he,
- 9 as city manager, in his role as city manager,
- was doing for the town and then communicating
- 11 directly with constituents about that, sometimes
- 12 answering their questions about the scope of his
- orders.
- 14 JUSTICE THOMAS: But Ms. Karlan made
- the point that there were only three instances
- 16 on the website there in the last case that were
- 17 personal. In this case, just going through the
- 18 Joint Appendix, there's quite a bit that is
- 19 personal.
- 20 So how would you just -- just
- 21 factually distinguish that or emphasize the fact
- 22 -- the fact that --
- MR. KEDEM: Sure.
- 24 JUSTICE THOMAS: -- the personal here
- does not override the official?

1	MR. KEDEM: So there were certainly a
2	lot more personal posts, although the ratio of
3	job-related posts to personal posts changed
4	dramatically at the start of the pandemic, as
5	you would expect, because a lot of the services
6	and the way that he was doing his job migrated
7	online.
8	I think, once you've established a
9	channel for communicating with constituents
10	about your job, I don't think also posting
11	sometimes about your family is going to undo
12	that, although, if what you're complaining about
13	in a specific case is being is having a
14	comment on a personal post deleted, obviously,
15	that would change the equation.
16	JUSTICE JACKSON: Does it matter if
17	you've established this channel ahead of time
18	and before you became a public official? I
19	mean, you sort of suggested that it had to do
20	with the purpose of the
21	MR. KEDEM: Yeah.
22	JUSTICE JACKSON: account.
23	MR. KEDEM: So I I think you would
24	look at what you were doing with the page
25	beforehand or you could. I suppose, but I think

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1 it's fairly clear that Mr. Freed wasn't talking
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- 2 about the job of the city manager before he
- 3 actually became city manager. He wasn't posting
- 4 about directives that he himself issued until --
- 5 JUSTICE JACKSON: Right, but I guess
- 6 --
- 7 MR. KEDEM: -- he had that power.
- JUSTICE JACKSON: -- I'm asking, does
- 9 it matter whether or not he opens up a new page
- once he becomes the city manager and begins
- 11 conversing in the way that --
- MR. KEDEM: Yeah.
- JUSTICE JACKSON: -- we're talking
- 14 about, or, alternatively, he had this page
- before he became city manager, it had all of his
- 16 personal information and, you know, pictures of
- 17 his kids and whatnot, and he just added to the
- 18 stream of conversation?
- 19 MR. KEDEM: So I -- I think that's
- 20 something that you would look at. Obviously, it
- 21 would be a factor. But there were a lot of
- things that changed when he became city manager,
- 23 not just the content of the posts, but,
- 24 presumably, he also didn't list as his website
- on the -- the page this official city address.

- 1 He didn't use the community comments at
- 2 PortHuron.org as his email address. There were
- a number of things that changed by virtue of the
- 4 fact that he was starting to use this in his
- 5 capacity as the -- the city manager of the town.
- 6 JUSTICE JACKSON: Would it have
- 7 mattered to you if he had a disclaimer on it?
- 8 MR. KEDEM: So I think it probably
- 9 wouldn't get you back over the line into
- 10 personal use, in part because of the way that he
- 11 was using it to make certain announcements and
- issue directives, information that you wouldn't
- 13 necessarily be able to get anywhere else. And,
- 14 certainly, there was no other place that you
- 15 could go to interact with the city manager.
- Now it would have, I think, been
- 17 something that they could argue that he was
- doing -- using this in a personal capacity, but
- 19 I think the disclaimer would have been
- 20 substantially overridden by the way he was
- 21 actually using the page.
- 22 JUSTICE ALITO: Just to be clear, if
- the page had not been created until he became
- 24 city manager, would the case come out the same
- 25 way? Should it come out the same way in your

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1 view?
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- 2 MR. KEDEM: It -- it would, although
- 3 perhaps it would be even clearer than it already
- 4 is.
- 5 JUSTICE ALITO: It would be -- okay.
- 6 What if 95 percent of the posts are personal and
- 7 5 percent of the posts involve discussion of his
- 8 work?
- 9 MR. KEDEM: So it would obviously be a
- 10 more difficult argument for us to make, but I
- would still be here certainly as my client's
- 12 attorney telling you, look, if there's only one
- 13 place to go to interact with the city manager
- 14 about issues -- directives that he himself had
- issued, the fact that he posts a lot about cats
- or whatever personal thing he wants to post
- about, that doesn't change the fact that if you
- get blocked off from that page, you're suddenly
- 19 losing access to a lot of information.
- JUSTICE ALITO: So, if it's entirely
- 21 personal, but once he slips and he talks about
- 22 his work, that -- that changes it?
- MR. KEDEM: I think it does because,
- there, it's not really being established as a
- 25 channel of communication. It's a little bit

- 1 like running into someone at the grocery store,
- 2 where maybe they let slip some information about
- 3 the way the government is working. That doesn't
- 4 mean that they are going to the grocery store in
- 5 order to interact with constituents.
- 6 But you could, obviously, change the
- 7 hypothetical where they say, I'm going to hold
- 8 office hours every Friday in the grocery store
- 9 for an hour to talk with citizens about, you
- 10 know, pending legislation and what I'm intending
- 11 to do. It --
- 12 JUSTICE ALITO: So I -- I'm not sure
- about what -- the -- the line that you're
- drawing. You said, if it's 5 percent official,
- 5 percent work-related, then it's state action,
- 16 but if it's like 1 percent, one-half of
- 17 1 percent, it's not? Is that what you're
- 18 saying?
- 19 MR. KEDEM: So it -- it's not a
- 20 quantitative test. It's qualitative. But the
- 21 quality that you're going for is whether you've
- 22 established it as a channel of communication.
- 23 And I thought I understood your hypothetical as
- 24 essentially just one thing you said one time,
- 25 there's no understanding or expectation that

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1 you're using this as an ongoing channel of
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- 2 communicating --
- JUSTICE GORSUCH: Counsel --
- 4 MR. KEDEM: -- with constituents.
- 5 JUSTICE GORSUCH: -- I'm confused.
- 6 Is -- is it the channel that we're supposed to
- 7 be focusing on -- this gets back to the Chief
- 8 Justice's first question in the last argument --
- 9 or is it the message at issue itself?
- Because I had thought I heard you say,
- if the message were about a private family
- 12 matter and you were blocked from that, you
- wouldn't have any recourse. So which is it? Is
- it the channel, or is it the message?
- MR. KEDEM: So I think, in part, it
- depends on what function you're complaining
- 17 about. If your complaint is you're being
- 18 blocked from access to the page, then it's the
- 19 channel that matters. It's the entire page and
- 20 your access to information.
- If, on the other hand, you're
- 22 complaining because your comment was deleted
- from a post, it obviously matters what the post
- 24 was about. If it was a post about cats, then
- you don't have any constitutional claim.

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1
               JUSTICE GORSUCH: Well, what if --
 2
      what if the individual harasses the public
 3
      official on all of his personal, you know, cat
     pictures and children pictures, and he finally
 4
 5
     gets fed up and he just blocks them --
 6
               MR. KEDEM: Yeah. So I think --
 7
               JUSTICE GORSUCH: -- from the channel.
               MR. KEDEM: Sure.
 8
 9
               JUSTICE GORSUCH: Then that's state
10
      action?
11
               MR. KEDEM: So I think it could be in
12
      the exact same way that it could be if, for
13
     instance, you were on an official page of the
14
     town and you were being harassing. At some
15
     point --
16
               JUSTICE GORSUCH: No, no, all the
17
     harassing in my hypothetical has to do with
18
      cats.
19
               MR. KEDEM: No, I understand.
20
               JUSTICE GORSUCH: The -- the commenter
21
     hates --
2.2
               MR. KEDEM: Sure.
23
               JUSTICE GORSUCH: -- cats.
24
               MR. KEDEM:
                            Sure. And --
25
               JUSTICE GORSUCH: And maybe he hates
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1 your children too, I don't know.
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- 2 (Laughter.)
- JUSTICE GORSUCH: But -- but -- but,
- 4 you know --
- 5 MR. KEDEM: Yeah.
- 6 JUSTICE GORSUCH: -- if I block that
- 7 person for that, at some point, you know, even
- 8 though it's all my personal stuff, that --
- 9 that's state action?
- 10 MR. KEDEM: So I -- I think, again,
- 11 let's say, you know, in -- in official town
- pages, all the time they say: Here's someone
- enjoying themselves in the park, and let's say
- 14 you posted something --
- JUSTICE GORSUCH: No, no, I'm talking
- 16 about my -- I -- I understand --
- 17 MR. KEDEM: I understand, Your Honor.
- 18 JUSTICE GORSUCH: -- you want to
- 19 change the hypothetical. I get it.
- 20 MR. KEDEM: Yeah.
- JUSTICE GORSUCH: I -- I get it. But
- 22 just answer mine if you would.
- MR. KEDEM: Sure. So -- so the answer
- is there still would be state action, but it
- would probably easily pass the First Amendment,

- 1 and especially with the qualified immunity
- overlay, it would be a very easy case. There
- 3 would be no problem.
- 4 JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: Yeah, but there's
- 5 litigation -- I don't want to interrupt.
- 6 JUSTICE GORSUCH: No, no, please,
- 7 please interrupt.
- JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: You know, once
- 9 it's state action, then -- then there's an
- 10 issue. And I guess one of the concerns I have
- about your position and just the line-drawing is
- to define doing your job as talking about your
- job is really quite all-encompassing, really,
- 14 because a lot of elected officials I've been
- 15 around love going to the grocery store and
- talking to people after church, and that's where
- they learn things to help them do their job
- 18 better.
- And they're thinking in their mind,
- 20 yeah, I'm going to church, I'm going to the
- 21 grocery, but I'm also going to pick up things --
- MR. KEDEM: Yes.
- JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: -- or going to the
- 24 game or going to the high school football game
- on Friday night, and I'm going to see a lot of

- 1 people, and that's going to help me get my
- 2 finger on the pulse of the community about, you
- 3 know, whatever issue it might be.
- 4 MR. KEDEM: And I -- I understand
- 5 that, but I think that's what the distinction
- 6 between talking about your job, which you might
- 7 do at the grocery store, and establishing a
- 8 communication with constituents about your
- 9 in-office conduct, which is something that
- 10 happens on an ongoing basis.
- 11 JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: So the two key
- words I think you used there were "establishing"
- and "channel." And I don't know what it takes
- 14 to "in the brick-and-mortar world" to establish
- 15 a channel.
- But, if you have a regular pattern of
- seeing a group of people, let's meet -- I want
- to meet at my house with old friends regularly
- 19 to talk about what they think's going on --
- 20 MR. KEDEM: So I think --
- 21 JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: -- in the
- 22 community for purposes of helping me figure out
- 23 what legislation to propose --
- MR. KEDEM: So --
- JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: -- as a state rep,

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1 say.
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- 2 MR. KEDEM: -- I think -- I think,
- 3 there, if you were just issuing an invitation to
- 4 your friends, that's very different than issuing
- 5 a general invitation to everyone in the town,
- 6 all your constituents who you basically say, I
- 7 will interact with anyone who comes, but,
- 8 according to my friends from the other side, you
- 9 could essentially say, but only the white
- 10 citizens of the town are invited.
- 11 JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: Right. But it
- goes back to who you want to include and who you
- want to exclude, I guess. And I think elected
- officials and appointed officials rely on groups
- of people who are supporters, friends, people
- they've known, people that are fair-minded, not
- 17 people that are just going to come and scream at
- 18 them --
- 19 MR. KEDEM: Yeah.
- JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: -- to get advice,
- 21 thoughts, including negative and critical
- thoughts, but they want to exclude, you know,
- 23 the person who's the jerk who's going to
- interrupt the whole thing.
- MR. KEDEM: So I -- I think it's easy

1 sort of on the extremes where either you're just

- 2 inviting an old friend or you're inviting
- 3 everyone in the town because they're
- 4 constituents, which is essentially what Freed
- 5 was doing.
- In the middle, I grant you there will
- 7 be difficult cases where it sort of seems like
- 8 you are inviting everyone only that you like,
- 9 or, you know, there may be other ways to divide
- 10 the hypothetical.
- But I think, in a case like Facebook,
- where, essentially, anyone with a profile
- 13 could -- could look at Mr. Freed's page, I think
- 14 it's -- it's relatively clear the invitation was
- 15 to everyone in the town.
- 16 JUSTICE JACKSON: Can I direct your
- 17 attention to what I perceive to be a difference
- 18 between your position and the one that Ms.
- 19 Karlan just articulated? And maybe there is no
- 20 daylight, but I would -- be helpful to
- 21 understand if there is.
- You've said repeatedly here that this
- is about whether or not the page has been
- 24 established as a channel of communication, which
- sounds to me like a species of the appearance.

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1 We're looking at this page and we're seeing how
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- 2 it operates.
- I understood Ms. Karlan to be saying:
- 4 Well, really, her test is, are you doing your
- 5 job? What are the duties and functions of your
- 6 position? And have you created this page and
- 7 does it operate to facilitate your job duties?
- 8 Are you at all -- so is there a
- 9 difference between those two? And are you also
- 10 relying at all on the sort of duties or
- 11 functions the -- whether or not the person had
- 12 to create the page or something like this?
- 13 MR. KEDEM: So I think, if they had to
- create the page, that obviously is game over.
- But we agree with the Respondents in the prior
- 16 case that there has to be a broader conception
- 17 of what duty encompasses to mean everything that
- is sort of customarily expected of you in your
- 19 job for a high-ranking executive official.
- 20 Usually, that's going to be talking about your
- job at least in certain established ways.
- JUSTICE JACKSON: But I didn't hear
- your test to be about duty at all really.
- MR. KEDEM: Yeah. So --
- 25 JUSTICE JACKSON: Is it?

- 1 MR. KEDEM: So I think the answer is
- 2 it is certainly sufficient if you have a concept
- 3 of doing your job through your page. We think
- 4 that we have that here.
- 5 We also have a slightly broader
- 6 principle that if you hold yourself out as doing
- 7 your job through your page, that is also
- 8 sufficient, which I don't know that my friends
- 9 on the other side -- on -- Respondent in the
- 10 first -- first case disagrees with, but they
- 11 aren't relying as much on that principle.
- 12 JUSTICE JACKSON: And your hold
- 13 yourself out in the situation is because we can
- 14 look at the page and we see that it has been
- 15 established as a channel for communication with
- 16 the constituents?
- 17 MR. KEDEM: Yeah. So it's partly the
- 18 way that you design your page and partly what
- 19 you do with it. Here, we have both his profile
- and the way that he was posting and what he was
- 21 posting about.
- 22 JUSTICE KAGAN: I -- I would have
- thought that the "what it looks like" is the
- 24 worst test for you, because what this looks like
- is there are a lot of baby pictures and dog

- 1 pictures and obviously personal stuff.
- 2 And intermixed with that, there is, as
- 3 you say, communication with constituents about
- 4 important matters. But it's hard to look at
- 5 this page as a whole, unlike the one in the last
- 6 case, and not think that surely this could not
- 7 be the official communication channel.
- 8 MR. KEDEM: So --
- 9 JUSTICE KAGAN: Or what, you know --
- 10 MR. KEDEM: Yeah. So I -- I think --
- JUSTICE KAGAN: It's not like any town
- 12 I've ever seen.
- 13 (Laughter.)
- 14 MR. KEDEM: Right. Well, I think
- small-town government works in different ways.
- 16 Obviously, there was some personal stuff as
- 17 well. But the way that he was talking about the
- 18 posts, referring to things in the plural, the
- 19 way that he was posting things that were
- 20 directives that he himself had issued only
- 21 minutes earlier and then answering constituent
- 22 questions about that, now, admittedly, he was
- 23 also talking about personal things, but you
- 24 can't essentially immunize yourself from
- 25 constitutional scrutiny if you've established

```
1
      this government channel of communication --
 2
                JUSTICE GORSUCH: What do you --
 3
               MR. KEDEM: -- just by also posting
      about your dog.
 4
                JUSTICE GORSUCH: Well, what do you --
 5
 6
     what do you say to the Chief Justice's concern
 7
      at the outset of this conversation about the
      free speech rights of civil servants? And we're
 8
      a number in the millions now across this
 9
10
      country.
11
                And if -- if it is within the scope of
12
     your duty, you know, and if you're going to
     define that very, very broadly, you give the
13
14
      government a lot of power over limiting what --
15
     what many millions of Americans can say. And,
16
     surely, that must -- must be some concern to
17
     you.
18
                MR. KEDEM:
                            It is a concern that has
19
      to be balanced against the right of people in
                 I think there is some irony that the
20
      the town.
     petitioners in the first case and the United
21
2.2
      States say the way to solve the First Amendment
23
     problem is for the government just to tell
24
     people how to use their pages and have --
25
                JUSTICE GORSUCH: Well, and -- and --
```

- 1 and there's some irony on the other side to say
- 2 the way to solve the First Amendment problem is
- 3 to turn it all into government speech, so the
- 4 government controls what millions of civil
- 5 servants in -- in towns large, small, and the
- 6 federal government alike, what they can and
- 7 cannot say in the public forum.
- 8 MR. KEDEM: So, admittedly, there is
- 9 going to be some issue of government control,
- 10 but I don't think that's escapable. For
- instance, if the mayor of Port Huron had wanted
- to, she obviously could have told Mr. Freed
- 13 either stop posting your directives to your
- 14 personal page, or, when you post them, also post
- this additional information, or, when you answer
- 16 a question about this directive, answer it in
- 17 this way.
- 18 So that sort of control is already
- 19 going to be there regardless of whether he's
- 20 considered a state actor.
- 21 JUSTICE GORSUCH: It would be on -- on
- 22 a clearly public page.
- MR. KEDEM: As it is, yes.
- JUSTICE GORSUCH: The question --
- 25 clearly. The question is whether it might also

- 1 have to be on a page maintained, somebody
- 2 thought personally that they came up with before
- 3 they became a government official that's mostly
- 4 populated by dog pictures and whether the
- 5 government can also mandate what the person can
- 6 say there.
- 7 And if that's the case, what's left of
- 8 that person's free speech rights?
- 9 MR. KEDEM: So I think --
- JUSTICE GORSUCH: I mean, we -- we
- 11 used to care about public employee private
- 12 speech rights, Garcetti, Pickering, you know.
- MR. KEDEM: Yeah. And I think that as
- 14 your question alludes to, there is a doctrine
- 15 under the First Amendment that reconciles the
- 16 First Amendment rights of a public official
- 17 against the government's interests in the
- 18 speech.
- 19 One of the key points that we're
- 20 making is the exact same factors that you look
- 21 to to decide whether the government has an
- interest in the speech and therefore has some
- 23 control over it, even when it's ostensibly
- 24 private speech, those are things like, are you
- 25 purporting to do your job on the page? Are you

- 1 holding yourself out as a public official? And,
- if so, can the government tell you, if you're
- going to use your title on your page, as many
- 4 people do, just make clear you're saying this in
- 5 your private capacity?
- And if the government can say that to
- 7 you consistent with the First Amendment, then
- 8 you sort of understand that there's not going to
- 9 be a different First Amendment equation just
- 10 because we're calling it state action as well.
- 11 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Well, I mean,
- 12 these -- on these pages, people -- people have
- both a job in the government and they have all
- sorts of other things, whether it's cats or
- children or whatever it is, and the problem it
- seems to me is we kind of have to disaggregate
- that, right, and say, well, you know, you have
- to have a governmental page and you have to have
- 19 a private page and you can't mention the
- 20 government on your private page or else it's
- 21 going to become a government page.
- 22 And as I understand it, you basically
- say, if you've got 5 percent government, then
- 24 we, the government, can basically say the whole
- 25 thing, even if the rest of it is all about your

- 1 children and -- and -- and the dogs, that's
- ours. And if we don't like little dogs, we can
- 3 say you can't put pictures of little dogs on
- 4 there.
- 5 And it seems to me that -- that that
- 6 effort to kind of disentangle the two things
- 7 doesn't really reflect the reality of how social
- 8 media works.
- 9 MR. KEDEM: So, Your Honor, I have to
- 10 push back in two respects. First --
- 11 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: About the dogs
- 12 or --
- 13 (Laughter.)
- MR. KEDEM: A little bit about the
- 15 dogs.
- 16 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Okay.
- 17 MR. KEDEM: So one principle is it's
- not the 5 percent versus 95 percent, that you've
- 19 gotten over some threshold. It's the way you're
- 20 using your page as an ongoing place where people
- 21 in the town go to get information about what you
- as a city manager are doing, how you're doing
- 23 your job, the directives that you issue.
- If you set it up that way, that's the
- 25 quality that you're looking for --

1	CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Well, just to
2	
3	MR. KEDEM: not quantity.
4	CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: I don't mean
5	well, I do mean to interrupt.
6	MR. KEDEM: Yes.
7	CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: But but
8	what if you're doing you know that from your
9	you know, the official weather, whatever, a
10	very bad storm is coming. You also know that
11	not everybody checks the city's site, you know,
12	12 times a day, but you know a lot of people
13	look at your your private site. And if you
14	put on there there's a very bad storm coming or
15	I looked at the city weather, whatever, you need
16	to know there's a bad storm coming, does that
17	compromise the private nature of your page?
18	MR. KEDEM: No. Again, you haven't
19	set up an ongoing channel for communication
20	where people know that's the place to go in the
21	future for important information.
22	JUSTICE JACKSON: Well, why
23	MR. KEDEM: And the second
24	JUSTICE KAGAN: And how do you know
25	that this is an ongoing channel of

- 1 communication? What do you look to to decide
- 2 that? And -- and be specific about this site.
- 3 MR. KEDEM: Sure.
- 4 JUSTICE KAGAN: What on this site
- 5 indicates that this was what you consider an
- 6 ongoing channel of communication, as opposed to
- 7 just a place where you talk about your dogs, you
- 8 talk about your children --
- 9 MR. KEDEM: Yeah.
- 10 JUSTICE KAGAN: -- and you talk about
- 11 your work?
- MR. KEDEM: Sure. So I think, as soon
- as the pandemic started, there were multiple
- 14 posts a day about what he and other people in
- 15 the government were doing. Usually, he was
- 16 going to post a daily COVID update from the,
- 17 basically, health equivalent of the CDC. He was
- 18 posting directives. So I could direct you, for
- instance, to the directive on page 22 of the
- 20 Joint Appendix. There's another directive on
- 21 page 20 of the Joint Appendix. And then the
- 22 specific post that was the subject of the
- 23 dispute with my client, that was flanked by a
- 24 post about a community operations outreach
- center on one side and a place to donate for

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1 people who were struggling on the other side.
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- 2 So there were just multiple posts a
- day about this. And he was also interacting
- 4 with constituents. So one of the key features,
- 5 I think, that you would lose out on is, if you
- 6 go back to page 22 of the Joint Appendix, he
- 7 issues this order about cutting off water, and
- 8 he says basically effective immediately we're
- 9 not going to cut off water for 30 days because
- of the pandemic. And then there's a question
- 11 from a constituent below who says, well, what
- 12 about people whose water is already cut off?
- 13 Are those going to be turned back on? And he
- 14 answers yes.
- So there is essentially a real-time
- 16 gloss on his own directive. And it's possible
- that the directive appeared somewhere else.
- 18 There's nothing in the record about that. But
- it presumably came a little bit later, and if
- 20 you wanted to know what is the city manager,
- 21 who's essentially the chief executive officer
- for the town, what is he doing, that's the place
- 23 to go. There was essentially no other game in
- town for figuring it out if you were a citizen
- 25 of Port Huron.

1	JUSTICE BARRETT: Well, that makes it
2	pretty difficult for a public official or a city
3	manager to have any kind of private site because
4	he could have a private Facebook page populated
5	with pictures of his dog, pictures of his kids,
6	and one of his friends asks something about the
7	water shutoff, and he says, you know, yeah, the
8	water is going to be shut off, you know, et
9	cetera, or a storm's coming, whatever.
10	Has he then transformed what he
11	thought was his private Facebook page into
12	something that is state action and so he
13	arguably has to give everybody in the town
14	access to, when he might not want to give them,
15	you know, access to pictures of his kids? Or
16	does he have to tell his friend, sorry, I can't
17	answer that question here, head over to my
18	public Facebook page and I'll answer it there?
19	MR. KEDEM: So that sounds a lot to me
20	like the sort of Facebook equivalent of just
21	running into someone in the grocery store. I
22	don't think that that creates any sort of
23	channel that way, although the best practice is
24	obviously to refer someone you know, for more
25	information go to the official page

1	JUSTICE BARRETT: It creates
2	nightmares of litigation, though, right?
3	MR. KEDEM: So it it could create
4	nightmares of litigation. I think, literally,
5	whatever you say here, unless you essentially
6	say nothing that happens over Facebook is going
7	to ever be state action, which I don't even now
8	take any of the the parties to be arguing,
9	unless you say that, you're always going to have
LO	some amount of litigation.
L1	The good news is our test has been the
L2	majority test in the circuits. And I think the
L3	reason that you don't see a flood of litigation
L4	there are basically only five court of appeals
L5	decisions, including the two cases before you,
L6	is number one. You've got the qualified
L7	immunity overlay, number two. Most of these
L8	First Amendment claims are are not going to
L9	have much to them. They can be dismissed on
20	reasonable time, place, and manner restrictions
21	JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: Why isn't all of
22	Facebook the equivalent of running into someone
23	at the grocery store, unless, on that personal
24	page, you're announcing some governmental rule
25	or some official notice

1	MR. KEDEM: Yeah.
2	JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: of some kind?
3	And we can debate what official notice is.
4	MR. KEDEM: So I think Facebook, as
5	this Court has said in other cases, and all of
6	these social media media platforms are
7	incredibly powerful in a way that running into
8	someone in the grocery store is not. This is
9	not just an incidental place where you happen to
10	receive speech from someone.
11	You know, in the olden days, if you
12	were a public official and you wanted to
13	communicate with the public outside of formal
14	channels, you probably would have had to walk
15	out of your office, maybe find a pay phone, if
16	you remember what those still were, and it would
17	have been very difficult without the use of your
18	staff to communicate to the public in any sort
19	of broad way.
20	These social media platforms make that
21	basically instantaneous. You can cast as wide a
22	net as you want, talk to everyone in the town.
23	You can talk specifically to individual people.
24	They are just incredibly powerful in a way that
25	I don't think that just the happenstance of

1	running into someone in the grocery store is.
2	I think the better analogy, if I may
3	tweak yours, is essentially just saying, you
4	know, I'm going to post my private phone number.
5	Everyone in the town can give me a call if you
6	have problems with your leaf collection. Oh,
7	but, by the way, only white citizens are allowed
8	to use this phone. I think that would also be
9	constitutionally problematic, even though you
LO	were using your own private phone number.
L1	CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Thank you.
L2	Justice Thomas?
L3	Justice Alito?
L4	Justice Sotomayor?
L5	Justice Kagan?
L6	Justice Kavanaugh?
L7	Justice Barrett?
L8	JUSTICE BARRETT: No.
L9	CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Justice
20	Jackson?
21	JUSTICE JACKSON: Just one final
22	question. I guess I don't understand why this
23	test that you have articulated doesn't require
24	the sort of post-by-post analysis, because I
25	appreciate that you say that this is an ongoing

- 1 channel of communication because we have some
- 2 posts that give the kind of information and ask
- 3 for public feedback, but you also concede that
- 4 we have other posts, a substantial number of
- 5 other posts, that are private.
- 6 So, first, I guess, what is your
- 7 answer to could the public official who uses
- 8 this to communicate with the public sometimes,
- 9 could they block a person who made comments
- 10 about the dogs or not?
- 11 MR. KEDEM: So, certainly, they
- 12 could --
- 13 JUSTICE JACKSON: Is that state
- 14 action?
- MR. KEDEM: Right.
- 16 JUSTICE JACKSON: Excuse me. Is it
- 17 state action --
- 18 MR. KEDEM: So -- so --
- 19 JUSTICE JACKSON: -- to block a
- 20 comment about the dogs?
- MR. KEDEM: So I think the answer is,
- 22 if you're talking just about removing a comment
- from a specific post, it is only state action if
- the post itself has something to do with the
- job. And I think this goes back to the Chief

- 1 Justice's questions about whether all of a
- 2 sudden it means that you basically have to let
- 3 the government control all the posting that you
- 4 do about your cats or dogs.
- 5 JUSTICE JACKSON: Right.
- 6 MR. KEDEM: The answer is no because
- 7 the posting about the cats or dogs is not state
- 8 action. But, if you're talking about blocking
- 9 someone's access to the entire page for all time
- on a going-forward basis, then, obviously, it
- 11 matters not just the specific post that led you
- 12 to take that action but all of the other
- information that they're losing out on.
- JUSTICE JACKSON: So you're saying
- 15 there is a situation -- was that the case in
- 16 your situation where the -- the block resulted
- in no access to this page at all?
- 18 MR. KEDEM: Yes. So two things
- 19 happened. He had comments removed, but, also,
- 20 he was blocked so that he could not access the
- 21 page when he was signed in. And there were four
- 22 other people who also either had comments
- 23 deleted or were blocked, all of whom, because --
- 24 it was because they essentially criticized the
- 25 way that Mr. Freed was performing his -- his job

- 1 of city manager.
- JUSTICE JACKSON: Thank you.
- 3 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Thank you,
- 4 counsel.
- 5 Ms. Ferres.
- 6 ORAL ARGUMENT OF VICTORIA R. FERRES
- 7 ON BEHALF OF THE RESPONDENT
- 8 MS. FERRES: Mr. Chief Justice, and
- 9 may it please the Court:
- 10 This country's 21 million government
- 11 employees should have the right to talk publicly
- 12 about their jobs on personal social media
- accounts like their private-sector counterparts.
- 14 As this Court addresses the question
- 15 presented, this Court should adopt the Sixth
- 16 Circuit's duty and authority or state official
- 17 test because it complies with this Court's
- 18 precedent and requires that a government
- 19 employee is either exercising power possessed by
- virtue of state law or made possible only
- 21 because he is clothed with the authority of
- 22 state law.
- 23 Petitioner wrongly advocates for an
- 24 inherently subjective test that divorces the
- 25 state action inquiry from state law.

- 1 Petitioner's test will result in uncertainty and
- 2 self-censorship for this country's government
- 3 employees despite this Court repeatedly finding
- 4 that government employees do not lose their
- 5 rights merely by virtue of public employment.
- James Freed's Facebook account is the
- 7 perfect example of the danger of Petitioner's
- 8 test. Mr. Freed opened a personal Facebook
- 9 count in -- account in 2008 as a college student
- 10 at Indiana Wesleyan University.
- 11 For 12 years, he built up the account
- to interact with friends, family members, and
- 13 colleagues to talk about his passions and
- interests, including his wife, daughter, his
- dog, his work, and his favorite Bible passages.
- 16 As he had done for over a decade while
- 17 operating the account, in 2020, Mr. Freed made a
- 18 private choice like any other Facebook user
- 19 could do to block Petitioner and delete
- 20 Petitioner's comments from the page.
- 21 After being sued, Mr. Freed
- 22 deactivated the page and stopped speaking to his
- family and friends and the public on Facebook
- 24 because he did not want to lose control over his
- own speech by the threat of state action.

_	Such self-censorship for government
2	employees will not only have a negative impact
3	on society on government employees themselves
4	but as society in addition to society as a
5	whole as the voices that may advance knowledge
6	and the search for the truth will be silenced.
7	I welcome the Court's questions.
8	JUSTICE THOMAS: There's quite a bit
9	on the site about personal activities, including
10	the battles with raccoons and other things, but
11	Petitioner says that the balance changes
12	somewhat during COVID, during the COVID crisis.
13	Would you react to that and whether or
14	not that sort of episode is enough to convert
15	this into a a into a an official
16	activity on this site as opposed to a personal
17	site?
18	MS. FERRES: Yes, Justice Thomas. So,
19	when you look at the from the Joint Appendix
20	from 15 to 24, you can see that from the time
21	that COVID started in March of 2020 through the
22	day that put the post in which Petitioner
23	claims he was then blocked and deleted, Mr.
24	Freed only makes 14 posts. And just to give
25	some or some context to that, from March 2019

- 1 to May of 2020, he made 451 posts. He was very
- 2 clearly a very active Facebook user.
- 3 And in those 14 posts --
- 4 JUSTICE THOMAS: Is that -- before you
- 5 go on -- before -- before you go on, the -- just
- 6 the COVID activity, though, is that -- would you
- 7 consider that government speech?
- 8 MS. FERRES: No, Your Honor. And he
- 9 had no duty or authority to be the COVID
- spokesperson from the county. And when you
- 11 really look at those 14 posts, all he was doing
- was resharing information from other sources.
- 13 And most often in only two instances
- 14 was it the City of Port Huron. There were other
- 15 nonprofit entities, there was other government
- 16 agencies that weren't the City of Port Huron.
- 17 He was sharing information just like
- 18 your neighbor might have done on Facebook, like
- 19 anyone else during COVID, so nothing changed
- 20 during that COVID time period.
- JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: How was he --
- 22 wasn't he inviting the public to comment on his
- 23 performance as a public official?
- MS. FERRES: Your Honor, no, there
- is -- there was a spot that people could

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1 comment. And sometimes people did. And as my
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- 2 friend on the other side noted, that he
- 3 sometimes would give the answer if he knew it,
- 4 but --
- 5 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: So you're claiming
- 6 that this site was, in fact, not a site for --
- 7 not an open square site where he was sharing
- 8 business/work information on a regular course --
- 9 MS. FERRES: He did --
- 10 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: -- or -- or
- 11 soliciting comments on a regular course?
- MS. FERRES: No, Your Honor. And you
- 13 can see in the record but oftentimes someone
- would ask a question related to the city and Mr.
- 15 Freed didn't respond. So, if he was having --
- if he had the duty to answer the town's
- 17 constituents, which he's an employee --
- JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: So -- so now use
- 19 the -- the definition of "duty" and "authority"
- 20 that both the Solicitor General and the -- the
- 21 other case has done. Tell me how you fit in
- 22 within that broader definition.
- I know how you fit in within the Sixth
- 24 Circuit. They ruled. Address the way they
- 25 defined it and tell me how you would get -- how

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this case would come out under their broader
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- 2 rule.
- 3 MS. FERRES: Sure, Your Honor.
- 4 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: Assuming its duty
- 5 includes this -- duty to communicate with
- 6 constituents, that you have either custom or
- 7 whatever, and authority includes the authority
- 8 to bind the state in some way --
- 9 MS. FERRES: Your Honor --
- 10 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: -- or -- or to do
- 11 this thing.
- MS. FERRES: -- I'll start with the
- 13 Solicitor General's test because I think --
- JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: Okay.
- MS. FERRES: -- that's the easiest.
- 16 We would very clearly win under that test
- 17 because this is a personal account. The log-in
- is JamesRFreed1@facebook.com. So we --
- JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: But they went past
- 20 that and said it depends on the nature of the
- 21 message in some --
- MS. FERRES: Your Honor --
- JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: Yeah.
- 24 MS. FERRES: -- I -- I don't -- I
- 25 don't -- don't think that the Solicitor General

- 1 --
- JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: Well, they said,
- 3 if you used the account for all that personal
- 4 stuff and used it for notice-and-comment on a
- 5 rule, that would be a business account.
- 6 MS. FERRES: Correct. If he -- he did
- 7 --
- 8 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: So the message
- 9 there, you have to look both contextually or the
- 10 channel, and you have to look also at the
- 11 message.
- MS. FERRES: Your Honor, I agree with
- 13 that. I -- I would say that if Mr. Freed used
- 14 the Facebook page, they decided to host a -- a
- 15 city council meeting in his -- on -- on Facebook
- 16 Live during the pandemic, then, during that
- 17 period of time, there may be state action in
- 18 that case.
- 19 And I think that's where the
- 20 notice-and-comment comes in, because the city
- 21 council meeting inherently has a right to access
- 22 to the public. They're able to come for public
- 23 comment.
- But, if you looked at it, if they did
- 25 that in his backyard and he opened up his

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1 backyard to the city council meeting, while
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- 2 there may be state action during the city
- 3 council meeting, I don't think anyone would
- 4 dispute that, he doesn't have to let everybody
- 5 --
- 6 JUSTICE JACKSON: The government does.
- 7 The government in -- I understood the
- 8 government's position to be that if they had the
- 9 city council meeting in their backyard -- and
- 10 maybe I'm mistaken -- that it's a property
- 11 thing, it's -- if they have it on the farm or
- 12 whatever.
- MS. FERRES: Your Honor, my
- 14 understanding on the Solicitor General's test is
- 15 that the property is a heuristic and that if
- it's personal in and of itself, then that's
- 17 pretty much always going to go to the government
- 18 employee, but I -- I'll let the Solicitor
- 19 General also --
- JUSTICE JACKSON: Okay.
- MS. FERRES: -- answer for herself.
- JUSTICE JACKSON: Sorry.
- MS. FERRES: But -- that's okay.
- 24 And I think the hard -- the biggest
- 25 problem that we have in -- in this case is that

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1 without this type of bright-line rule, we're not
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- 2 going to give government employees -- when we're
- 3 not looking to anything objective. We're
- 4 looking to Petitioners' subjective criteria.
- 5 There is going to be an influx in
- 6 litigation, and -- and government employees
- 7 won't know when or when they cannot -- when they
- 8 can talk about their jobs on social media, which
- 9 we know from Lane is their right to do.
- 10 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Well --
- JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: I think your --
- 12 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: -- I was just
- going to say one clear rule would be, if it's
- the only place they can go and you're talking
- about governmental activities, that's the place
- 16 to go, that -- that -- that's government speech.
- In other words, here, perhaps the
- 18 significant characteristic is that there wasn't
- 19 any other place to go, right?
- 20 MS. FERRES: Your Honor, there were
- 21 other places to go. Every -- Mr. Freed
- 22 very test -- very clearly testified -- and this
- is at the Joint Appendix at 638 -- that he --
- 24 anything that was ever released was always
- 25 released by official channels.

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So, for example, when he issued the
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- 2 water directive, that would have been sent to
- 3 the water department, and, of course, when he
- 4 did that, there's state action there.
- 5 JUSTICE KAGAN: But what if many
- 6 people in this town thought that, you -- the
- 7 site that they wanted to go to was his site.
- 8 They didn't want to go to the water site and the
- 9 roads site and the COVID site and the healthcare
- 10 site and the "this site" and the "that." I
- 11 mean, he was the one-stop shopping, and they
- 12 could see pictures of his dog too and that was
- 13 nice. So this is where they went for their
- information about what was happening in town.
- MS. FERRES: Well, rest in peace to
- 16 his dog, but, Your Honor, he -- in this case, he
- 17 -- it doesn't matter that someone wanted to go
- 18 see his site. There was -- he didn't -- his --
- 19 the city manager position is not a public-facing
- 20 position. It's not something like a press
- 21 secretary where they -- they are required to
- 22 speak to the public.
- 23 His duties under the -- under the
- state law or the city ordinances are to manage
- 25 the government employees.

_	OUSTICE RAGAIN. And you don't chimk
2	that managing the government managing
3	everything that goes on in the town, that it
4	helps to have a a channel of communication to
5	your constituents, to the people who live in the
6	town?
7	MS. FERRES: Your Honor, I think
8	that's that's obvious in any type of position
9	like that. Any governmental position would want
10	to have some type of communication with the
11	public. But that doesn't mean that every single
12	thing, every single time a government employee
13	talks about their job and they happen to be in
14	public, that it transforms into state action.
15	JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: Well, I think the
16	problem is they define the custom, I think, of
17	positions like this as including communicating
18	with the public about your job, and, therefore,
19	everything that you communicate about your job
20	becomes state action. So that's a problem for
21	them as I see it because that seems very broad
22	to me.
23	But then how would you define it short
24	of that? And be very specific. For example,
25	announcing rules, the word "directive" here.

- 1 announcing directives, announcing notices about
- 2 COVID, where -- like, where do you draw the line
- 3 short of the line that I think the other side
- 4 has?
- 5 MS. FERRES: Justice Kavanaugh, I
- 6 think that your hypotheticals in the last case
- 7 made the most sense and that when, if you have a
- 8 duty to announce a rule and the only time that
- 9 you ever do it is on the Facebook page, then
- 10 there's going to be state action there. If he
- 11 had an explicit duty to do something and that's
- 12 the only time he's carrying it out, yes.
- But, if he's merely reposting or
- 14 resharing the official action that he had
- 15 already taken, there's no state action in that
- 16 case.
- 17 JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: And on the
- 18 resharing thing, I guess -- this is a helpful
- 19 question for you, but just to think it through,
- I guess the point there is any citizen could be
- 21 resharing it, not -- not -- it's not unique to
- 22 the -- the city manager, I suppose.
- But I think the response to that, just
- 24 to continue it, as Justice Kagan would say, a
- 25 lot of people are going to rely -- her question

- 1 suggested a lot of people are going to rely on
- 2 the city manager to be the place you go for that
- 3 information.
- 4 MS. FERRES: Your Honor, a couple
- 5 things in response to this. But just the clout
- 6 of someone's job doesn't transform something
- 7 into state action. So many more people may
- 8 attend Mr. Freed's birthday party because he is
- 9 the city manager, but just that clout of his job
- 10 alone and the fact that people may be going to
- 11 his Facebook page because he is the city manager
- isn't enough to get us into state action.
- JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: And one thing you
- said I think I disagree with pretty strongly,
- which is that it's not part of your duties to
- 16 communicate as a city manager with the public.
- 17 I would think, it -- as a customary matter, that
- 18 would always be -- maybe you didn't say that, so
- 19 I'll give you an opportunity to amend that if
- 20 you want.
- 21 MS. FERRES: No, Your Honor. I think,
- in all government positions, I think it's an
- 23 inherent -- talking to -- generally and
- 24 speaking, but the city manager's role I think is
- 25 unique in that he has no authority to take any

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1 -- he can't make policy, he can't change policy.
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- 2 He can only recommend what he thinks is best to
- 3 the city council, and then they have to take an
- 4 official action as the city body.
- 5 JUSTICE BARRETT: But I hear you --
- 6 MS. FERRES: He has --
- 7 JUSTICE BARRETT: Oh, sorry. Please
- 8 finish.
- 9 MS. FERRES: He has no authority in --
- in and of himself to make any -- take any action
- 11 like that.
- 12 JUSTICE BARRETT: So Justice Sotomayor
- 13 was asking in the last argument about the Sixth
- 14 Circuit's test and whether it relied solely on
- 15 written law and excluded custom. But you've
- 16 been talking back and forth with Justice
- 17 Kavanaugh about custom and customary duties.
- 18 So do you agree that custom can be
- 19 part of the source of an -- of authority or
- 20 duty?
- MS. FERRES: No, not exactly, Your
- 22 Honor, but I do think that there could be -- I
- 23 think the Sixth Circuit used the phrase
- 24 "apparent duty," so I -- I guess what I would
- 25 say is if the city council directed Mr. Freed to

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1 main -- to discuss city business on a social
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- 2 media account.
- JUSTICE BARRETT: But 1983, I mean,
- 4 clearly, custom can be enough.
- 5 MS. FERRES: Correct.
- 6 JUSTICE BARRETT: Custom or policy, so
- 7 do you really want to fight that that hard?
- 8 MS. FERRES: I -- I don't disagree
- 9 that 1983 says statute, ordinance, regulation,
- 10 custom, or usage. So that -- we don't have to
- 11 look just to -- just to state law, but I think
- the only case this Court has ever really
- 13 addressed with custom was Adickes, and it had to
- 14 be something that was so forceful that it
- 15 essentially was the law. So, when we look at
- that case, they weren't letting any blacks into
- 17 the -- at the counter to eat, and it was --
- there was a police officer in there enforcing
- 19 that custom.
- 20 So we don't have anything like that in
- 21 this case where it's something so defined that
- 22 it becomes essentially a duty.
- JUSTICE JACKSON: Well, why I -- I
- 24 guess -- I understand your argument to be with
- 25 respect to the need for some sort of clarity,

- 1 bright line, the public officials have a First
- 2 Amendment right and they need to know when
- 3 they're going to be able to exercise it. I
- 4 appreciate that.
- 5 But I guess I thought that we had a
- 6 line of cases like the Pickering and Garcetti
- 7 cases in which those kinds of issues were taken
- 8 into account and the Court did not choose a
- 9 bright-line test. In other words, in the
- 10 Pickering scenario, where the public employees
- 11 are trying to speak on matters of public concern
- 12 and the government doesn't want them to speak, I
- 13 suppose the Court could -- could have adopted
- some sort of a bright line as to when -- when
- 15 are you speaking in your public capacity and
- 16 when are you not.
- But we said that it's a practical
- inquiry and that the listing of a given task in
- 19 the employee's written job description is
- 20 neither necessary nor sufficient to demonstrate
- 21 that conducting the task is within the -- the
- 22 scope of the -- the professional duties.
- 23 So it seems to me like you are arguing
- for a bright-line listing of the duty or some
- 25 kind of clear way to know in a circumstance in

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which in other similar situations we've said
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- 2 that's not required.
- 3 MS. FERRES: Your Honor, I -- I don't
- 4 think it's only looking at the specific duty or
- 5 that bright line, but I think what -- what I
- 6 mean when I say the term "bright line" is that
- 7 there's some type of objective indicia of the
- 8 duty and authority and where the Sixth Circuit,
- 9 I think, was correct in saying that, you know,
- 10 you can look whether government employees are
- 11 helping the person maintain the page, if
- 12 government funds are used, if the government
- page is owned by the government, if it -- once
- 14 -- in Mr. Freed's case, if once he leaves the
- 15 city manager position, if then the next city
- 16 manager is going to take over that account. So
- 17 these are all objective indicia of --
- 18 JUSTICE JACKSON: Would you include
- 19 operation, how it functions? The other side
- says you also look at what's actually going on
- on the page. Is that a part of the test for you
- 22 or not?
- MS. FERRES: No, Your Honor, I
- 24 wouldn't include function in the way that they
- 25 -- they do. I -- I -- I would look to whether

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1 there is duty and authority because that's what
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- 2 this Court's precedent in state action has
- 3 required, that there -- you're exercising some
- 4 type of rights and responsibilities made
- 5 possible only because you have the authority of
- 6 state law.
- 7 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: That -- that seems
- 8 to me not adequate at all, but every elected
- 9 official tells me that they're on duty 24 hours
- 10 a day. And so, if they are during that 24 hours
- 11 creating themselves and posting the Facebook and
- doing all of the communications they're doing,
- 13 why isn't that state action?
- If you're using government resources,
- 15 you're a government resource. You're a
- 16 government employee. And if you're claiming
- 17 you're on duty 24 hours, then you are. And you
- 18 are using a state resource. So it can't be as
- 19 limited as you say.
- 20 MS. FERRES: Your Honor, that would
- violate the government employee's First
- 22 Amendment rights because we know from Lane that
- 23 government employees have the right to speak
- 24 publicly about their jobs. Even in -- in Lane
- 25 --

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1 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: So the question is
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- on what topics, and the issue becomes, as I
- 3 think your other side is arguing, are you using
- 4 this as a channel of communication with the
- 5 public for you to be able to do your job?
- 6 That's how they want to define it.
- 7 MS. FERRES: Yes, I'd agree with that,
- 8 Your Honor. That's how --
- 9 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: All right.
- 10 MS. FERRES: That's what --
- 11 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: Yeah. That's --
- 12 that's what they're saying.
- MS. FERRES: Yes.
- JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: But I don't know
- what's wrong with that if your position is that
- the state stops you from using it as an official
- 17 page.
- MS. FERRES: Well, then every time the
- 19 -- a government employees speaks about their job
- 20 they have the threat of litigation like this and
- 21 they have the threat of their --
- JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: Well, this --
- 23 these Facebook challenges to me are -- are not
- 24 quite made up, but I don't fully understand them
- 25 because no one forces a public employee to have

- 1 a comment box. And so I don't know why your
- 2 person closed down his Facebook account when he
- 3 could have just blocked public comments.
- 4 MS. FERRES: Your Honor, actually, at
- 5 the time, Facebook did not have that option. It
- 6 didn't come into effect until March of 2021, so
- 7 --
- JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: I see. Okay.
- 9 MS. FERRES: -- at the time, he -- he
- 10 did have to require comments on his page if he
- wanted to continue speaking to his family and
- 12 friends on the page.
- JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: Got it.
- MS. FERRES: That is different now,
- and social media will evolve, so there will be
- 16 different -- different things that happen, but
- 17 that wasn't an option at the time.
- 18 JUSTICE ALITO: If you were advising a
- 19 -- a different town manager in a different town,
- someone who's newly elected, this person loves
- 21 Facebook, wants to communicate with family and
- friends on Facebook, also wants to communicate
- with constituents, would you advise that person
- 24 to mix the two together on the same Facebook
- 25 page, or would you advise that person to

1	separate them and have a purely job-related
2	official page and a purely personal page?
3	MS. FERRES: I think, until this case
4	is decided, I might have different opinions on
5	what I would advise someone, but I I I do
6	believe that under the state action inquiry
7	here, a public employee should be able to speak
8	about their job as long as they're not taking
9	official action exercising their actual job
10	duties on the page or hosting a a city
11	council meeting or things like that. Just
12	speaking and reposting about your job should be
13	perfectly fine to do on either page, on one
14	page.
15	Unless the Court has any further
16	questions?
17	CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: We'll find
18	out.
19	Justice Thomas?
20	Justice Alito?
21	Justice Sotomayor?
22	Justice Gorsuch?
23	Justice Kavanaugh?
24	Justice Barrett?
25	Justice Jackson?

Т	Thank you, counsel.
2	MS. FERRES: Thank you, Your Honor.
3	CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Ms. Hansford?
4	ORAL ARGUMENT OF MASHA G. HANSFORD
5	FOR THE UNITED STATES, AS AMICUS CURIAE,
6	SUPPORTING THE RESPONDENT
7	MS. HANSFORD: Mr. Chief Justice, and
8	may it please the Court:
9	As the government explained in the
10	first argument, the correct overarching test
11	here is duty or authority, and we think how that
12	test plays out in a case like this one that's
13	about denial of access to property should look
14	closely to the nature of the property.
15	And so we're trying to get at whether
16	this is an exercise of state power, and, Justice
17	Barrett, we're happy to view this as evidence of
18	that, but we think that the the heuristic or
19	the way the Court should look at this set of
20	cases is that state action generally exists in a
21	denial of access to property case, where either
22	the government controls the property, such as an
23	official Facebook page, or a defendant is
24	exercising a duty that itself requires providing
25	access, such as conducting a city council

- 1 meeting on Facebook Live, or, Justice Jackson,
- in his backyard, that's something that requires
- 3 providing access, so that would be something
- 4 that's an exercise of state power.
- 5 By contrast, the appearance and
- 6 content test that my friend on the other side
- 7 advances imperils the freedom of a government
- 8 official to speak as a public citizen on matters
- 9 of public concern. And I think the facts here
- 10 are a perfect example.
- 11 Mr. Freed posted on Facebook on his
- own time on a page he had created long before.
- 13 He didn't use any government devices. He didn't
- 14 use government resources. And still, because,
- 15 like most people on Facebook, he was talking
- about the pandemic in March of 2020 and because
- that overlapped with the subject matter of his
- job, my friend on the other side says that that
- 19 became -- state action such that constitutional
- 20 constraints applied, such that he was required
- 21 to allow comments he disagreed with or people he
- 22 found creepy.
- 23 And I think that that has really
- 24 serious repercussions. I think both just in the
- 25 Facebook context specifically, I think, as the

- 1 Chief Justice pointed out, that does mean
- 2 employer control.
- 3 That means that the City of Port Huron
- 4 could say here, Mr. Freed, no Bible verses on
- 5 your page. He had Bible verses on his page.
- 6 Because this is state action, that means it's
- 7 our speech and we don't want biblical verses on
- 8 our pages. That would be something the
- 9 government could do if this is state action, and
- 10 so it falls into the Garcetti bucket instead of
- 11 the Pickering bucket.
- 12 And I think it also has major
- 13 repercussions for the physical world because, if
- 14 appearance and content can convert something
- using purely private resources that has no
- 16 government ownership into state action, that
- 17 means that when Mr. Freed goes to the hardware
- 18 store and maybe he's wearing his city manager
- 19 pin and he's talking to people, those people
- 20 have access to the government in that instance
- 21 because he's knowledgeable about that material.
- 22 And that suggests that suddenly he
- 23 might be subject to constitutional constraints
- or, if he's having people over for a dinner
- 25 party, either friends or a kitchen cabinet of

- 1 informal advisors whose views he shares, if he
- 2 talks too much about his job, if he identifies
- 3 himself as a city manager or they know that
- 4 position, that means that he loses the ability
- 5 to have those conversations in his private
- 6 capacity.
- 7 And that's why we think it's so
- 8 important to look at what the actual duties of
- 9 the job were that he was exercising, and just
- 10 this idea that anytime you're having a
- 11 conversation with the public, that becomes state
- 12 action, I think, is a really dangerous idea.
- 13 And to look specifically at what Mr.
- 14 Freed's duties were in this case, Justice
- 15 Kavanaugh, I think different city managers might
- 16 have different roles. But Mr. Freed's role,
- 17 which I -- is set out in Section 2013 of the
- 18 city code and (c)(51) of the charter, is really
- 19 not a public-facing role. He reports to the
- 20 city council. He issues administrative
- 21 directives. He manages other officials.
- I think, if you look at that set of
- duties, it's clear that he's not the person
- 24 who's in charge of communicating to the public.
- 25 And I think that's another way that my friends

- on the other side position on these facts is so
- 2 extreme.
- JUSTICE ALITO: In the physical world,
- 4 practical limitations severely limit the ability
- of government officials to move what look very
- 6 much like government events or functions onto
- 7 private property. And so your property-based
- 8 rule may make more sense in that -- in that
- 9 world, but it -- it doesn't cost anything to
- 10 open a Facebook page.
- 11 And so to make so much turn on who
- owns the Facebook page seems quite artificial.
- 13 You know, if the mayor of a small town could
- 14 have everybody -- could have a -- what looks
- 15 like a quasi-public meeting on -- on the farm,
- 16 but somebody who -- an elected public official
- in a jurisdiction with millions of people can't
- 18 do that.
- 19 MS. HANSFORD: So -- so, Justice
- 20 Alito, I agree that if there is a duty to do a
- 21 certain thing, then the fact that it's happening
- on private property, whether it's the farm or
- 23 the Facebook Live or the private Zoom isn't
- 24 going to change that. The government official
- 25 can't take things away. If they're carrying out

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1 a duty, that is going to still be state action.
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- 2 But I think we have to be really
- 3 careful before assuming that something that's
- 4 happening on private property is state action
- 5 just because it's talking about the subject
- 6 matter, absent some duty to have that
- 7 conversation.
- 8 JUSTICE ALITO: Well, duty -- if duty
- 9 is positive law, then that's a pretty clear,
- 10 sharp limitation. But, if you say -- if you
- 11 agree that custom -- a duty can -- can arise
- 12 from custom, do you -- you agree with that?
- MS. HANSFORD: I agree with that but
- in the narrow sense, the Adickes sense of custom
- 15 that has the force of law, that's how this Court
- 16 has defined it in the 1983 context. So, when
- 17 there is such a strong norm in a town that if
- 18 you allow your diner to serve racially diverse
- 19 groups like the facts in Adickes unsegregated
- 20 groups, the sheriff will come and will -- will
- 21 beat you up and there will be negative
- 22 repercussions that -- I think that is the form
- of custom. I don't want to be too rigid --
- 24 JUSTICE ALITO: But communicating with
- 25 --

Τ	MS. HANSFORD: on now I define
2	JUSTICE ALITO: I'm sorry.
3	Communicating with constituents is not a a
4	strong enough custom for elected public
5	officials?
6	MS. HANSFORD: So just Mr. Freed is
7	not an elected official. He's an appointed
8	official. But setting that aside, there are
9	there are roles in which communicating with the
10	public is part of the job, but that is also
11	something that any public official can do as a
12	private citizen, and we have to tell which.
13	And if it's happening on private
14	property, we should be really careful in
15	assuming that that is the exercise of a public
16	duty because that takes away the public
17	official's ability to ever communicate with the
18	public or, on matters of public concern, say
19	things like "Stay Home, Stay Safe" and that
20	becomes official action even though you could
21	equally say that as a private citizen, so
22	JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: I I didn't want
23	to interrupt. Sorry.
24	MS. HANSFORD: No, please go ahead.
25	JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: You you were

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1 about to say, I don't want to be rigid on how I
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- define, and then you didn't finish that. I just
- 3 want to make sure I caught that.
- 4 MS. HANSFORD: I -- I think, on that
- 5 --
- 6 JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: I think it was
- 7 custom, but --
- 8 MS. HANSFORD: I think on how I define
- 9 custom, so I think that duty has some
- 10 flexibility to it.
- 11 Here, you would look at those
- 12 provisions that I cited earlier in the city
- 13 code, and the city charter also provides --
- 14 JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: But the broader --
- MS. HANSFORD: -- that Mr. --
- JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: Keep going.
- 17 MS. HANSFORD: -- that Mr. Freed's
- 18 duties include things that the city council
- instructs him to do, maybe that's in a memo,
- 20 maybe that's in an employee manual. I think
- 21 that you -- you can -- you can look at it more
- 22 or less broadly, but, if there -- if it's
- 23 unclear and he's doing it on private property,
- 24 it's not clear whether it's a duty, you should
- 25 be really careful before assuming --

1	JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: The the
2	broader
3	MS. HANSFORD: that it's a duty.
4	JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: I don't know
5	that you want us to decide the case based on the
6	specific identified duties in the memo and what
7	have you here as opposed to I think the broader
8	issue is, for a lot of elected and appointed
9	officials, part of their customary duties are to
10	communicate with the public, but that would be
11	from your perspective a mistake, a pretty big
12	mistake to define state action by reference to
13	that customary duty because that would swallow
14	the whole thing?
15	MS. HANSFORD: That's right, Justice
16	Kavanaugh. And I think this Court has already
17	said that in cases like Lane and Garcetti where
18	it warned against overbroad descriptions.
19	So, even if the employee manual or the
20	city charter here said your duty is to
21	communicate with the public, it can't be that
22	every time Mr. Freed does it, whether it's at
23	church or at his own house, that is state action
24	that the government can control. That subjects
25	him to viewpoint limitations, which are things

- 1 that are perfectly appropriate for private
- 2 individuals to engage in.
- 3 And we think the kind of odious
- 4 examples of racial discrimination and the like
- 5 should be taken care of because -- by the
- 6 employer being able to regulate private speech
- 7 under the Pickering balancing test, and so you
- 8 can ban your professors from saying racially
- 9 discriminatory things even on their private
- 10 capacity because it harms their role.
- 11 But I think it should be -- the Court
- should be very careful before kind of writing
- 13 the private social media policies across the
- board as a constitutional matter, especially
- 15 with a spillover to --
- 16 JUSTICE JACKSON: So, Ms. Hansford, do
- we have enough in this record to really
- 18 confidently say that the Facebook page here is
- 19 private property?
- 20 So much turns on your argument that
- 21 there is a distinction between private and
- 22 public, and we can see that clearly in an actual
- 23 brick-and-mortar scenario. But I didn't
- 24 understand that either of the courts in the last
- 25 case and this case really honed in on this

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1 issue.
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- 2 And so do we know that a social media
- 3 account is private in this way?
- 4 MS. HANSFORD: Justice Jackson, I
- 5 think the record here is very clear on that, and
- 6 I think that both of the lower courts looked at
- 7 it to some extent -- probably at pages 24
- 8 through 26 of the Petition Appendix has a lot of
- 9 the key facts, but, here, there is no use of
- 10 government time. There's no use of government
- 11 resources. Mr. Freed didn't even use his --
- 12 JUSTICE JACKSON: But what about the
- 13 --
- MS. HANSFORD: -- official devices.
- JUSTICE JACKSON: -- third-party
- 16 aspect of this? We know that -- that -- that
- 17 Facebook itself is -- is operating in this space
- 18 and doing -- controlling access and that kind of
- 19 thing. Does that matter to your private
- 20 analysis?
- MS. HANSFORD: So that only makes it,
- 22 if anything, more private, that Facebook also
- 23 had the authority to take down this account. We
- 24 don't think that matters on these facts because
- 25 Facebook didn't actually exercise that

- 1 authority. The authority that was being
- 2 exercised was Mr. Freed's ability to block.
- 3 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Thank you,
- 4 counsel.
- 5 This may be following up a little bit
- 6 on -- on Justice Jackson's point, but -- and I
- 7 don't mean this in any pejorative way to the
- 8 analysis at all, but I was very surprised in
- 9 reading the brief to see all the emphasis on
- 10 private property. I mean, usually, we're told
- in these, you know, social media, whatever,
- 12 cases that it's not a question of a physical
- 13 asset.
- 14 And in what sense is this really
- 15 private property? They're -- it's just the
- 16 gathering of the protons or whatever they are.
- 17 (Laughter.)
- 18 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: And they pop
- up on his page and they could pop up on somebody
- 20 else's page. So, I mean, is that -- I guess --
- 21 should I be concerned about the fact that we
- 22 have this old concept applied to what we always
- 23 say is some new phenomenon? And I'm not sure
- 24 that it works in the sense that it's actually --
- 25 it's not Blackacre. It's -- it's a machine and

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1 somebody else's machine can pick it up if you
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- 2 want. It's -- it's -- it seems incongruous to
- 3 me.
- 4 MS. HANSFORD: Mr. Chief Justice, the
- 5 -- this Court has often looked to private
- 6 property analogies, whether the property is
- 7 physical or virtual, whether it's access to a
- 8 public access channel in the Halleck case or the
- 9 Combined Federal Campaign in Cornelius. What --
- 10 the question here is a denial of access, and
- 11 we're trying to figure out if this is an
- 12 exercise of state power.
- 13 And -- that you don't need any state
- power to block someone on Facebook. This is not
- 15 a case where you -- it's an officer wearing a
- 16 uniform flashing a badge and the blocking is
- somehow more effective before -- because you're
- an officer. So we think the analogy is fully on
- 19 point, even though it's virtual, not physical.
- 20 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Thank you.
- 21 Justice Thomas?
- JUSTICE THOMAS: Yes. This is
- 23 probably not relevant in this case, but looming
- in the background is the power of Facebook
- 25 itself to block these accounts. And what's

- 1 curious to me is that there's that elephant in
- 2 the room and we don't discuss -- we decline to
- 3 discuss it in the context of private property,
- 4 your -- your approach.
- 5 Is there any role for consideration of
- 6 the fact that Facebook could also influence
- 7 who's blocked and who's not blocked?
- 8 MS. HANSFORD: Justice Thomas, and I
- 9 mentioned to Justice Jackson, at most, that's an
- 10 additional reason to not find state action here,
- 11 but we ultimately don't think that the fact that
- 12 Facebook also could exercise control is
- important because this is not a case where
- 14 Facebook purported to exercise that control.
- I believe my colleague gave this
- 16 example in the first argument, but it's like if
- 17 the government rents a ballroom for an official
- 18 meeting and then excludes someone from that
- meeting, that is exercising its governmental
- 20 authority as an entity that's controlling that
- 21 ballroom for this period, even if the hotel
- 22 could say, oh, this whole meeting is too rowdy,
- 23 we're going to kick everybody out. That may not
- 24 be state action on the hotel's part at all.
- 25 And I think the Facebook's role

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1 question is a lurking one that we don't need to
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- 2 address here. But, here, where -- it -- it --
- 3 when the owner of the Facebook page or the
- 4 controller of the Facebook page is the one
- 5 that's doing the blocking, I think you can focus
- on that person's control even if it's not the
- 7 full bundle of property rights, but just the
- 8 ability to exclude for the temporary period
- 9 until Facebook vetoes it or kicks them off
- 10 entirely.
- 11 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Justice Alito?
- 12 Justice Sotomayor?
- JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: It just seems to
- 14 me that you want a set of strong rules that make
- nothing state action, really, because you keep
- 16 saying you can only have authority if the state
- is providing resources, personnel, time for
- 18 personnel, whatever. And you're saying it's
- only a duty if it's written basically.
- 20 And you're saying -- you're giving in
- 21 a little bit to a strong social norm, but I
- don't even know what a strong social norm is
- 23 because a lot of situations, especially in the
- 24 workplace, can't be described that way.
- Give me -- let's give you an example.

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1 Christmastime, teachers are authorized to give
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- 2 little gifts to kids. One teacher decides --
- 3 not authorized officially; it's just a norm,
- 4 okay? And one teacher decides she's not going
- 5 to give it to one class of kids but to give it
- 6 to another.
- 7 Is that a strong social norm? And
- 8 what built that strong -- social norm? So where
- 9 do we take that from the situation that now
- official government sites exist for everything?
- 11 MS. HANSFORD: So --
- 12 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: And to share this
- information that public officials are now
- including in their personal accounts. So why
- shouldn't a government official who jumps the
- qun on a state announcement, uses their website
- 17 to be the first to announce everything, followed
- an hour later or a day later but followed later
- 19 by officials' announcements, why should that
- 20 person not be viewed as using their state
- 21 authority to facilitate their activities?
- 22 They're getting information before everyone
- 23 else. They're publishing it before everyone
- 24 else.
- MS. HANSFORD: So, Justice Sotomayor,

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on that last question about somebody who
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- 2 preempts the official announcement, those are
- 3 not the facts here. And I think my friend
- 4 misstated that, but Petition Appendix page 25a
- 5 shows that -- that there's nothing in this
- 6 record --
- 7 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: But your test is
- 8 not taking care of that. Neither is the Sixth
- 9 Circuit's test taking care of either of these
- 10 two situations.
- 11 MS. HANSFORD: But -- but I think even
- in the case where you're preempting the
- announcement that ends up being announced
- somewhere else, that's also something the
- 15 government official could do by telling just his
- 16 friends. Government officials are allowed to
- 17 talk about things that are the subject matter of
- their job, and if the employer doesn't want them
- 19 to do that, that can be something that the
- 20 employer can regulate. But, if they're doing
- 21 something additional that they're not required
- to do and if they're doing it on private time
- and on private property, we don't want to assume
- that they're exercising state power.
- 25 And I think it's because --

1	JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: Well, that takes
2	away from the Griffin case because a private
3	citizen can choose to make an arrest. So can a
4	deputy choose to make an arrest. What changed
5	it in Griffin was the fact that he was wearing
6	the deputy badge and purporting to act as a
7	government official.
8	Similarly here, he's disclosing
9	information that's private to his job and using
LO	the site to make people realize or believe that
L1	he is performing a social function by being the
L2	first to give them the news.
L3	MS. HANSFORD: So, Justice Sotomayor,
L4	when you're conducting an arrest or ordering
L5	somebody to leave, exercising governmental
L6	authority and appearing to be exercising
L7	governmental authority changes the nature of
L8	what you're doing. It's giving you additional
L9	power that a private rent-a-cop does not have to
20	obtain compliance.
21	And so we think the analogy to the
22	Griffin case would be, if Mr. Freed went on
23	Facebook and said, by the authority of city
24	manager, I hereby order everybody to stay at
25	home under penalty of fines, and then the fact

- 1 that he appeared official and that -- that --
- 2 that might matter. But that is not any of the
- 3 facts here, and that is not the power that is
- 4 being exercised by blocking someone.
- 5 Just talking about things, as Your
- 6 Honor's opinion in Lane makes clear, talking
- 7 about your job is not something that the state
- 8 has a monopoly on and that government employees
- 9 can only do in their official capacity. That's
- 10 what makes these cases hard, and that's why we
- 11 need to figure out if the official was speaking
- 12 as a private citizen or not. And we think that
- if it's happening on private property on private
- 14 time, you -- you should be really careful,
- 15 without a more specific duty, to infer that.
- But just the -- one last point. The
- duty doesn't need to be spelled out in minute
- 18 detail. In your case about the teacher, the
- 19 teacher's job in the classroom is to teach and
- 20 mentor her students, and if she's doing those
- 21 things in the classroom, the fact that handing
- 22 out gifts is not specifically delineated I don't
- think is going to make a difference.
- I think that's also probably true of
- Justice Kagan's example of the road closures.

- 1 If the duty is to provide information in
- 2 emergency situations, the fact that it doesn't
- 3 say provide information about road closures as a
- 4 specific thing doesn't matter. The means don't
- 5 need to be spelled out. It's still part of the
- 6 duty.
- 7 But, if this is just general speaking
- 8 about the pandemic, before you take that away
- 9 from a public official as a private citizen, you
- 10 want to be really care -- really sure it's part
- of his job by looking at something more
- 12 specific, and we just don't have that here.
- 13 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Justice Kagan?
- 14 JUSTICE KAGAN: Ms. Hansford, take
- 15 this as another version of the Chief Justice's
- 16 question about the apparent -- let's call it
- 17 archaic nature of your -- your test, and I guess
- 18 what strikes me about it is that, you know, it's
- 19 hard to predict the future, but change has
- 20 happened very quickly in the last however many
- 21 years and is going to continue to happen.
- 22 And part of that change is that more
- and more of our government operates on social
- 24 media. More and more of our democracy operates
- 25 on social media. Public discourse, this is the

- 1 forum for officials to talk to citizens, for
- 2 citizens to talk to officials, for citizens to
- 3 talk to each other, and it is becoming
- 4 increasingly so.
- 5 And I worry that the rules that you're
- 6 suggesting and even the analogies that you're
- 7 proposing as though we can satisfy our -- our --
- 8 as we can -- we can solve this case by thinking
- 9 about grocery stores is really not taking into
- 10 account the big picture of how much is going to
- 11 be happening in this forum and how much citizens
- 12 will be foreclosed from participating in our
- democracy if the kind of rule you're advocating
- 14 goes into effect.
- So I guess I would like you to comment
- 16 on that. You know, it's a big-picture challenge
- 17 about the nature of the world we live in and
- we're going to live in and the need for rules
- 19 that are going to meet a world that we don't
- 20 really have any idea what it will look like.
- MS. HANSFORD: Justice Kagan, I agree
- 22 that social media is important and is increasing
- in importance, but I think our test is malleable
- 24 enough to capture that because I think that
- 25 precisely because social media is so important,

- 1 it is now a duty of many officials as one of
- 2 their jobs to run an official social media
- 3 account or to have a social media presence or to
- 4 engage in conversations on social media. And as
- 5 the duties change, then I think that will become
- 6 state action.
- 7 But I -- our -- our submission is that
- 8 in a case where running the Facebook account is
- 9 extra or, in this case, when somebody is running
- 10 a personal Facebook account and happens to talk
- 11 about topics that matter to his employer, as
- well as to his community and to him personally,
- 13 that's not enough.
- 14 And I think one way to see that this
- is an extra bucket as opposed to a duty bucket
- 16 is that Mr. Freed was able to just take down his
- 17 Facebook page when he was upset at being subject
- 18 to these private capacity suits. He was able
- 19 just to take it down. That's just less speech.
- 20 And if this were a part of his duty,
- if the mayor said no, no, we really need you to
- 22 have a Facebook presence, Facebook is critical
- for the city to communicate with the government,
- he wouldn't have been allowed to do that, but
- 25 then he would have been running the Facebook

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1 page in his official capacity. It would have
```

- 2 been a duty because it would have been something
- 3 he was instructed to do by the mayor.
- 4 JUSTICE KAGAN: Thank you.
- 5 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Justice
- 6 Gorsuch?
- 7 Justice Kavanaugh?
- 8 Justice Barrett?
- 9 Justice Jackson?
- 10 JUSTICE JACKSON: Can I just ask you
- one last thing, which is I'm trying to
- 12 understand how we evaluate a government employee
- 13 controlling access to private property.
- 14 You -- you keep focusing on the
- private property nature of this, but what if we
- 16 have, you know, a big concert, Taylor Swift has
- 17 a big concert in a private, you know, area, a
- 18 park or something, and the police recognize
- there are going to be large crowds, et cetera,
- and so they come and they help with the
- 21 screening of the bags and they, you know, kick
- 22 out people who are rowdy and they're controlling
- access to this area of the private area of this.
- 24 Because it's private, we would say
- 25 that's not state action or --

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1
                MS. HANSFORD: I -- I -- I don't think
 2
      so, Justice Jackson. I think those officers
 3
      would be carrying out their official duties and
      they would be exercising their power, and, of
 4
      course, it's a police officer case where the
 5
 6
     authority of the state makes the expulsion more
7
      effective. That's why a police officer is hired
 8
 9
                JUSTICE JACKSON: But a -- but a --
               MS. HANSFORD: -- instead of a private
10
11
      security quard.
12
                JUSTICE JACKSON: -- but -- but Taylor
      Swift could have hired -- it's -- it's not just
13
14
      the fact that -- I mean, they're not doing
15
     anything more than a private security guard
16
      could have done, right? So it's not -- it's not
17
      just we look at, well, what are they doing
18
      versus what a private person could do.
19
                So what makes it that they are state
20
      action and not --
21
                MS. HANSFORD: I -- I think that state
2.2
      officials can exclude people from private
23
     property, but -- and that is the case that if
24
      state officials are carrying out their duty to
```

do it, if they were -- if they were hired to do

1	it, that that would
2	JUSTICE JACKSON: That would
3	MS. HANSFORD: that would
4	JUSTICE JACKSON: be state action?
5	MS. HANSFORD: that would be state
6	action if they were hired as police officers to
7	exercise that power and to make that expulsion
8	more effective. But there's no analogy to that
9	on Facebook because anyone can block equally,
10	and saying I block a city manager doesn't make
11	it any more of a block than just hitting block.
12	If we had a world where Facebook
13	didn't have a blocking function, then maybe
14	saying, oh, if you come back to my account then
15	post again, the city will fine you. I'm saying
16	this as city manager, that would be an instance
17	of apparent authority, but we just don't think
18	that plays into this set of cases, which is why
19	we think you can set it aside and just focus on
20	governmental control.
21	JUSTICE JACKSON: Thank you.
22	CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Thank you,
23	counsel.
24	Rebuttal, Mr. Kedem.

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1	REBUTTAL ARGUMENT OF ALLON KEDEM
2	ON BEHALF OF THE PETITIONER
3	MR. KEDEM: Thank you, Your Honor.
4	I'd like to start by addressing the
5	test proposed by the United States. I think it
6	has a number of problems, but I'd like to focus
7	on two of them.
8	First of all, the test is all about
9	denial of access to property. But many disputes
10	on social media have nothing to do with access.
11	They have to do with discrimination or other
12	forms of constitutional harm.
13	We gave the example of a teaching
14	assistant at a public university who on Twitter
15	made a number of anti-Semitic comments about
16	students in her class, has nothing to do with
17	access.
18	But it doesn't make sense to have one
19	state action test for access cases online and
20	another state action test for all the other
21	cases, even assuming that we can figure out what
22	denial of access means in the context of all of
23	these different platforms and their various
24	functions.
25	And, second, the test proposed by the

- 1 United States is an obvious doctrinal mismatch
- 2 because it relies on cases about the use of
- 3 private property, which, because it's private
- 4 property, it has some governmental involvement,
- 5 but it has to be pretty extraordinary to
- 6 overcome the very strong default presumption
- 7 that private property is just not used for state
- 8 action ever.
- 9 And for that reason, the government
- says, essentially, only if you are performing an
- 11 exclusive public function does it ever count as
- 12 state action. But, as this Court is very --
- well aware, very few things qualify as exclusive
- 14 public functions. Even something like providing
- 15 a public education is not an exclusive public
- 16 function.
- 17 And for that reason, under the
- 18 government's test, public officials could
- 19 transfer a lot of what they do to private
- 20 property and thereby escape constitutional
- 21 scrutiny.
- I'd like to end by talking about the
- 23 different values on both sides of the equation
- 24 because this Court has always been mindful in
- 25 the state action context about the

- 1 constitutional values that are at stake.
- 2 In -- on our side, we're talking about
- 3 creation of a channel of communication between a
- 4 public official and their constituents about how
- 5 they're doing their job. So we're not talking
- 6 about these one-off posts or fortuitous
- 7 encounters that are essentially the online
- 8 equivalent of running into someone at the
- 9 grocery store. Instead, we're talking about
- denial of access to the channel altogether.
- 11 And I think that there are four
- 12 general values. First of all, we've talked a
- 13 lot about losing out on access to information.
- 14 Some information is only going to be available
- on the private Facebook page of public
- 16 officials. Sometimes it will only be available
- 17 at a certain time or in a certain form.
- 18 Sometimes it will be available somewhere else,
- 19 but it'll be scattered to the four corners of
- 20 the Internet.
- But, second, you lose access to the
- 22 public official him or herself. There were a
- 23 number of instances where Mr. Freed would
- 24 explain a directive that he himself had issued
- 25 to say it applies not just to people who are

- 1 about to have their water cut off but to people
- who have already had their water cut off.
- 3 That's something you would only know if you were
- 4 able to interact with him and ask him a question
- 5 online.
- 6 The third value, as, Justice Kagan,
- 7 you were pointing out, this is also a place
- 8 where members of the town came to talk to one
- 9 another, and that is part of the give-and-take
- of local self-government.
- 11 And, finally, I think there's a
- 12 dignitary interest. To the extent that we're
- 13 not just talking about someone doing this,
- 14 blocking information, you had the information,
- but now you don't have it, it also matters that
- it is the government who is doing it to you.
- 17 Now we have an example in our brief
- 18 about a public school teacher who holds an
- 19 end-of-the-school -- end-of-year party at her
- 20 own house. So there's no duty, there's no
- 21 authority being used. She's not using any state
- 22 funds. But she only invites the white students
- 23 from her class.
- We think that would be an obvious
- 25 constitutional problem. But it's not a problem

- 1 because of any sort of coercion. It's not a
- 2 problem because of use of state resources. And
- 3 it's not really about denial of access to pizza
- 4 and ice cream.
- 5 Really, it's a dignitary harm that it
- is someone from the government treating you in a
- 7 particular way that you should not be treated.
- 8 And that's, I think, something that gets lost
- 9 when you don't take account of the fact that he
- 10 was holding himself out as the city manager,
- 11 establishing this channel, talking to citizens
- 12 in that capacity.
- 13 There are also First Amendment values
- on the other side of the equation, and we admit
- that, although, again, we think they're somewhat
- limited when we're just talking about the
- 17 channel that you've established and whether you
- 18 can block access to that channel, as opposed to
- 19 control over all of your other posts about dogs
- 20 or other things like that.
- I think, to a large extent, the other
- 22 side undercuts their own First Amendment
- 23 argument when they freely admit that the
- 24 government as employer could basically tell them
- 25 to do all of the things that we say they should

- 1 have done in the first place: namely, establish
- 2 a second Facebook account where they just talk
- 3 about their job or, at the very least, if you're
- 4 going to invoke your title, then make clear when
- 5 you're talking in your personal capacity and
- 6 make clear when you're talking in your
- 7 professional capacity.
- 8 So, to some extent, they're already
- 9 undercutting their own First Amendment rights.
- But we do admit that if you establish a channel
- as a public official purporting to be a public
- official, you do lose some amount of control and
- you will be subject to First Amendment scrutiny.
- 14 A lot of times, you can still block people for
- 15 various reasons.
- 16 But we think that as Justice Scalia
- 17 put it in his concurrence in Doe versus Reed,
- 18 criticism is traditionally the price that we
- 19 have been willing to pay for self-government.
- Thank you.
- 21 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Thank you,
- 22 counsel.
- The case is submitted.
- 24 (Whereupon, at 1:05 p.m., the case was
- 25 submitted.)

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