SUPREME COURT OF THE UNITED STATES

IN THE SUPREME COURT OF THE	UNITED STATES
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THOMAS A. CONNELLY,)
AS EXECUTOR OF THE ESTATE OF)
MICHAEL P. CONNELLY, SR.,)
Petitioner,)
v.) No. 23-146
UNITED STATES,)
Respondent.)

Pages: 1 through 62

Place: Washington, D.C.

Date: March 27, 2024

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6	Petitioner,)
7	v.) No. 23-146
8	UNITED STATES,)
9	Respondent.)
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11		
12	Washington, D.C	
13	Wednesday, March 27	, 2024
14		
15	The above-entitled matte	r came on for
16	oral argument before the Suprem	e Court of the
17	United States at 11:41 a.m.	
18		
19	APPEARANCES:	
20	KANNON K. SHANMUGAM, ESQUIRE, W	ashington, D.C.; on
21	behalf of the Petitioner.	
22	YAIRA DUBIN, Assistant to the S	olicitor General,
23	Department of Justice, Wash	ington, D.C.; on behalf
24	of the Respondent.	
25		

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1	PROCEEDINGS
2	(11:41 a.m.)
3	CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: We will hear
4	argument next in Case 23-146, Connelly versus
5	United States.
6	Mr. Shanmugam.
7	ORAL ARGUMENT OF KANNON K. SHANMUGAM
8	ON BEHALF OF THE PETITIONER
9	MR. SHANMUGAM: Thank you, Mr. Chief
10	Justice, and may it please the Court:
11	To ensure continuity in their
12	operations, closely held corporations will often
13	agree to redeem the stock of a shareholder upon
14	his death and then obtain a life insurance
15	policy on the shareholder in order to fund the
16	redemption obligation.
17	This case presents the question of how
18	the federal estate tax treats such arrangements
19	Because the proceeds from a life insurance
20	policy to fulfill a contractual redemption
21	obligation do not increase the corporation's net
22	worth, they do not increase the estate tax owed
23	on the decedent's stock. The court of appeals'
24	contrary conclusion was erroneous.
25	The legal framework governing this

- 1 case is relatively straightforward. The
- 2 Internal Revenue Code and Treasury regulations
- 3 provide that where the parties agree on the
- 4 price to redeem a shareholder's stock, that
- 5 price will establish the value of the stock for
- 6 purposes of the estate tax in certain
- 7 circumstances.
- 8 But where, as here, those
- 9 circumstances have not been met, the value of
- 10 the stock is determined by the price at which
- 11 such stock would change hands between a
- 12 hypothetical willing buyer and willing seller.
- 13 Here, a hypothetical buyer would not
- treat the life insurance proceeds as increasing
- 15 the value of the stock because that asset is
- offset by the contractual obligation to redeem
- shares, a preexisting corporate liability.
- Now the government argues that a court
- 19 should attach no weight to the redemption
- 20 obligation when assessing the value of the
- 21 company. But the government fails to
- 22 distinguish between a contractual obligation to
- 23 redeem stock on the one hand and a voluntary
- 24 stock redemption on the other.
- 25 A hypothetical buyer would treat the

- 1 contractual redemption obligation like any other
- debt that reduces the net worth and therefore
- 3 the value of the company. The government's
- 4 approach would lead to a grossly inflated
- 5 valuation of the decedent's shares, and it would
- 6 effectively lead to double taxation. It would
- 7 defy common sense to take one side of the
- 8 transaction into account but to ignore the other
- 9 for purposes of the estate tax. And it would
- 10 destroy a valuable succession planning tool that
- 11 the nation's small businesses have openly used
- 12 for decades. The judgment of the court of
- appeals should be reversed.
- I welcome the Court's questions.
- JUSTICE THOMAS: Mr. Shanmugam, the --
- if a very interested buyer showed up the day
- 17 after Michael died, would Thomas sell the
- 18 business to him for 3.86 million?
- MR. SHANMUGAM: So, if Thomas were the
- 20 person we were thinking about and not Michael, I
- 21 think it is quite possible that a hypothetical
- 22 willing buyer would pay \$3.68 million --
- JUSTICE THOMAS: No, I'm -- I'm
- 24 -- I'm more focused on the asking price. If a
- 25 buyer showed up the day after Michael died and

- 1 offered to buy it at any price, what would he
- 2 sell it for?
- 3 MR. SHANMUGAM: So I think it's
- 4 important here to distinguish between Michael
- 5 and Thomas.
- 6 JUSTICE THOMAS: Which one died?
- 7 MR. SHANMUGAM: Michael is the one who
- 8 died.
- 9 JUSTICE THOMAS: Okay.
- 10 MR. SHANMUGAM: And -- and Michael, of
- 11 course, is the one whose shares would be subject
- 12 to the \$3 million --
- JUSTICE THOMAS: But -- but Thomas --
- MR. SHANMUGAM: Yes, Your Honor.
- 15 JUSTICE THOMAS: -- is the -- he is
- 16 actually in charge of the estate and the
- company, so he's on both, so he can actually
- 18 sell the property, right?
- MR. SHANMUGAM: Yes, except for the
- fact that, under the buy-sell agreement, Thomas
- is actually disabled from selling the company.
- JUSTICE THOMAS: Well, he has the
- 23 first option.
- MR. SHANMUGAM: He has the first
- option. That is correct. But, under the terms

of the buy-sell agreement, the estate cannot

- 2 sell the stock.
- JUSTICE THOMAS: Okay. Let's --
- 4 MR. SHANMUGAM: So the way --
- 5 JUSTICE THOMAS: Well, let me just
- 6 blink that for a minute, okay? What would he
- 7 ask for it, assuming he could sell it? Would he
- 8 ask 3.86 million or 6.86 million, assuming that
- 9 the insurance was -- was included in the assets
- or liabilities of the company?
- MR. SHANMUGAM: Sure, Justice Thomas.
- 12 So the first question is what is the net worth
- of the company, because we're in agreement with
- 14 the government that that is the first question.
- 15 Our view is that the net worth of the
- 16 company throughout all of this is \$3.86 million.
- 17 The government's view is that the net worth of
- 18 the company is \$6.86 million because, in the
- 19 government's view, you take into account the
- 20 life insurance proceeds but not the offsetting
- 21 redemption obligation.
- JUSTICE THOMAS: Okay. So, if a
- 23 willing buyer shows up -- and who owns the life
- insurance policy?
- MR. SHANMUGAM: So the company is

- 1 entitled to the proceeds of the life insurance.
- 2 And that is hugely important when you're
- 3 applying this test because the fundamental
- 4 problem with the government's view -- our view
- 5 is that 77 percent of \$3.86 million is \$3
- 6 million. The government's view is that
- 7 77 percent of \$6.86 million is \$5.3 million.
- 8 A willing buyer would never, at that
- 9 moment, if buying Michael, the decedent's,
- 10 shares, pay \$5.3 million. Why? Because a
- 11 willing buyer would not be able to capture those
- 12 life insurance proceeds by swooping in before
- 13 the redemption. Those life insurance proceeds
- 14 belong to the company.
- JUSTICE THOMAS: Well, the value has
- to go someplace. The 3 million goes someplace.
- Does it go into the value of the remaining
- 18 stocks? And if it is there, why isn't the
- 19 appropriate valuation 6.86 million?
- 20 MR. SHANMUGAM: The \$3 million of the
- 21 life insurance proceeds are used to redeem
- 22 Michael's shares under the terms of the parties'
- 23 agreement.
- Now, as a practical matter, the
- 25 problem here and the fundamental issue that all

- of us are wrestling with is that what we know is
- 2 that you can't use the \$3 million as simply the
- 3 valuation. Why? Because, as I noted at the
- 4 outset, we didn't satisfy the requirements of
- 5 Section 2703.
- And, therefore, you have to engage in
- 7 this counterfactual inquiry, and the problem
- 8 with the counterfactual inquiry that the
- 9 government wants this Court to engage in is,
- 10 again, that it requires you to disregard the
- 11 redemption obligation.
- 12 Now it is true that one consequence of
- our interpretation is that, as to Thomas, the
- 14 surviving stockholder, Thomas in some very real
- sense benefits from the increase in value by
- 16 virtue of this transaction. Why? Because
- 17 Thomas goes from having 22 percent of the
- 18 company to a hundred percent of the company.
- 19 But, under our approach, as under the
- 20 government's approach, that is taken care of by
- 21 the eventual application of the capital gains
- 22 tax.
- 23 What the government wants you to do is
- 24 to effectively take those life insurance
- 25 proceeds into account twice, once when

- 1 calculating the estate tax because the
- 2 government wants you to tax this higher amount,
- 3 \$5.3 million -- and, again, no hypothetical
- 4 willing buyer would ever have paid that. Crown
- 5 would never have redeemed the shares for \$5.3
- 6 million. And I'm happy to explain why.
- 7 But then the government also will
- 8 subject Thomas eventually to the capital gains
- 9 tax on the increase in the value of his shares.
- 10 And that, in our view, is the fundamental
- 11 problem with the government's approach here, and
- 12 that is why this is effectively double taxation.
- 13 And to just spell out for another
- sentence or two why the \$5.3 million valuation
- 15 --
- 16 JUSTICE KAGAN: But, if I can just
- 17 stop you there because it seems that the
- 18 fundamental problem with your approach is that
- 19 Thomas's -- you know, Thomas's asset has
- 20 quadrupled in value, and it's quadrupled in
- 21 value without him putting a single cent more
- into the company.
- 23 And there might be some taxation
- 24 effect in the end of all that, but -- but not
- 25 sufficient to -- you know, to -- to make up for

- 1 the fact that your -- it's -- it's a -- it's a
- 2 tell that your way of -- of calculating the
- 3 thing is wrong that somebody can come away with
- 4 four times the value without putting a single
- 5 cent into the company.
- 6 MR. SHANMUGAM: So, with respect,
- 7 Justice Kagan, I completely disagree with that,
- 8 and let me explain why.
- 9 It is true that Thomas is in a very
- 10 real sense practically the beneficiary of the
- 11 life insurance proceeds. Why? Because those
- 12 proceeds extinguish the offsetting liability on
- the books, the offsetting redemption obligation.
- 14 And so this is a context in which
- 15 Thomas does come away with the benefit of those
- 16 proceeds because he is the sole owner of a
- 17 company that is worth \$3.86 million.
- Now the government complains around
- 19 the edges about the fact that it's the capital
- 20 gains tax, the capital gains tax only operates
- 21 upon realization, there is a stepped-up basis
- 22 when someone dies and passes the stock along and
- 23 so forth.
- 24 But those are all features of the
- 25 capital gains tax system. That is not a bug

- 1 with our position. Again, our position is the
- 2 rational one precisely because the tax system
- 3 captures that increase.
- 4 And, of course, under our approach,
- 5 Michael's heir is still, of course, paying the
- 6 estate tax. Michael's heir is paying the estate
- 7 tax on stock at around \$3 million,
- 8 coincidentally roughly the amount that was
- 9 contained in the buy-sell agreement, which I
- 10 think confirms that that amount was a rational
- 11 amount here.
- 12 But the problem with the \$5.3 million,
- again, the government's view is -- let's take
- 14 Crown. The government's view is presumably that
- if there had been a proper arm's-length
- 16 agreement here, Crown would have been willing to
- 17 pay \$5.3 million to redeem this stock.
- 18 That would have required Crown to use
- 19 all of the life insurance proceeds here, the
- 20 entire \$3.5 million, and also to dip into its
- 21 operating assets in order to redeem those
- 22 shares. That illustrates why the government's
- 23 position here is irrational.
- Now, to be sure, I think there is a --
- JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: Why?

1	MR. SHANMUGAM: conceptual
2	JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: If if Thomas
3	had done what he needed to do, he would have
4	both owners would have insured each other. They
5	would have paid the price and and gotten the
6	shares. What you did was to off that to the
7	corporation and give the corporation a benefit
8	that entitled Thomas to own the company a
9	hundred percent. I think that's where Justice
LO	Thomas's question comes up.
L1	MR. SHANMUGAM: Well, it wasn't
L2	JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: The value of the
L3	company is the value at which someone's going to
L4	own a hundred percent shares of the stock.
L5	MR. SHANMUGAM: So, Justice Sotomayor,
L6	I think that that hypothetical which the
L7	government uses actually helps our position, and
L8	let me explain why.
L9	The government acknowledges that if
20	you had a situation in which the individuals
21	themselves took out the insurance policies and
22	entered into a cross-purchase agreement, that it
23	would be subject to tax treatment along the
24	lines of what we are suggesting here.
25	Why should this situation be treated

- 1 differently? And -- and one reason
- 2 parenthetically why that alternative is
- 3 impractical is that if you have a company with
- 4 multiple owners, that gets very complicated, but
- 5 it's also distinguishable because, in that
- 6 situation, the individuals have to pay the
- 7 premiums.
- 8 Here, the reason why the corporation
- 9 is paying the premiums is precisely because the
- 10 corporation derives a benefit from this
- 11 arrangement, and that benefit, as I said in my
- very first words, is continuity of ownership.
- 13 That is an incredibly valuable benefit to
- 14 closely-held corporations in this context.
- 15 And -- and so this is not a situation
- in which the corporation itself derives any sort
- 17 of windfall. The corporation is paying premiums
- 18 and it gets the life insurance proceeds in
- 19 return.
- I think what the government is really
- 21 bridling against --
- JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: Thank you.
- JUSTICE BARRETT: Mr. Shanmugam, what
- is the right perspective? So, when Justice
- 25 Thomas asked you the question, you know, he said

- 1 how much would you buy the company for, I think,
- 2 but regardless of how he asked it, I think that
- 3 would be one way to consider it, like what was
- 4 the whole value worth.
- 5 Or do we ask if you had a stranger to
- 6 the situation, what would the price of one share
- 7 be? Is that the right way to think about it?
- 8 And then just kind of to build on to that, do
- 9 you assume the perspective of Thomas, you know,
- someone who would buy one of Thomas's shares or
- 11 someone who would buy one of Michael's shares or
- just someone like you could even pretend that
- 13 you had a third brother named Ralph who only had
- 14 one share.
- 15 Like, what's the right way to think
- 16 about it?
- 17 MR. SHANMUGAM: So, Justice Barrett,
- it is a hypothetical buyer of the same
- 19 proportion of shares in the company. So it's a
- 20 hypothetical buyer of 77.18 percent of Crown's
- 21 shares.
- Now I think the reason why we talk
- 23 about the value of a company here is that I
- 24 think we are in agreement that under the
- 25 relevant regulations -- and this is

- 1 2020-31(2)(f) -- we are really focusing on the
- 2 net worth of the company and then multiplying
- 3 the relevant percentage here. I think we and
- 4 the government are in agreement that that is the
- 5 correct approach here.
- 6 Now that will not always be true.
- 7 There may be circumstances in which, for
- 8 instance, that block of shares gives you a
- 9 control premium that needs to be valued. And
- 10 when you look at the lower court case law in
- 11 this area, often the price will then be adjusted
- 12 up or down.
- But we're all in agreement that there
- is no such adjustment here. And so, really, the
- 15 fundamental question here is what was the net
- 16 worth of the company. And to make just two
- 17 additional points about that, the first is the
- 18 reason why we're talking about a hypothetical
- 19 block of 77.18 percent of the shares is
- 20 precisely because, if we were talking about
- 21 Michael's actual shares, those shares are about
- 22 to be extinguished.
- They're subject to the redemption
- obligation. So I think there's really no good
- 25 conceptual way to do that. And I think that the

- 1 regulations recognize that when they talk about
- 2 the fact in 2020-31(1)(b) that you can look to
- 3 an equivalent asset, a comparable item in the
- 4 words of the regulation, when you're making this
- 5 determination.
- 6 And then I think the second thing that
- 7 I think is important to keep in mind here is,
- 8 when you're talking about the net worth of the
- 9 company, I don't really hear the government to
- 10 dispute the fact that an obligation to redeem
- shares would be treated ordinarily and common
- sense bears this out as a liability like any
- 13 other.
- 14 It's a legally-binding obligation.
- 15 The accounting standards treat it as a
- 16 liability. In fact, the accounting standards go
- so far as to specifically enumerate stock to be
- 18 redeemed upon the death of the holder as giving
- 19 rise to a liability.
- 20 JUSTICE GORSUCH: So fair enough on
- 21 that, but let's just see if I've got this right,
- and tell me where I'm wrong.
- 23 You agree that the relevant value is
- of the corporation as a whole. And, really, the
- 25 question is what do we do with the \$3 million in

- 1 life insurance proceeds. How should that be
- 2 dealt with?
- 3 And I hear the government saying a
- 4 prospective buyer would consider that part of
- 5 the assets of the corporation, and, therefore,
- 6 it enhances the value of the company to five
- 7 point whatever it is. And I hear you saying no,
- 8 you really shouldn't count those insurance
- 9 proceeds because they're -- they're earmarked
- 10 for the redemption, and so no willing purchaser
- 11 would account for them in part of his assessment
- of the value of the company.
- 13 Is that a fair assessment of the
- 14 difference between the two?
- MR. SHANMUGAM: I would word the point
- 16 slightly differently, Justice Gorsuch, but I
- 17 think this difference is important. We're not
- 18 disputing that the life insurance proceeds are
- 19 an asset. What we're really debating here is
- 20 whether or not they are a net asset, whether --
- 21 JUSTICE GORSUCH: Whether a willing
- 22 buyer would consider them part of the value of
- 23 the company that he's going to obtain when
- they're really earmarked for redemption.
- MR. SHANMUGAM: And what a willing

- 1 buyer would do, I think, is to look at this and
- 2 to say: Yes, there are \$3 million in life
- 3 insurance proceeds that are going to come into
- 4 the company, but those proceeds are going to
- 5 immediately go out again. They're going to go
- 6 out in order to fund this offsetting liability
- 7 which is on the books.
- 8 And under our approach, which, again,
- 9 I think accords with a healthy dose of common
- sense here, when the parties entered into the
- initial buy-sell agreement, that had the effect
- of putting an asset and a liability on the books
- 13 at the same time.
- 14 JUSTICE GORSUCH: It offset one
- 15 another.
- 16 MR. SHANMUGAM: They offset each other
- 17 at every point.
- JUSTICE GORSUCH: Okay. Now --
- MR. SHANMUGAM: And that is precisely
- 20 why, as I said, in response to one of the
- 21 earlier questions, under our approach, the net
- 22 worth of the company is the same throughout. In
- other words, it's the same before death, it's
- the same at the moment of death, and it's the
- 25 same after the redemption obligation.

- 1 JUSTICE GORSUCH: Now one wrinkle to
- 2 that, though, is I don't think the life
- 3 insurance proceeds -- the only permitted use for
- 4 them was the redemption, and the government
- 5 makes something of that.
- 6 MR. SHANMUGAM: That is correct, and
- 7 that's why I didn't pick up on the word
- 8 "earmarked" in your question --
- 9 JUSTICE GORSUCH: Right. Right.
- 10 Yeah. And --
- 11 MR. SHANMUGAM: -- because money is
- 12 fungible.
- 13 JUSTICE GORSUCH: Yeah.
- MR. SHANMUGAM: And so I think our
- analysis would be the same if you were talking
- about \$3 million that happened to be some other
- 17 non-operating asset.
- 18 JUSTICE GORSUCH: It's still a \$3
- 19 million liability.
- 20 MR. SHANMUGAM: It would still be
- 21 offset. And, indeed, in this case, the life
- insurance policy was not for \$3 million. It
- turns out it was for \$3.5 million. We're in all
- 24 -- we're all in agreement that the remaining
- 25 \$500,000 is an asset, a non-operating asset that

2.1

- 1 should be on the company's books.
- 2 And so all we are doing here, I think,
- 3 is giving effect to the broader framework which
- 4 not just Congress but the Treasury and the IRS
- 5 has set up here, which is a framework that says
- 6 that when you are in the hypothetical world
- 7 conducting this analysis, you assume that the
- 8 hypothetical buyer and seller takes all relevant
- 9 facts into account.
- 10 JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: You -- you said --
- MR. SHANMUGAM: And --
- JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: Keep going, I'm
- 13 sorry.
- 14 MR. SHANMUGAM: And I think that the
- problem with the government's approach is that
- 16 the government's approach requires you to do one
- 17 of two things: either to disregard the
- 18 offsetting liability or to assume -- and I think
- when you look at the government's italicized
- 20 hypotheticals, all of them effectively do this
- 21 -- to assume that your hypothetical buyer is
- 22 somehow going to be able to capture the life
- insurance proceeds.
- 24 That was the flaw with the court of
- 25 appeals' reasoning because the court of appeals

2.2

- 1 posited a situation where you had a buyer not
- 2 just of the 77 percent of the shares but of the
- 3 entirety of the company. Of course, if a buyer
- 4 could get their hands on both Michael's shares
- 5 and Thomas's shares, presumably the first thing
- 6 that buyer would do is to extinguish any
- 7 redemption obligation, not that that redemption
- 8 obligation would make any sense in that
- 9 hypothetical, and to have the benefit of the
- 10 \$3.86 million in corporate value and the \$3
- 11 million in life insurance proceeds.
- 12 JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: Something you said
- 13 that I think is critical to your position is
- that the net worth before, on the day of, on the
- day after, a month after, after the life
- insurance and the -- and the redemption has
- 17 occurred or whenever after that, is -- is
- 18 constant.
- 19 MR. SHANMUGAM: Yes, and that is
- 20 different from a voluntary redemption. Much ink
- is spilled both in the government's brief and --
- and in the briefs of the amicus law professors
- on the fact that when you're dealing with a
- voluntary redemption -- let's say a publicly
- 25 held company decides on the next day to redeem

- 1 shares, at that point it is true that you are
- 2 going to have a diminution in the net worth,
- 3 which ensures that the remaining shareholders'
- 4 stock remains relatively constant.
- 5 That actually turns out not to be true
- 6 when you're dealing with publicly held companies
- 7 because often the stock will move up or down in
- 8 response to such an announcement, but I think
- 9 that basic principle is one that we don't
- 10 disagree with.
- 11 But everything in the government's
- brief presupposes that a voluntary redemption
- and a contractual obligation to redeem shares
- are treated exactly the same way. And I think
- the problem is that if you're a hypothetical
- buyer looking at the company, a redemption
- 17 obligation is like any other debt. You see that
- on the corporate books. And that is \$3 million
- 19 that is going out the door.
- Now, to be sure, this is a
- 21 hypothetical buyer. And so we are presupposing
- 22 that the buyer is not attempting to buy the
- 23 shares that are subject to the redemption
- obligation. That would, again, be impossible
- under the terms of the buy-sell agreement, and

- 1 even if they could, they would be entitled only
- 2 to \$3 million, and we're disregarding that
- 3 figure.
- 4 JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: On -- on the
- 5 professors' -- Professor Chodorow and Professor
- 6 Hellwig's amicus briefs, obviously they've spent
- 7 a lot of time thinking about this issue.
- 8 They're against you. Do you want to -- maybe
- 9 you just covered it in your view, but where do
- 10 they get it wrong? Maybe your point is the
- 11 voluntary redemption is where they -- where they
- get it wrong, but I'd like some more explanation
- because they -- they clearly have studied this.
- 14 MR. SHANMUGAM: I -- I -- I think that
- 15 that is -- the fundamental flaw is that they
- 16 really presuppose a voluntary redemption, and so
- many of the principles that they set out and,
- indeed, the four principles that the government
- 19 sets out are principles that we have no
- 20 objection to in that context.
- In this context, by contrast, again,
- 22 it's that a hypothetical buyer would not somehow
- 23 disregard this redemption obligation. The
- 24 hypothetical buyer would take it into account
- and recognize that the funds that are coming in

- 1 are going out the door again.
- 2 And to be clear, this results in no
- 3 windfall whatsoever to anyone, other than the
- 4 benefit to Thomas that's going to be taxed.
- I think when the government says that
- 6 the purposes here are not legitimate, there's
- 7 nothing in the case that we disagree with more.
- 8 The reason that closely held corporations engage
- 9 in these transactions, as the Chambers amicus
- 10 brief explains at some length, is precisely
- 11 because this is a way of ensuring continuity of
- 12 operations without engaging in disruption.
- 13 If you don't have the life insurance
- 14 proceeds here, most of these companies, which
- are typically very small, are going to have to
- 16 dip into operating assets or otherwise engage in
- 17 some sort of transaction to ensure continuity.
- 18 If you have an heir who doesn't want to run the
- 19 company or if the heir is someone outside the
- 20 family, you have a very real risk that that
- 21 person will not be interested in running the
- company or that you'll have a disruption of
- 23 operations.
- JUSTICE JACKSON: Mr. Shanmuqam, can I
- just ask you -- because I'm trying to follow.

- 1 So you've said many times that the money is
- 2 going out, but I guess I'm trying to figure out
- 3 whether the proceeds of the life insurance are
- 4 really going out when they're being used to
- 5 redeem the shares.
- 6 So what -- what is the effect on the
- 7 value of the remaining shares once the
- 8 redemption occurs?
- 9 MR. SHANMUGAM: So the remaining
- 10 shares effectively have a larger share of
- 11 ownership in the company. In other words --
- 12 JUSTICE JACKSON: Their value
- increases. Is that where the four times that
- 14 Justice -- Justice Kagan was talking about -- is
- 15 that where that comes from?
- MR. SHANMUGAM: Yes, that's correct.
- 17 And this is the contrast, I think, with a
- 18 voluntary redemption because in the context of a
- 19 voluntary redemption, rather than these life
- insurance proceeds, something else has to go out
- of the company and you are getting the shares
- 22 back into the company.
- 23 And -- and the reason why that is
- 24 different is that here you are extinguishing an
- 25 existing liability. That is what makes this

1 different --2 JUSTICE KAGAN: But you're treating this --3 MR. SHANMUGAM: -- is that you have a 4 liability on the books. 5 6 JUSTICE KAGAN: You're treating this 7 redemption obligation like any other redemption obligation. And it's really not like any other 8 9 redemption obligation because this obligation is 10 benefiting the equity interests that we're 11 trying to value. And so it -- it just doesn't 12 seem to make a lot of sense in that context to 13 say that the redemption obligation simultaneously serves to reduce the value of 14 15 that interest. 16 MR. SHANMUGAM: I think that that's a 17 fair factual statement, but let me explain to 18 you why that should make no difference. 19 In our view, the -- the redemption 20 obligation is like any other debt from the 21 perspective of the hypothetical buyer. And I 2.2 recognize that this is the artificiality of the 23 case, but I think it's an artificiality of the case that is inherent in the way that the 24

regulations work, and I think it's a problem

2.8

- 1 that the government has to come to terms with as
- 2 well.
- 3 Our view is that, from the perspective
- 4 of a hypothetical third party, the fact that
- 5 this redemption obligation runs to somebody else
- 6 is of no moment. The hypothetical buyer here is
- 7 not in the same position as Michael. It's a
- 8 hypothetical buyer.
- 9 And so that is why we think that when
- 10 you're applying a regulation that requires you
- 11 to take into account all relevant facts, you've
- 12 got to look at the economic reality from the
- 13 position of the company.
- 14 And, again, the best way I think to
- 15 understand that is to think about whether or not
- 16 the government's fair market valuation would be
- one that the parties would use. We know that
- 18 our fair market valuation, in fact, pretty
- 19 closely tracks the price that was agreed. \$5.3
- 20 million would have destroyed Crown if Crown had
- 21 spent that amount of money to redeem the shares
- 22 because, again, the life insurance proceeds
- 23 would not have covered that amount.
- 24 And I think that illustrates why the
- 25 government's position cannot be correct.

1	CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Thank you,
2	counsel.
3	Justice Thomas?
4	Justice Alito?
5	Justice Sotomayor?
6	Justice Gorsuch?
7	Justice Kavanaugh?
8	Justice Barrett?
9	JUSTICE JACKSON: Can I just ask one
LO	more question? Assume that the company doesn't
L1	take out life insurance to fund the redemption.
L2	The agreement just says the company promises to
L3	redeem the shares at fair market value upon the
L4	shareholder's death.
L5	What, if anything, about your
L6	treatment of the redemption obligation changes
L7	in that circumstance?
L8	MR. SHANMUGAM: So I think the
L9	analysis is somewhat different, Justice Jackson.
20	And I think that that is similar to the two
21	sisters hypothetical that the government uses in
22	its brief. And that is for the simple reason
23	and we've kind of been talking to some extent
24	about this that in that hypothetical, the
25	obligation to redeem charge actually has a

- depressive effect on the company's future
- 2 earning capacity. Why? Precisely because the
- 3 company has to use other assets and typically
- 4 operating assets in order to fund the redemption
- 5 obligation.
- 6 And in that circumstance, there could
- 7 well be a depressive effect on the valuation,
- 8 and that depressive effect could, in fact, be
- 9 substantial. One reason why this circumstance
- is different is precisely because where you have
- an offsetting life insurance policy and
- redemption obligation, it actually makes sense
- 13 to think about valuation in terms of the net
- 14 worth of the company.
- I think once you start to get away
- 16 from that, the valuation of the company is
- 17 affected by its remaining operating assets, how
- the business is going to do on a going-forward
- 19 basis. But here, precisely because there's no
- 20 effect on the remainder of the company, it makes
- 21 sense to engage in the valuation by multiplying
- 22 the percentage of shares by the net worth.
- JUSTICE JACKSON: Thank you.
- 24 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Thank you,
- 25 counsel.

1	MR. SHANMUGAM: Thank you.
2	CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Ms. Dubin.
3	ORAL ARGUMENT OF YAIRA DUBIN
4	ON BEHALF OF THE RESPONDENT
5	MS. DUBIN: Mr. Chief Justice, and may
6	it please the Court:
7	The estate's evaluation of Michael
8	Connelly's shares contradicts basic math and
9	valuation principles. According to the estate,
LO	before we can value Michael's shares in Crown,
L1	we must first subtract the price that Crown paid
L2	for Michael's shares. In other words, the
L3	estate's theory is that before you can value
L4	something, you must first subtract the price
L5	paid for the very thing you are trying to value.
L6	That makes no sense. Using the item
L7	you're trying to value as a line item in its own
L8	valuation will never give you the correct
L9	answer, and it doesn't give the estate the right
20	answer here either.
21	The estate's contrary view rests on a
22	fundamental misunderstanding of the nature of a
23	redemption obligation. A redemption obligation
24	is not a corporate debt that reduces the
25	corporation's net worth or the value of the

- 1 shares to be redeemed. A debt owed to creditors
- 2 reduces corporate and shareholder value. A
- 3 redemption obligation divides the corporate pie
- 4 among existing shareholders without changing the
- 5 value of their interests.
- 6 And here the corporate pie was worth
- 7 6.86 million, not 3.86 million. And that's true
- 8 even if you look only at the statute of
- 9 limitation estate's own incomes. Walked away
- 10 from the redemption with approximately \$3
- 11 million in cash, but Petitioner also admits that
- 12 Thomas walked away from the redemption with
- 13 \$3.86 million in value.
- 14 And the estate doesn't dispute the
- 15 Black Letter valuation principle that the
- interest of each equity shareholder added
- 17 together has to equal the company's total value.
- 18 That defeats their position because that means
- 19 that Crown's total net worth before the family
- 20 divided the company was 6.86 million. The value
- of the two equities licenses put back together
- 22 and that means the estate evaluation of
- 23 Michael's 77 percent stake in Crown at \$3
- 24 million came nowhere close to fair market value.
- I welcome the Court's questions.

1	JUSTICE THOMAS: I think what
2	Petitioner is arguing that is that, yes, we took
3	the insurance policy, the receipts of 3.5
4	million, we paid out 3, and we received the
5	shares, so it's a wash.
6	The 3 million, up to 3 million, it's a
7	wash. So what do you do with that argument?
8	MS. DUBIN: Sure. So that argument
9	depends on the idea that the \$3 million
10	redemption obligation is a debt, a liability.
11	And that's just not correct.
12	What it is is a promise to cash out
13	one of the existing shareholder's shares. So,
14	for example, in the two sisters hypothetical, or
15	page 37 of our brief, if you own 80 percent of a
16	company worth \$5 million, you have a \$4 million
17	stake in the company, a redemption obligation at
18	fair market value would be a promise to cash you
19	out for your shares for your stake in the
20	company.
21	It is not the same thing as the
22	corporation for example owing a mortgage or some
23	other debt. A mortgage or some other debt like
24	that would reduce the value of the company and
25	the value of the for its shareholders. That

- 1 is simply not true of a redemption obligation.
- 2 And I think that you know it's sort of
- 3 important that Petitioner concedes a voluntary
- 4 redemption obligation wouldn't decrease the
- 5 value of the company because on the date of
- 6 Michael's death it doesn't matter whether the
- 7 redemption obligation is voluntary or mandatory.
- 8 \$3 million is being paid to Michael's
- 9 shares, so that's where that money is going.
- 10 But it is going either whether that is voluntary
- or mandatory. The point is that that was part
- of the corporate assets here and it was paid to
- 13 Michael on the date of his death.
- 14 JUSTICE BARRETT: Do you agree that
- 15 none of the money escapes taxation because more
- 16 value -- I mean the \$3 million of the life
- insurance proceeds didn't vanish, as you say
- it's retained by the company, and Mr. Shanmugam
- 19 was pointing out that Thomas will be taxed on
- 20 that as a capital gains tax when he sells out
- 21 his shares.
- 22 So Mr. Shanmugam says that means that
- the government is double dipping. What do you
- 24 have to say to that?
- MS. DUBIN: A couple responses to

1 that. First of all, any sort of double dipping allegation comes from the Crown family decisions to value the is shares at below fair fair market 3 value. Had these shares been redeemed for fair 4 market value, which is \$5.3 million, there would 5 be no risk of double taxation. The risk of 6 7 double taxation comes because \$2.3 million stayed in Crown and inured to Thomas's benefit 8 9 but that money was part of the fair market value 10 of Michael's shares. In a transaction that was 11 done at fair market value you would have had 5.3 12 million go to Michael's estate, be subject to 13 the estate tax, and never be subject to any 14 possibility of future taxation through capital 15 gains on Thomas. So that's the first answer 16 which is this problem becomes because the estate 17 valued these shares below fair market value. 18 But the second answer is that we just 19 simply can't know what will happen to Thomas's 20 shares in the future. Maybe they will be 21 subject to capital gains. It depends if he 2.2 begueaths them, it depends on what they are 23 worth at that time. That's a separate inquiry 24 that goes to the value of Thomas.

tax cares about the shares of Michael's death

- 1 and Michael's estate not what went to any of the
- 2 particular heirs or beneficiaries.
- JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: I thought -- am I
- 4 wrong that on -- on capital gains you pay the
- 5 tax, capital gain at the -- at the price that
- 6 you've gotten it.
- 7 MS. DUBIN: If -- if you get a
- 8 stepped-up --
- 9 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: And that's why he
- 10 won't pay on that.
- 11 MS. DUBIN: If he sells it during his
- 12 lifetime, he didn't get these shares as a
- bequeathment so he's not entitled to stepped-up
- basis, but he could pass it on to his heirs with
- 15 the stepped-up basis.
- 16 JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: The net worth
- 17 question that Mr. Shanmugam said the net worth
- 18 stayed the same all the way through, A, do you
- 19 agree, B, why is it not relevant if it is true?
- 20 MS. DUBIN: It's not true. The
- 21 corporation was worth 6.86 million on the date
- 22 of Michael's death. Our view is not that only
- 23 somehow Michael's shares had some value in them,
- 24 that the corporation didn't have. Our view is
- 25 that the corporation's equity value is made up

- 1 by the equity stakeholder's value. Michael's
- 2 shares were entitled to a \$5.3 million valuation
- 3 and Thomas's shares were \$1.5 million valuation,
- 4 that adds up to our \$6.86 million valuation.
- 5 JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: Why -- why is it
- 6 -- you said the redemption obligation is not a
- 7 debt. Just walk me through that, if you can,
- 8 because I find this case extremely difficult.
- 9 So it seems like a key point and I'd
- 10 like to hear you explain it again.
- 11 MS. DUBIN: Sure. And I would just
- 12 start off with saying, I mean, I think
- 13 Petitioner agrees a voluntary redemption is not
- 14 the paying of the debt.
- 15 JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: Yeah.
- 16 MS. DUBIN: So I think that sort of to
- 17 the extent we're --
- JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: But he's saying
- 19 that's the key point in the case. I think
- 20 that's what he said. So I would like to hear
- 21 you address that.
- MS. DUBIN: Yeah. I think that -- I
- think we've been talking a little bit about the
- amicus briefs and they are very helpful in
- 25 explaining the nature of a redemption generally,

- 1 but the nature of a redemption, what a company
- 2 is agreeing to do in a redemption is to exchange
- 3 one of the existing shareholder's shares, so
- 4 their stake in the company, their equity stake
- 5 in the company, in exchange for cash.
- 6 So that's -- that's the promise. It
- 7 is we will get back your equity shares and we
- 8 will give you cash in exchange for it. If that
- 9 were done at fair market value it would mean
- 10 that if you had an 80 percent stake in a \$5
- 11 million company, you would be entitled to \$4
- 12 million in cash.
- What happens on the other side, your
- shares are extinguished, so they no longer
- 15 exist. So the remaining shareholder, who has a
- 16 20 percent stakeholder in our \$5 million
- 17 company, he had originally, to start, he had a
- 18 20 percent stake in a \$5 million company which
- 19 is a \$1 million stake. Now after this
- 20 redemption which is paid out at 4 million he
- 21 would be left with sole ownership of a \$1
- 22 million company.
- So in a redemption both of the
- 24 corporate shareholders, if the redemption is
- done at fair market value, they both walk away

1 with the same value they had before. By contrast in a debt situation paying a debt, the corporation pays money out of its coffers to 3 someone outside the corporation and that will 4 reduce both the corporate and the shareholder 5 6 value and if this had been that sort of \$3 7 million debt, then Petitioners analysis would be right but here the \$3 million went into 8 9 Michael's pocket, it went to one of the equity shareholders. So that does not decrease the 10 value of the corporation or, of course, the 11 12 value of the shares to to be redeemed. 13 And I think just to pause on that for 14 a second, you know, Petitioner says what we're 15 really valuing here is some theoretical stake in 16 the corporation, not Michael's shares. That's 17 not correct as a matter of the statute. statute tells us in 26 U.S.C. 2031, 2033 and 18 19 2036 that the relevant shares to be valued here 20 are the decedent's shares. That's, of course, 21 what we're valuing. So that's not correct. 2.2 But, even if you were going to value

some hypothetical 77 percent stake in the

stake in the company with a redemption

company, some 70 percent seven -- 77 percent

23

24

- 1 obligation or anything like that, you would
- 2 always get \$5.3 million because \$5.3 million is
- 3 what that stake is equivalent to.
- 4 The only way you get Petitioner's
- 5 numbers is if you treat it as if there's a
- 6 separate \$3 million debt that you first take out
- 7 of the company and then you try to value
- 8 Michael's shares. But that just doesn't make
- 9 sense because that \$3 million runs to the holder
- 10 of Michael's shares. It is not some
- 11 free-floating debt out there in the universe.
- 12 JUSTICE BARRETT: But it would work if
- 13 -- Petitioner's would work if it was a
- 14 free-floating debt somewhere outside in the
- 15 universe?
- 16 MS. DUBIN: Yes. If it were a debt
- owed to creditors just generally when you're
- 18 doing a very simplistic valuation of a
- 19 corporation, you would subtract the liabilities
- 20 owed to creditors before you determine what is
- 21 the equity value remaining.
- But, here, we're looking at an equity
- 23 stake and money paid to an equity stake and you
- 24 can't say that that reduces the value of that
- 25 equity stake or the value of the corporation as

- 1 a whole.
- 2 JUSTICE GORSUCH: Would your answer
- differ if the life insurance proceeds had been
- 4 earmarked for the redemption of Michael's
- 5 shares?
- 6 MS. DUBIN: No. The parties' intent
- 7 doesn't govern here. I think both we and
- 8 Petitioner agree that the \$3 million is actually
- 9 an asset to the corporation. It does count.
- 10 And we both agree on that. The only question is
- 11 whether it's offset by a debt, offset by a
- 12 liability, and for that -- and for that purpose,
- 13 I think it doesn't matter.
- 14 JUSTICE GORSUCH: Well, help me on
- that because I understand a hypothetical
- 16 purchaser of the company as a whole would say:
- 17 Ah, that \$3 million is going to inure to my
- 18 benefit because I'm just going to extinguish the
- 19 redemption obligation and off we go.
- 20 But, if somebody's purchasing
- 21 Michael's shares at the time of his death, why
- 22 -- why isn't it different then and -- and --
- 23 because we're assessing his estate value and
- there you have an obligation to pay him out and
- 25 the insurance proceeds coming in to do that.

1	MS. DUBIN: Absolutely. And the
2	answer is that for all of the illustrations that
3	we've suggested, whether it's a buyer of Crown
4	as a whole, whether it's a buyer of just
5	Michael's shares, you will always be able to
6	capture the value of the insurance proceeds.
7	JUSTICE GORSUCH: Okay. But you agree
8	the relevant measurement is the buyer of
9	Michael's shares?
LO	MS. DUBIN: Yes, although, as
L1	Petitioner mentioned, we agree that it's a pro
L2	rata share of Crown as a whole, so you will get
L3	the same number whether you value a buyer of
L4	Crown as a whole and then take Michael's pro
L5	rata share of that or value just Michael's
L6	shares. Either way, a buyer who just buys
L7	Michael's shares is going to get a 77 percent
L8	stake in a company with total assets of \$6.86
L9	million. So, if that redemption obligation now
20	runs to him, he will get cash in exchange for
21	the 77 percent obligation. If the redemption
22	obligation is for some reason not honored or
23	whatever it is, then he has a 77 percent stake
24	in a company worth \$6.86 million.
25	But the problem with Detitioner's case

- 1 is that he tries to take \$3 million out of that
- 2 pot. But the problem is that that \$3 million
- 3 goes to the holder of Michael's shares.
- 4 JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: Feel free to tell
- 5 me this is the wrong question, but what's the
- 6 net worth of the company after the shares are
- 7 redeemed?
- 8 MS. DUBIN: On Petitioner's view, it's
- 9 \$3.86 million, and you see this in the pie
- 10 charts that they have on their reply brief on
- 11 page 6.
- 12 JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: Well, how about on
- 13 your view?
- MS. DUBIN: On our view, had the
- 15 redemption been done of fair market value, which
- 16 it was not, had the redemption been done at fair
- 17 market value, it would be 1.53 million.
- 18 But I think that that picks up on a
- 19 critical point, which is our -- our view, the
- 20 government's view, here about how the estate tax
- 21 works doesn't change how the parties had to
- 22 structure their transactions. They are free to
- 23 redeem shares at below fair market value for
- 24 whatever business or idiosyncratic reasons they
- 25 want to. But the estate tax looks at what was

- 1 the fair market value of those shares.
- JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: So, after they get
- 3 the life insurance proceeds and redeem the
- 4 shares, the net worth of the company's dropped
- 5 dramatically in your estimation?
- 6 MS. DUBIN: Yes. And that's the
- 7 fundamental way when you're --
- 8 JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: Doesn't that
- 9 seem that -- just explain that to me.
- 10 MS. DUBIN: Sure, and I think this
- 11 goes a little bit to your questions earlier
- about how a redemption is supposed to work.
- 13 A redemption is a -- essentially, it's
- sort of like a spinoff, right? You're dividing
- 15 the corporate assets among existing
- 16 shareholders. One is getting cash in exchange
- for their share, and one gets sole ownership of
- 18 a company worth less.
- 19 It is a problem for Petitioner that
- 20 notwithstanding that that's how a redemption is
- 21 supposed to work in his view, the corporation
- 22 maintains the same amount before and after. And
- 23 the reason that the problem comes from is
- 24 because he's saying the corporation is worth
- \$3.86 million before, but it's actually worth

- 1 6.86 million.
- JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: I think it's odd
- 3 that you have a net worth of the company --
- 4 what's the net worth of the company in your view
- 5 the day before he dies?
- 6 MS. DUBIN: So just -- I don't -- I
- 7 don't mean to pause, but the trickiness of it is
- 8 trying to value the life insurance policies the
- 9 day before he dies. There's a cash surrender
- value of the life insurance policies, which is
- approximately \$500,000 the day before Michael
- 12 dies. So that's a little bit tricky.
- But putting aside any interest in the
- 14 life insurance policies whatsoever, it's around
- 15 \$3 million.
- JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: Okay. And then,
- after he dies, even though they've bought the
- 18 life insurance for exactly this purpose, the net
- worth of the company has dipped in half, right?
- MS. DUBIN: So two --
- 21 JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: That seems a
- 22 little -- I mean, maybe you say they just messed
- 23 up, but that -- the whole purpose of the life
- insurance policy was to make sure that didn't
- 25 happen, right?

- 1 MS. DUBIN: So two responses to that.
- On the first point, if you're only looking at
- 3 Crown, it is correct that after the redemption,
- 4 Crown becomes a smaller company. That's how
- 5 redemptions work. But, if you're looking at the
- 6 total value that the Connelly family walked away
- 7 with, they are going to walk away with a total
- 8 of \$6.86 million. Some of it was used to buy
- 9 out Crown -- buy out Michael, and some of it was
- 10 used to Crown.
- 11 To your point about what the parties
- 12 want --
- JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: The whole family
- 14 mean -- and Thomas got out of this -- well, I
- think, but I'm not sure why the company's net
- worth should dip in half when the whole purpose
- 17 of getting the life insurance policy, I think --
- 18 you've probably already answered this, but the
- 19 life insurance policy was meant to prevent that,
- 20 I thought.
- 21 MS. DUBIN: I think that -- my
- 22 understanding is that is what the parties
- intended. Intent doesn't govern here.
- 24 JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: I -- I got it, but
- 25 it's weird to walk away the day after his death

- with a company that's suddenly worth 50 percent
- of what it had been worth the day before his
- death, even though you bought a life insurance
- 4 policy to cover the redemption.
- 5 MS. DUBIN: Yeah. So two -- two
- 6 responses to that. One is it's really not
- 7 strange in the concept of what a redemption is.
- 8 That is what a redemption is supposed to do. A
- 9 redemption is supposed to give one shareholder
- 10 cash in exchange for their assets, and the other
- one is supposed to maintain control of the
- 12 smaller company.
- 13 But, to your point about doesn't seem
- 14 like that's what the parties wanted to do here,
- 15 you're right, what the parties wanted to do here
- 16 was maintain Crown as a \$3.86 million enterprise
- and give Michael \$3 million. That's what the
- 18 parties wanted. That means that there's \$6.86
- 19 million of value in the estate tax because
- 20 Michael owned that \$6.86 million of value. His
- 21 percentage stake of it says that was the fair
- 22 value -- market value of Michael's shares.
- I think that sort of pulls up, you
- know, Petitioner's points about continuity of
- ownership. There are many ways in which to

1 arrange for continuity of ownership of a 2 closely-held corporation, but what you can't do 3 is have \$6.86 million of corporate assets by virtue of a life insurance proceed, take \$3 4 million out and give it to one shareholder, 5 6 maintain the company at its \$3.86 million size, 7 and then maintain for purposes of the estate tax that the company wasn't worth \$6.86 million. 8 JUSTICE GORSUCH: What do we --9 10 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Do you --11 JUSTICE GORSUCH: I'm sorry, Chief. 12 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Do you dispute 13 your friend's statement that this has been a 14 common way for family corporations to maintain 15 continuity of operations? And is -- if -- if 16 that's the case, how -- how long has the 17 government overlooked the fact that there was this great pool of money out there waiting for 18 19 them to take? 20 MS. DUBIN: Sure. So our 21 understanding is not Petitioner's understanding. 2.2 This is what we know, and I'll tell you what we 23 know, which is there have only been these three 24 reported cases that we know of. So it's Blount 25 and Cartwright from 1999 and 2005 and then this

- 1 case. That's it. So, in terms of the litigated
- 2 cases, not very many.
- We did ask at the cert stage the IRS
- 4 examiners who are charged with looking at estate
- 5 tax returns if they're seeing a lot of these in
- 6 the pipeline, and they are not. They couldn't
- 7 find any. So they didn't see any sort of
- 8 maneuvers like this in the fact patterns in what
- 9 they are looking at.
- I understand that that's not, you
- 11 know, sort of a conclusive view of whether
- 12 people are doing it or not. My guess is that --
- or my view is what should have been happening is
- 14 that tax advisors are looking at what you have
- on the one hand is the Ninth and Eleventh
- 16 Circuit extremely thinly reasoned decisions on
- this, and on the other hand, what you have is
- 18 the Tax Court's decision in Blount I, and the
- 19 Tax Court's decision in Blount I explains
- 20 extremes clearly that this doesn't make sense
- 21 because you are, you know, subtracting the value
- of the very thing you're trying to price in
- 23 determining the value of that thing.
- 24 JUSTICE KAGAN: And so what do most --
- 25 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: So the -- I'm

- 1 sorry. I just was going to say, so the Ninth
- 2 and the Eleventh Circuits were on your friend's
- 3 side?
- 4 MS. DUBIN: That's right.
- 5 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Which might
- 6 suggest that it is a common way of -- for family
- 7 corporations to maintain continuity of
- 8 operations.
- 9 MS. DUBIN: Right. So I would say my
- 10 best guess is that if -- if this is happening
- often, it was probably happening in the Ninth
- 12 and Eleventh Circuits, which, of course, this
- 13 case doesn't arise from. This comes from the
- 14 Eighth Circuit. And that -- that might be one
- way that advisors are saying they can do it in
- 16 those circuits. Tax advisors tend to be risk
- 17 averse. I think they would be very well aware
- 18 of the fact that there are other ways to
- 19 structure this, like the cross-insurance
- 20 agreement or held by a trust or various ways in
- 21 which the critical piece is that the life
- insurance proceeds do not go into the
- 23 corporation, because the premise of Blount and
- 24 Cartwright, the court of appeals decisions, is
- 25 that somehow you can have money come into a

- 1 corporation and have it not count when you're
- 2 valuing shares in the corporation.
- 3 And there's no reasoning whatsoever to
- 4 explain why they think it's appropriate to treat
- 5 the redemption --
- 6 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Well --
- 7 MS. DUBIN: -- obligation as a
- 8 liability.
- 9 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Well, they
- 10 might think it's appropriate because the money
- 11 that comes in goes out fairly quickly.
- MS. DUBIN: I agree that's definitely
- the sort of initial appeal of what Petitioner is
- saying and what the courts must have thought was
- true in Blount and Cartwright. It's simply just
- 16 not correct, though, because the going out
- 17 matters. If it's going out to a creditor, it
- 18 reduces the corporation's net worthand it would
- 19 reduce the shareholders' value. We absolutely
- agree with that.
- But, here, when it went out, it went
- out to the holder of Michael's equity stake.
- 23 Michael has a stake, and we are cashing out his
- 24 shares. That's what's happening there. So it's
- 25 not something that reduces the value of the

- 1 shareholders' shares. It would not reduce the
- value of Michael's shares, and it wouldn't
- 3 reduce Crown's net worth when we're looking at
- 4 it. It's not a debt owed to creditors. It is a
- 5 promise to exchange a shareholder's shares for
- 6 cash.
- 7 JUSTICE KAGAN: So, if the IRS doesn't
- 8 see many people doing this, what are they
- 9 seeing? What do families do instead?
- 10 MS. DUBIN: Our understanding is it is
- 11 much more common to do the cross-purchase
- 12 arrangement. So you keep -- right. The two
- 13 brothers would cross-insure each other. The
- 14 life insurance proceeds would never come into
- 15 the corporation. And so you have a situation
- 16 where, if Thomas wanted to, he could buy Michael
- out, and that would be a much simpler way of
- 18 accomplishing that, and you wouldn't have this
- 19 problem that we're dealing with here where you
- 20 have corporate assets that Petitioner has to
- 21 argue shouldn't be counted as corporate assets.
- 22 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: And the reason
- that's not as attractive is because, in this
- 24 situation, it's the corporation that is paying
- 25 the premiums or --

1	MS. DUBIN: They're a different
2	they're not economically exactly the same
3	transactions, of course. It's not us saying
4	that this is, you know, sort of just a
5	form-over-substance distinction. That's not
6	what's happening here. They're different.
7	In the situation that happened here,
8	you had Crown paying the premiums, Crown had the
9	benefits and burdens of ownership, and that's
LO	why, in the end, when Crown then gets the
L1	proceeds, it's treated as a corporate asset.
L2	In the cross-insurance arrangement, it
L3	would be the brothers personally responsible for
L4	maintaining those life insurance policies. And,
L5	no, there would not be the same confidence from
L6	one brother to another that you will maintain
L7	those policies.
L8	So these these different tactics do
L9	have different economic consequences, but those
20	are the choices taxpayers can make as they're
21	navigating how can we minimize the estate tax
22	consequences of a large estate.
23	JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: Your position
24	doesn't depend on this, but I think it's little
25	rough to tell a tay advisor oh figure out

- 1 whether the Ninth and Eleventh Circuit opinions
- are thinly reasoned and don't follow them when
- 3 they're --
- 4 MS. DUBIN: So I don't -- I don't mean
- 5 to disparage those decisions in any way, but I
- 6 think that if Your Honor would look at them, I
- 7 don't think you would need to be a tax
- 8 specialist to think that they are not a fulsome
- 9 analysis of this issue. There's a few
- sentences, and they don't engage at all with the
- 11 arguments that --
- 12 JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: Right, but the --
- MS. DUBIN: -- the IRS had been
- 14 making.
- 15 JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: Right. That's
- 16 fair. But, normally, you'd rely on the bottom
- 17 line, I think, if you were in that business, two
- 18 -- two courts of appeals, but --
- MS. DUBIN: Well, just to clarify that
- 20 --
- JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: But you have a
- 22 whole bunch of academics who for years have been
- 23 writing about this.
- 24 MS. DUBIN: There are many academics
- 25 writing about it, including one of the amicus

- 1 here, Professor Chodorow. There's also many,
- 2 many other articles that have come out since
- 3 those cases explaining why they're wrong,
- 4 including those by Delaney, Burke, and
- 5 Bogdanski, and other professors.
- 6 But I think just to go to sort of the
- 7 heart of your question, the Tax Court, you know,
- 8 is free -- it doesn't have to follow the Ninth
- 9 and Eleventh Circuit decisions. So, if you are
- 10 coming up in a circuit that is not the Ninth or
- 11 Eleventh, there is no reason for you to think
- 12 that those Ninth and Eleventh Circuit precedents
- are governing. And I do expect that tax
- 14 advisors would know that.
- 15 JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: Mm-hmm.
- 16 JUSTICE KAGAN: But if I could just
- 17 sort of put this in most simple -- you know,
- 18 it's a little bit hard for me to get this
- 19 through my head, but your basic pitch is this is
- 20 not any old liability. This is a redemption
- 21 obligation. A redemption obligation is supposed
- 22 to split the pie, so you come away with a
- 23 smaller pie. That's because that's what
- 24 redemption obligations do.
- MS. DUBIN: Yes, that's correct.

- 1 That's our basic pitch about a redemption
- obligation. I would just add that the other
- 3 part of our pitch is that the hole in their case
- 4 is that they are trying to value Michael's
- 5 shares after Crown already redeemed them.
- 6 You can't do that. The price paid out
- 7 for Michael's shares is value that goes to
- 8 Michael's shares. If you subtract that as a \$3
- 9 million liability before trying to value
- 10 Michael's shares, you will never get the correct
- answer.
- 12 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Thank you,
- 13 counsel.
- Anyone, anything further? Anything
- 15 further? No? Thank you.
- 16 Rebuttal, Mr. Shanmugam.
- 17 REBUTTAL ARGUMENT OF KANNON K. SHANMUGAM
- 18 ON BEHALF OF THE PETITIONER
- MR. SHANMUGAM: So the gist of the
- 20 government's position is that it is not any old
- obligation, but that's the fundamental problem
- 22 with the government's position.
- You see, the government doesn't
- 24 dispute the fact that it is a liability and
- common sense or accounting terms. They say:

- 1 Well, it's a liability that runs to an equity
- 2 holder. It's a liability that runs to the
- 3 Michael -- to Michael, but the problem here is
- 4 that we're analyzing this from the perspective
- of a hypothetical buyer, not Michael.
- 6 And from the perspective of a
- 7 hypothetical buyer, this is, therefore, like any
- 8 other debt. The fact that the debt runs to one
- 9 of the other shareholders rather than to the
- 10 bank that holds the mortgage is of no moment.
- 11 It is a liability that does not inure to the
- 12 benefit of the hypothetical buyer.
- 13 And so when valuing the company and
- determining its net worth, you have to look at
- it from the perspective of somebody who is
- 16 examining the entirety of the company and try to
- 17 figure out what he or she would pay for that
- 18 share.
- 19 And while it is true that we're trying
- to value Michael's shares, we're not trying to
- value Michael's actual shares because, after
- 22 all, those are the precise shares that are
- 23 subject to the \$3 million redemption obligation
- and are going to be extinguished. That's why
- you have to make the move to a hypothetical

1 block of shares in the same proportion. 2 Now, let's drill down a little bit 3 about the basic flaw in the government's position. I think this flaw was illustrated in 4 the colloquy between my friend, Ms. Dubin, and 5 6 Justice Kavanaugh. And that is because the 7 government's position is not just that Michael's shares are worth \$5.13 million. It's that after 8 9 the redemption, the remaining shares, Thomas's shares, would be worth \$1.53 million. 10 11 What does that tell you? It tells you 12 that in order to engage in a redemption at fair 13 market value, the company would have to do 14 something that it would never do. This is a 15 \$3.86 million company that would have to use 16 some of that corporate value and some of its 17 operating assets in order to redeem the shares 18 and thereby diminish the remainder of the 19 company and be left with a stub of a company. 20 And particularly for a company like 21 Crown in an industry like the construction 2.2 industry, where most of the assets are literally 23 bricks and mortar inventory, that is something 24 that is completely counterfactual and would 25 never take place in the real world.

1	And, parenthetically, to the extent
2	that the government comes back to the fact that
3	supposedly under our approach the two sets of
4	shares would add up to \$6.86 million, because
5	Thomas's shares would be valued at \$3.86
6	million, the problem with that is that \$3.86
7	million is the post-redemption value of Thomas's
8	shares.
9	Under our approach, as the pie charts
LO	in our reply brief bear out, if you are valuing
L1	Thomas's shares, those shares would be worth
L2	only \$880,000 at the time of Michael's death,
L3	precisely because what you're trying to do is to
L4	value the entire company from the perspective of
L5	a hypothetical buyer.
L6	Now, to the extent the government
L7	says, well, you're getting a benefit here,
L8	you're getting a \$3 million redemption of shares
L9	and Thomas is walking away with the same company
20	that existed beforehand, that is a feature of
21	the fact that the company is getting, through
22	awards of the life insurance, it is getting \$3
23	million and that \$3 million is being put to use.
24	But that is being accounted for by the
2.5	operation of the tax system, and, in particular.

- 1 the operation of the capital gains tax. And to
- 2 the extent that Ms. Dubin today in response to
- 3 Justice Sotomayor said: Well, you may not get
- 4 that money right away, you only get it upon
- 5 realization, you only get the difference between
- 6 the value at the time of realization and the
- 7 value at the time that Thomas acquired the
- 8 shares, all of those are features of the capital
- 9 gains system.
- In terms of whether or not this is a
- 11 common practice, that's obviously a hard thing
- 12 to quantify. I would respectfully submit that
- 13 the number of client alerts and -- and the
- amount of froth in the industry in response to
- the Court's grant of cert suggests that this is
- 16 a pretty common practice.
- 17 But if we look at the reported cases,
- 18 I think the two critical facts are, first, that
- 19 the government, in fact, took the contrary
- 20 position in Estate of Cartwright, a case where
- the contrary position benefitted the government
- 22 because we were dealing with income tax, rather
- 23 than the estate tax; second, that the government
- 24 never indicated its non-acquiescence in those
- 25 decisions as the IRS sometimes does when it

- 1 disagrees with them; and, third, that I think
- 2 it's a little bit unfair to disparage the Ninth
- 3 and the Eleventh Circuits here, because it isn't
- 4 as if the Eighth Circuit offered more extended
- 5 reasoning.
- 6 The sum total of the Eighth Circuit's
- 7 reasoning was that if you posited a buyer of the
- 8 entirety of the company, that buyer could
- 9 capture the value of the life insurance
- 10 proceeds. And ultimately that analysis is
- 11 fundamentally flawed.
- 12 And none of the alternative ways of
- attempting to achieve the same result that the
- 14 government posits, in fact, are successful. I
- think Ms. Dubin actually herself illustrated the
- 16 flaws with individuals cross-purchasing
- insurance in order to conduct this arrangement
- off the corporate books. Individuals could, of
- 19 course, charge their minds. There would be the
- 20 lack of certainty. But fundamentally the
- 21 corporation would not be paying the premiums and
- the corporation is the one who benefits from
- 23 continuity of ownership.
- Thank you.
- 25 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Thank you,

1	counsel.	The	case	is	sul	omitte	d.		
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