1	IN THE SUPREME COURT OF THE UNITED STATES	
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3	JAMES D. LOGAN, :	
4	Petitioner :	
5	v. : No. 06-6911	
6	UNITED STATES :	
7	x	
8	Washington, D.C.	
9	Tuesday, October 30, 2007	
10		
11	The above-entitled matter came on for ora	a]
12	argument before the Supreme Court of the United States	
13	at 11:03 a.m.	
14	APPEARANCES:	
15	RICHARD A. COAD, ESQ., Madison, Wis.; on behalf of the	9
16	Petitioner.	
17	DARYL JOSEFFER, ESQ., Assistant to the Solicitor	
18	General, Department of Justice, Washington, D.C.; or	n
19	behalf of the Respondent.	
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1	PROCEEDINGS
2	(11:03 a.m.)
3	CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: We'll hear argument
4	next in case 06-6911, Logan v. United States.
5	Mr. Coad.
6	ORAL ARGUMENT OF RICHARD A. COAD
7	ON BEHALF OF PETITIONER
8	MR. COAD: Mr. Chief Justice, and may it
9	please the Court:
10	The provision at issue determines which
11	convictions constitute a prior felony for imposition of
12	the Federal firearms ban and its increased penalties.
13	Its exemption clause prescribes certain ways in which a
14	conviction that otherwise meets that definition is
15	nevertheless exempt. Specifically, it looks to a
16	State's indication that an offense is deprived of any
17	continuing effect, such as whether the status of an
18	offender's civil rights are the same after a conviction
19	as they were before conviction.
20	The issue before the Court is whether the
21	statute should be read to exempt convictions for which
22	civil rights were lost and later regained while at the
23	same time not exempting a conviction for which civil
24	rights were never lost, even though both in the end,
25	both offenders have their civil rights following their

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- 2 Congress's underlying objective in drafting
- 3 the exemption clause was to ensure that Federal law
- 4 respected a State's considered judgment that a
- 5 particular offense should not subject a person to the
- 6 Federal firearms law. The Seventh Circuit's
- 7 interpretation, which counted convictions for which
- 8 rights were never lost, fails to respect that judgment.
- 9 It disregards the State's unequivocal indication to the
- 10 Federal statute that an offender is worthy of fully
- 11 participating in civic life.
- 12 JUSTICE GINSBURG: So if you had a
- 13 statute -- a State like, I'm told, Vermont, that doesn't
- 14 take away any one's civil rights, not even a first
- 15 degree murderer's, then that first degree murderer would
- 16 be equated to someone whose civil rights were taken away
- 17 and then restored.
- 18 MR. COAD: That's correct. And I think that
- 19 the Government points to Maine as an example where no
- 20 offenders lose their civil rights, but felons lose their
- 21 gun rights and certain misdemeanants also lose their gun
- 22 rights, but get that gun right back. And in States like
- 23 Maine and in Vermont, the "unless" clause still applies
- 24 and still precludes those types of convictions. So I
- 25 think when the Government alleges that there are certain

- 1 anomalies that arise from our interpretation, it is
- 2 simply not the case, and if they are anomalies that
- 3 arise from our interpretation --
- 4 JUSTICE GINSBURG: They're not anomalies
- 5 because the gun prohibition would cover them, even
- 6 though they never had their civil rights taken away? Is
- 7 that -- is that what you're saying?
- 8 MR. COAD: Correct. We have to read the --
- 9 both clauses, the exemption clause and the unless cause.
- 10 And --
- 11 JUSTICE SCALIA: Mr. Coad, how are -- how
- 12 are civil rights which have been taken away typically
- 13 restored? What is -- what is the process for restoring
- 14 them? Just if you don't commit another offense within a
- 15 certain number of years?
- 16 MR. COAD: It depends on the State. In the
- 17 NACDL lodging that the Court has -- I believe 29 States
- 18 were identified as having some type of restoration
- 19 procedures. The majority of those, it is by automatic
- 20 operation of law. So there's no subsequent conditions
- 21 met by the offender.
- 22 JUSTICE KENNEDY: Well, but even -- even
- 23 there I assume the law waits for a certain passage of
- 24 time, and I would assume that there can be no felony
- 25 committed during that interim period or the person's

- 1 sentence has to be served or something? It's ongoing,
- 2 it's prospective. And so restoration has a real
- 3 component, in that -- that is not present in the statute
- 4 that we're faced with here.
- 5 MR. COAD: Well, I think that there really
- 6 isn't a difference between -- by operation of law, a
- 7 State taking away someone's rights and giving it back or
- 8 allowing a offender to retain civil rights --
- 9 JUSTICE KENNEDY: Well, it is of -- maybe no
- 10 difference if the operation of law is 24 hours later.
- MR. COAD: It could be a matter --
- 12 JUSTICE KENNEDY: But I assume that's not
- 13 the case. I assume that there's in every case, as
- 14 Justice Scalia's question indicates, a certain passage
- 15 of time that takes place.
- 16 MR. COAD: It could be as short as 24 hours.
- 17 In certain States if a probationer is convicted, rights
- 18 aren't taken away. But if a felony offender is
- 19 sentenced to even one day in jail those rights are in
- 20 theory taken away for that one day and restored to that
- 21 offender the minute he walks out of jail.
- JUSTICE SCALIA: Well, you -- you can say,
- 23 however, that -- that in the restoring situation, there
- 24 is at least a greater individuation of the -- of the
- 25 State's determination of the -- the trustworthiness of

- 1 the individual to be -- to be trusted with arms.
- 2 That is to say well, this person has not
- 3 committed an offense within so many years. Or maybe in
- 4 some States, it may be an individual determination.
- 5 That's why I asked you the question. Is it ever one by
- 6 one, you apply to have them restored?
- 7 MR. COAD: In a minority of States, yes.
- 8 JUSTICE SCALIA: Well, I mean, that's --
- 9 that's a totally different thing from just a gross
- 10 determination by a State that everybody who commits this
- 11 crime does not lose -- does not lose firearm rights.
- I think it's -- it's -- there's a greater
- degree of assurance when you're dealing with those
- 14 States that -- that have some degree of individuation.
- 15 At least this is an individual who hasn't committed an
- 16 offense for so many years. Or in those States where you
- 17 have to apply personally, I think they're different
- 18 situations.
- 19 MR. COAD: I -- I don't think they are, Your
- 20 Honor. As I just mentioned there are States in which a
- 21 day in jail, your rights are lost and restored. And
- there really isn't any difference between a broad
- 23 legislative determination by a State --
- JUSTICE KENNEDY: Well, but I'm
- 25 suggesting -- and I haven't done the research -- that

- 1 that's atypical.
- MR. COAD: No, it's not atypical. In 18 out
- 3 of the 29 States identified in the NACDL lodging, rights
- 4 are automatically restored. There's no --
- 5 JUSTICE KENNEDY: I think it's atypical to
- 6 give a felon one day in jail.
- 7 MR. COAD: Well, it could be a misdemeanor.
- 8 There are certainly misdemeanors punishable by more than
- 9 two years. In fact two of the misdemeanors at question
- 10 here that were punishable by more than two years, my
- 11 client did not serve a day in jail.
- 12 JUSTICE SCALIA: But a misdemeanor? I see.
- 13 MR. COAD: So there are misdemeanors --
- 14 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: I understand that --
- 15 I understand that it is rare for misdemeanants to lose
- 16 their civil rights.
- 17 MR. COAD: It -- that's the assumption. But
- 18 here we've identified in at least 12 States -- excuse
- 19 me, 16 States misdemeanors punishable by more than two
- 20 years or felonies, rights are retained.
- 21 So there are States, for example, Maryland,
- 22 where rights are lost for a misdemeanor punishable by
- 23 more than two years.
- 24 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: But certainly the
- 25 minority approach. In most States if you are convicted

- of a misdemeanor you do not lose civil rights?
- 2 MR. COAD: Absolutely.
- 3 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: So your argument, if
- 4 accepted, would essentially weed out, or at least for a
- 5 majority of the States, weed out subdivision
- 6 (a)(20)(A)(b) -- (a)(20)(B)? In other words, there's
- 7 coverage under the statute if you are convicted under a
- 8 misdemeanor and you want to say, well, if your civil
- 9 rights were never taken away, you shouldn't be covered.
- 10 Well, that would mean most misdemeanors aren't going to
- 11 be covered.
- MR. COAD: Well, in, for example, Maryland,
- 13 that's not the case. In many -- in 12 States, it is the
- 14 case.
- 15 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Well, if I say most
- 16 misdemeanors aren't going to be covered, it's not an
- answer to say, well, here's one State where they are
- 18 covered. It's maybe 49 are not.
- 19 MR. COAD: There really are only 16 States
- 20 in total that have misdemeanors punishable by more than
- 21 two years where rights are retained. We're not talking
- 22 about a very big group to begin with. This certainly is
- 23 an issue on the margins.
- JUSTICE SOUTER: Mr. Coad, may I ask you a
- 25 question that involves the comparison of what, for

- 1 shorthand purposes I'll call Subsection (20) and
- 2 Subsection (33). I take it, it is your position that --
- 3 and (20) applies here. But I take it that it's your
- 4 position that under (33), your argument could not
- 5 prevail because the language of (33) makes it clear that
- 6 there's got to be a -- in effect, a revocation of the
- 7 right first, before there can be a restoration within
- 8 the meaning of that statute?
- 9 You accept that?
- 10 MR. COAD: That's correct, Your Honor.
- 11 JUSTICE SOUTER: Now that applies as I
- 12 recall to cases, or primarily to cases, in which there
- 13 has been a misdemeanor conviction for domestic violence,
- 14 is that correct?
- 15 MR. COAD: It only applies in that instance.
- 16 JUSTICE SOUTER: Okay. If your position
- 17 prevails, then Subsection (20), which applies to more
- 18 serious offenses, would in effect be held to provide for
- 19 a restoration when, in fact, nothing had been taken
- away.
- 21 Whereas under (33), which applies simply to
- 22 a relatively minor set of crimes in relation to (20),
- 23 would not provide this relief. So you would have the
- 24 anomaly that in the more serious cases, you would win.
- 25 In the less serious cases, you would lose, because the

- 1 statute was more onerous. That's anomalous.
- 2 And my point is, and this is what I want you
- 3 to comment on, I'll assume for the sake of argument that
- 4 you're pointing out an anomaly here if you just look at
- 5 (20) alone. But if you look at (20) and (33), by going
- 6 your way, we're going to create another anomaly, the
- 7 other anomaly being that the more serious offense or the
- 8 more serious offender gets better treatment than the
- 9 less serious offender.
- 10 So either way we go, there's going to be
- 11 some anomaly. Am I right in reading it that way?
- MR. COAD: Well, in part. Congress was
- 13 specific in 1996 when it enacted the Lautenberg
- 14 Amendment, which was the genesis for the (a)(33) and the
- 15 prohibition on firearms for misdemeanor crimes of
- 16 domestic violence, it was very -- Congress was very
- 17 specific that it thought those types of offenders were
- 18 particularly dangerous. Whereas when you look at
- 19 (a)(20), yes, it generally applies to felons and to
- 20 misdemeanors punishable by more than two years.
- 21 But in that group of people, you had varying
- 22 degrees of seriousness. You could have embezzlement
- 23 convictions --
- 24 JUSTICE SOUTER: But none of them is less
- 25 serious in the classification of the crime than those

- 1 covered by 33, because 33 simply covers a misdemeanor of
- 2 domestic violence.
- MR. COAD: I think what we have to look to
- 4 here is Congress's clear choice in both. In The
- 5 Firearms Owners' Protection Act for (a)(20), Congress
- 6 wanted to provide a broad exemption for individual
- 7 States deemed to be trustworthy. Whereas in (a)(33),
- 8 Congress was legislating under a very different purpose,
- 9 which was to target misdemeanor crimes of domestic
- 10 violence as particularly dangerous offenders in relation
- 11 to gun possession.
- 12 JUSTICE SOUTER: Yes, but the State's
- 13 judgment about trustworthiness may very well be the same
- 14 in each case. So the trustworthiness criterion, it
- 15 seems to me, is being -- would be applied differently in
- 16 the two cases if we take your position.
- 17 MR. COAD: It is. And I think that it is
- 18 okay for the Court to decide that because of the very
- 19 specific nature of only one type of offender in (a)(33),
- 20 which Congress decided they didn't want them to possess
- 21 guns. Whereas in (a)(20), The Firearms Owners'
- 22 Protection Act had a very different purpose. It was to
- 23 expand gun ownership to even felons who States determine
- 24 to be otherwise trustworthy.
- 25 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Isn't there another

- 1 difficulty for you in this statutory comparison that
- 2 Justice Souter has noted? You're argument under (a)(20)
- 3 is that it would be absurd for Congress to take people,
- 4 exempt people, whose rights have been restored, but not
- 5 people whose rights were never taken away. That is
- 6 exactly what Congress did in (a)(33).
- 7 So if Congress thought it was all right even
- 8 in albeit in a different context, it seems to me to be
- 9 very difficult to argue that it is inherently absurd to
- 10 do it somewhere else.
- 11 MR. COAD: Our absurdity argument you've
- 12 identified for (a)(20) is more particular than that. It
- is when you look to a particular State, because again
- 14 we're in the realm here of delegation or at least
- 15 deferring to States this trustworthy judgment. It is
- 16 within a particular State that a less serious offender
- 17 as determined by that State ends up being punished more
- 18 harshly than its more serious offenders.
- 19 Whereas in (a)(33) you don't run into that
- 20 problem. You accept the anomalies amongst the States.
- 21 There are varying States -- ways to -- States handle
- 22 these types of issues. But with (a)(33) you have one
- 23 type of offender, and a State treats that offender in
- 24 one particular way.
- 25 You aren't comparing State by State. We

- 1 don't look to Wisconsin versus Louisiana to see an
- 2 absurdity. We look within a particular State, for
- 3 example, in Wisconsin to identify an absurdity. There
- 4 certainly is an acceptance when Congress decided --
- JUSTICE SCALIA: Are you sure about that?
- 6 (33) applies to a number of different crimes, it seems
- 7 to me, within every State. Are you sure that in none of
- 8 those crimes the civil rights are not taken away for
- 9 some of them, but are taken away for others?
- 10 MR. COAD: The difference here, I think,
- 11 between (a)(20) and (a)(33) is that Congress was
- 12 legislating under the assumption for a felony you're
- 13 going to lose your civil rights. Whereas in (a)(33)
- 14 Your Honor is correct. Typically misdemeanors
- 15 punishable by nine months or up to a year, rights are
- 16 not lost.
- 17 And so I think that's the difference Your
- 18 Honor is getting to. I'm not sure if I answered the
- 19 question.
- JUSTICE ALITO: Well, with respect to the
- 21 in-State anomaly that you were talking about, the
- 22 government argues on page 30 -- 29 and 30 of its brief
- 23 that there really are only a few States where this
- 24 exists, and even in those -- even in the States where it
- 25 exists, there are very significant restrictions on the

- 1 ability of the felon to obtain restoration of civil
- 2 rights.
- 3
 Is that incorrect?
- 4 MR. COAD: I think it is incorrect in the
- 5 sense that when the government sort of narrowed the
- 6 number of States that we identified as being problem
- 7 States, what it ignores is that the Armed Career
- 8 Criminal Act and the prohibition against firearms goes
- 9 back forever really. You have to look at all of State
- 10 law for 1980s, '70s '60s.
- Now, the government argued, well, right now
- 12 there are only a handful of States. That might be
- 13 correct for now. But State laws have changed over the
- 14 years. And so, we have to look back farther. So, it is
- 15 a deeper problem than the government identified.
- 16 And I think what's key is that we're talking
- 17 about Congress separating dangerous offenders from those
- 18 who are otherwise considered trustworthy by a particular
- 19 State. And this Court has recognized this principal in
- 20 both Caron and in Small. And when you are excluding
- 21 from the protections of the exemption clause offenders
- 22 for which a State has clearly identified as its most --
- 23 if you want to consider them its most trustworthy
- 24 offenders, that is absurd.
- 25 And it certainly offends the societal norm

- 1 that, all things being equal, we don't punish less
- 2 serious offenders more harshly than we do more serious
- 3 offenders.
- 4 JUSTICE GINSBURG: Well, then, maybe the
- 5 problem was that Congress included misdemeanants who
- 6 were subject to over a two- year sentence.
- 7 The point has been made that, on your
- 8 reading, that was a futile gesture, or Congress did one
- 9 thing that was cancelled out by someone else, by another
- 10 provision. And then they put in this group of
- 11 misdemeanants who were subject to an over-two-year
- 12 sentence; but most of that group -- and in many states
- 13 all of them -- would not have their civil rights taken
- 14 away.
- 15 So what is left of the group that was put
- in, misdemeanants with over-two-year sentences?
- 17 MR. COAD: I'm not sure I understand Your
- 18 Honor's question.
- 19 JUSTICE GINSBURG: What was the point of
- 20 putting that group in the statute as covered by the
- 21 Career Criminal Act?
- MR. COAD: Well, I -- I think the point is
- 23 that -- that we can't ignore Congress's clear intent to
- 24 exempt the -- the most trustworthy offenders in a -- in
- 25 a given State. And that's --

- 1 JUSTICE GINSBURG: But how many would be --
- 2 take a State that doesn't take civil rights away and gun
- 3 rights from misdemeanants.
- 4 What effect in that State would this
- 5 legislation have -- what effect would the provision of
- 6 this legislation -- that says misdemeanants who are
- 7 subject to a two-year -- over-two-year term are covered?
- 8 It wouldn't be covered because the -- because they're
- 9 not having their civil rights taken away.
- 10 MR. COAD: Well, certainly, the Federal
- 11 statute set a two-year floor, if you will. But I don't
- 12 think that we should read the civil-rights-restored
- 13 exception in isolation. I mean we have to make sense of
- 14 Congress's choice to look to civil rights.
- 15 JUSTICE SCALIA: But does it make much
- 16 sense, as -- as Justice Ginsburg suggests, to read
- 17 (a)(20)(B) as covering almost nothing?
- 18 I mean, you know, why go to the trouble of
- 19 putting in that provision if it's only going to make a
- 20 difference in those -- in those very few States where --
- 21 well --
- MR. COAD: Well, we're talking about very
- 23 few States overall. I mean even the problem we've
- 24 identified is certainly a limited one. We're talking
- 25 about a dozen States, at most.

- 1 And so we can say, well, you know, it
- 2 vitiates (B) because only two States are left that fall
- 3 into (B). But when we're talking about the civil rights
- 4 restoration provision as applying to rights retained,
- 5 we're still only talking about a dozen States. So I
- 6 don't think that that necessarily vitiates (B).
- 7 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: You phrased
- 8 Congress's intent as allowing an exemption for people
- 9 the State has found trustworthy. But I don't think
- 10 that's how this legislative process works.
- 11 You have additional punishment, and then
- 12 somebody says: Oh, let's not apply it to people who are
- 13 convicted of antitrust violations. And you say: Yeah,
- 14 yeah.
- 15 And then somebody says: Let's not apply it
- 16 to people whose civil rights have been restored. And
- 17 they say: Fine.
- 18 And then nobody pipes up and says: Well,
- 19 let's not apply it to people whose civil rights were
- 20 never taken away.
- 21 In other words, it's not an intent that is
- 22 not effectuated. It is just you want the intent to
- 23 reach more broadly.
- 24 MR. COAD: I think that the intent was
- 25 broad, and Congress was operating under the assumption

- 1 that rights would generally be lost for those serious
- 2 types of offenses that it thought it was covering in
- 3 (a)(20). And I think there is no evidence in the
- 4 Congressional Record --
- 5 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: So it's based on a
- 6 congressional mistake, in other words, about the
- 7 breadth, but it still doesn't --
- 8 MR. COAD: It is an unthought-of application
- 9 of the statute that -- that leads to absurd results,
- 10 which, if we go with the government's interpretation, we
- 11 frustrate Congress's intent with passing legislation.
- 12 JUSTICE SCALIA: Can we rewrite statutes
- 13 like that? Because, gee, look at this statute.
- 14 Congress didn't think about this, and it makes a really
- 15 bad result here. So we're going to add this -- this
- 16 new -- I don't think that that's how we operate.
- 17 MR. COAD: In the context of identifying an
- 18 absurdity, it certainly strengthens the absurdity
- 19 argument where --
- 20 JUSTICE SCALIA: It's not that absurd if
- 21 Congress did the same thing in (a)(33).
- 22 MR. COAD: It's -- it might not be
- 23 absurd in (a) (33). But Congress, when it showed that
- 24 -- when it chose to limit the concept of restoration, it
- 25 knew how to do so.

- 1 It was aware of three circuit courts
- 2 evaluating (a)(20) to include rights retained, and so it
- 3 did it there. But it didn't do it in (a)(20).
- 4 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: What about
- 5 securities law violations? (A)(20)(A)says this doesn't
- 6 apply if it's an antitrust violation. Now, did
- 7 Congress -- you could say: Well, they would have
- 8 applied it to securities law violations, too. It's a
- 9 business offense. They're not interested in that. So
- 10 we should read this as applying to securities law
- 11 violations.
- 12 MR. COAD: I think that's different, because
- 13 that's a separate type of violation; whereas, here we're
- 14 talking about an area that Congress clearly identified,
- 15 which is how a State treats the civil rights of its
- 16 offenders.
- 17 And you're also talking about, in most
- 18 instances, a broad, legislative determination that a
- 19 State decides: Well, we're not going to take them away,
- 20 or we're going to take them away and give them back; but
- 21 it has nothing to do with the offender. There is no act
- 22 of forgiveness on the part of the State. It is just a
- 23 broad, legislative rule.
- 24 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: That kind of begs
- 25 the question for you to say Congress is worried about

- 1 offenders States think are trustworthy. What they
- 2 actually said are, of course, offenders who have had
- 3 their civil rights restored.
- 4 Maybe if they focused on the question of
- 5 whether or not civil rights were taken away in the first
- 6 place, they would have made a different judgment, as
- 7 they did, of course, in (a)(33).
- 8 MR. COAD: Well -- and, again, in (a)(33)
- 9 they did it for a very particular type of offender and a
- 10 different type of offender.
- 11 And I think, if you even just look at the
- 12 NACDL lodging, the expansiveness of it and the amount of
- 13 detail, none of that is in the Congressional Record.
- 14 It's clear that Congress didn't consider exactly what
- 15 was going to happen with the civil rights restored
- 16 provision. They just assumed rights would generally be
- 17 lost for those types of convictions.
- 18 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Well, isn't -- under
- 19 our precedents, isn't what you just said fatal to your
- 20 case: In other words, Congress didn't think about this,
- 21 or they made a mistake in thinking about it?
- In either case it's clear that they didn't
- 23 legislate with respect to it.
- MR. COAD: I -- I think that they did
- 25 legislate with respect to civil rights. They just

- 1 didn't consider that this certain circumstance would
- 2 exist. And it's -- and it's absurd to conclude that a
- 3 less serious offender should be included within the
- 4 Federal ban; whereas, a more serious offender should not
- 5 as the State has determined.
- And I think if you look at it this way, too,
- 7 the -- a State, in order to -- if the Court decides:
- 8 Well, sorry, you're out of luck to civil rights
- 9 retained, if a State wishes to have its less serious
- 10 offenders avoid the Federal ban, it would have to treat
- 11 them more harshly than it currently does in order for
- 12 those offenders to be treated better under Federal law.
- 13 And I think that that's an absurd notion.
- 14 And I also -- I think -- I just want to give
- 15 one what I think is the most clear example, which is the
- 16 State of North Dakota. We're not talking about
- 17 misdemeanors here. We're talking about felony
- 18 convictions.
- 19 In North Dakota the State has decided that
- 20 if a felon is not sentenced to imprisonment, then the
- 21 felon retains his civil rights, and his right to possess
- 22 a firearm is restored after a short waiting period.
- 23 Whereas, a felon who is convicted to -- and
- 24 sent to prison, his rights are taken away and later
- 25 restored. So we have the result here of the complete

- 1 opposite of what North Dakota intended, which is to
- 2 treat the less serious offender accordingly and treat
- 3 the more serious offender accordingly.
- 4 And that's directly contrary to Congress's
- 5 purpose in passing a firearm owner's protection act,
- 6 which was in direct response to this Court's holding in
- 7 Dickerson, which ignored a State's expungement of -- of
- 8 a conviction, which, again, is another way of a State
- 9 identifying an individual as trustworthy.
- 10 JUSTICE KENNEDY: Do you know, since you
- 11 seem to have looked at it: In North Carolina, for the
- 12 person whose had his civil rights taken away, is -- is
- 13 there any mechanism to get them back earlier by -- by
- 14 applying for clemency or a pardon or --
- 15 MR. COAD: In North Dakota -- in North
- 16 Dakota you can apply for a pardon, I believe. I'd have
- 17 to check, but I think --
- JUSTICE KENNEDY: That would be about the
- 19 only way?
- 20 MR. COAD: Yes. And so you're talking about
- 21 requiring less serious offenders to seek, in some
- 22 instances, extraordinary relief in order to get on the
- 23 same footing as more serious offenders.
- 24 And I -- and I would look to point to the
- 25 example of Wisconsin and the offenses, in particular,

1	that	we're	talking	about	here.

- 2 For a misdemeanor crime as a repeat
- 3 offender, before 2003, it was punishable by up to three
- 4 years. Now Wisconsin has changed that law, and it is
- 5 only punishable by two years. So it would be exempt
- 6 under (b).
- 7 But Wisconsin allows that type of offender
- 8 to retain civil rights and to retain the rights to
- 9 possess a firearm. And, yet, under the government's
- 10 reading and the Seventh Circuit's reading the Federal
- 11 statute would ignore that determination by the State and
- 12 would impose the ban on that individual and require that
- individual to get on the same footing as a felon to
- 14 receive a pardon, which are generally not available to
- 15 misdemeanants but are readily available to -- to felons.
- And so you are talking about a less serious
- 17 offender having to seek extraordinary remedies under
- 18 State laws -- and this, I think, is not just unique to
- 19 the State of Wisconsin -- in order to put themselves on
- 20 the same footing as a more serious offender as
- 21 identified by that State.
- 22 And if I can reserve the rest of my time?
- 23 Thank you.
- 24 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Thank you, Mr. Coad.
- Mr. Joseffer.

1	ORAL ARGUMENT OF DARYL JOSEFFER
2	ON BEHALF OF THE RESPONDENT
3	MR. JOSEFFER: Mr. Chief Justice, and may it
4	please the Court:
5	We just have a two points. The first is
6	that restoring a right does not mean leaving it alone,
7	and the second is that the statute is not absurd. And
8	for those reasons, Petitioner's prior offenses are
9	violent felonies under the meaning of the act.
LO	The statute is clear on point. It says
L1	"restored," and restoring a right means giving back a
L2	right that has been taken away. It does not mean
L3	leaving a right alone. And though words can sometimes
L4	have different meanings in contexts, we are aware of no
L5	context in which "restore" was "leave alone."
L6	And this is certainly not such a context
L7	because the statute refers to a pardon, a set-aside, an
L8	expungement, or a restoration of rights. And the one
L9	thing that those four items all have in common is that
20	there are ways which a State essentially undoes its
21	conviction by relieving a defendant of some or all of
22	the consequences of that conviction.
23	Giving back rights that have been taken away
24	as part of the conviction has that effect. Simply
25	leaving the rights alone does not. And for that reason,

- 1 because the statute is so clear, the only question in
- 2 this case is whether the scope of the statutory
- 3 exemption is so absurd that this Court should take the
- 4 liberty to amend it in order to add an additional
- 5 exemption for defendants who never lost their civil
- 6 rights in the first place. And the Court should not
- 7 do so for numerous reasons. The first is that the
- 8 absurd results canon applies only if it is clear that
- 9 Congress could not possibly have intended the result of
- 10 the plain statutory text.
- 11 And as the Chief Justice pointed out, and
- 12 Justice Souter did as well, we know from the subsequent
- 13 enactment of the domestic violence misdemeanor provision
- 14 that this result is not something that's beyond
- 15 Congress's comprehension. Everyone agrees that Congress
- 16 did in fact mandate the supposedly alleged absurd
- 17 results in a closely analogous statute. And that's just
- 18 fatal to the absurdity argument.
- 19 JUSTICE GINSBURG: Everyone in this case.
- 20 The point might be arguable in a case that involved that
- 21 domestic violence statute.
- 22 Everyone in this case. This case doesn't
- 23 involve that other provision.
- MR. JOSEFFER: Well, that's true, but my
- 25 point is just that on the face of the domestic violence

- 1 statute, and what it says is that the restoration of
- 2 rights exception is limited to circumstances where the
- 3 law of the applicable jurisdiction provides for the loss
- 4 of civil rights. So on the face of that provision --
- 5 the provision says restoration occurs only if civil
- 6 rights have been lost. So it's clear as day that what
- 7 Congress was saying there was it was mandating the
- 8 allegedly absurd result here in situations where rights
- 9 were not lost.
- 10 And what that means is that you can't say
- 11 that it's impossible that Congress --
- 12 JUSTICE GINSBURG: There are cases in the
- 13 pipeline that don't think it's as clear as day.
- 14 MR. JOSEFFER: There is -- in the context of
- 15 subsection (33) -- in the context of the domestic
- 16 violence misdemeanor provision --
- 17 JUSTICE GINSBURG: Yes.
- 18 MR. JOSEFFER: -- there is one circuit that
- 19 has applied -- that has basically overlooked the plain
- 20 language there, not even attempted to deal with the
- 21 plain language there. And it's true, and it's found
- 22 that that exemption was somehow satisfied in a situation
- 23 where civil rights were never taken away or restored.
- 24 But the fact that, you know, a court of appeals reached
- 25 that conclusion without even attempting to take a look

- 1 at the statutory language doesn't diminish the very
- 2 plain meaning --
- JUSTICE SCALIA: What court --
- 4 MR. JOSEFFER: -- of the statutory language.
- 5 JUSTICE SCALIA: What court of appeals was
- 6 that? I didn't get that.
- 7 MR. JOSEFFER: It was the Sixth Circuit in
- 8 the Burgin case, I believe it's called. And the Sixth
- 9 Circuit there, similar to the First Circuit in
- 10 construing this statute, was very clear that it was just
- 11 skipping the language and doing what it thought Congress
- 12 would have wanted to do if it had thought about it.
- But the plain language in the domestic
- 14 violence provision is unmistakable because it expressly
- 15 refers to civil rights --
- 16 JUSTICE ALITO: If Congress thought about
- 17 the problem, what reason could they have for saying that
- 18 the firearms ban should apply to someone who never lost
- 19 his or her civil rights, but not -- but would not apply
- 20 to someone who had civil rights restored?
- 21 Automatically, let's say. Automatically and within a
- 22 short period of time. What rationale reason could there
- 23 be for doing that?
- MR. JOSEFFER: The reason is that Congress
- 25 was balancing two policies. On the one hand, what it

- 1 was looking to do in this provision was to defer to a
- 2 State's decision to essentially undo its conviction.
- 3 And that applies where rights have been taken away and
- 4 restored, but does not have anything to do with rights
- 5 being left alone.
- 6 On the other hand, and a couple of Justices
- 7 already made this point as well, Congress wanted to
- 8 apply the Federal firearms disability to serious
- 9 felonies, to felonies punishable by more than two years
- 10 of imprisonment, but if Congress had included a
- 11 retention of rights exemption, that would have all but
- 12 gutted the statutory prohibition on serious
- 13 misdemeanants possessing firearms. And that's why,
- 14 consistent with Congress's desire to get tough on
- 15 firearms and impose the firearms disability on serious
- 16 felons, it couldn't include a retention of rights
- 17 exemption.
- 18 So it's a situation where Congress had a
- 19 couple of different policies. It clearly pursued both
- 20 of them, and as a result, there is a seam, there is this
- 21 anomaly that Petitioners have pointed to, but that's an
- inevitable consequence of Congress's desire to balance
- 23 these two policies. And because that's an inevitable
- 24 and probably foreseen result of Congress's intent, it
- 25 doesn't call Congress's intent into question.

- 1 In addition, the scope of the anomalies here 2 is really quite minor. There are -- if you -- read 3 according to its plain language, there are a few States 4 in which the Petitioner -- the anomaly the Petitioner 5 points to occurs. It's currently about three States. 6 It used to be about six States. 7 On the other hand, if you take Petitioner's view, you create anomaly in a couple other States, which 8 Justice Ginsburg referred to, whereby the most serious 9 10 offenders, first-degree murderers, would not be treated 11 as having their civil rights restored. But in all of these States, the effect of 12
- the anomaly is greatly reduced by the firearms exception
 to the restoration of rights exemption because in -Petitioner's example was North Carolina, where he said
 that a more serious offender would be able to get
 firearms rights back promptly. I guess what he meant by
 "shortly" was that the offender could get them back 10
- 19 years after completing the sentence if he had not
- 20 committed further crimes.

 21 So the incidence of this issue is really not

 22 very significant. Instead, the real significance to

 23 departing from the plain statutory language would be to

 24 gut the statute as applied to misdemeanors punishable by

 25 tiers of imprisonment, which is contrary to Congress's

- 1 clearly expressed intent by including such misdemeanors
- 2 within the scope of the statute.
- 3 Petitioner has also argued at length that
- 4 what Congress was looking at here was trustworthiness.
- 5 Did the State find the defendant trustworthy to possess
- 6 firearms? But we know, and this Court explained in
- 7 Caron, that that's not what this provision goes to
- 8 because the whole point of the Federal firearms laws is
- 9 to prohibit firearms possession in some circumstances
- 10 where at least some States were permitting it.
- 11 So the fact that a State would let a person
- 12 possess firearms is not relevant here. Instead,
- 13 Congress was not deferring generally to the States'
- 14 trustworthiness views but instead was looking to defer
- 15 to their specific determination to essentially undo
- 16 their own conviction. If a State wanted to undo its own
- 17 conviction, Congress was willing to give effect to that,
- 18 but that's the only thing it was deferring to.
- 19 And it also bears emphasis that Congress --
- 20 JUSTICE ALITO: I can understand that
- 21 argument where there's an individualized determination
- 22 about each -- each defendant, but I don't quite
- 23 understand it when it's a blanket restoration of rights.
- MR. JOSEFFER: Right. That's --
- 25 JUSTICE ALITO: It's a formal difference

1	matter. There's no substance to it, is there?
2	MR. JOSEFFER: Well, there's still substance
3	to the fact that rights were, in fact, taken away and
4	were, in fact, restored, as opposed to someone having
5	his rights all the time. There's certainly a
6	substantive legal difference there, but as a practical
7	matter, I mean one reason that Congress may have decided
8	not to distinguish between automatic and individualized
9	restorations of rights is simply that it didn't want to
10	attempt to micromanage the States in how they would go
11	about choosing to do a pardon or a restoration of
12	rights. I mean and with respect to restoration or
13	rights. Louisiana automatically pardons most first-time
14	offenders. As this Court explained in Dickerson, of the
15	States that expunge convictions, many of them do it
16	automatically as well. And so Congress from because
17	of what it was doing here was advocating Dickerson, was
18	presumably aware of these points this Court had made in
19	Dickerson regarding the great variance in the laws and
20	the fact some of it was automatic.
21	CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Louisiana
22	automatically pardons all first-time offenders?
23	MR. JOSEFFER: Most.

CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Most?

MR. JOSEFFER: Most, and --

24

Τ.	JUSTICE SCALIA: NOT MUTGETETS, I assume?
2	MR. JOSEFFER: I don't I think that they
3	are not automatically pardoned.
4	JUSTICE SCALIA: No, that's
5	MR. JOSEFFER: In fact, this practice is
6	enshrined in the Louisiana Constitution.
7	But in any event, I think the point is just
8	that Congress was going to defer to the States' decision
9	to effectively undo their convictions, but was not going
LO	to micromanage how the States did it. But the most that
L1	one might determine from that point of view is that if
L2	you think that Congress was really thinking about an
L3	individualized determination, then what that would mean
L4	is that some offenders who get automatic restorations
L5	are currently essentially catching a break from the fact
L6	that they got an automatic one. But the fact that the
L7	plain language of the statute may give someone of the
L8	offenders a break is no reason to depart from the plain
L9	language of the statute, to give other offenders a break
20	that Congress clearly did not intend.
21	And, Justice Scalia, you asked about what's
22	a typical restoration process. At the time the statute
23	was enacted in 1986, of the States that did
24	restorations, about half of them did it automatically
25	and about half of them required individualized

- 1 consideration before returning at least one of the
- 2 rights.
- JUSTICE KENNEDY: And in the automatic
- 4 category, I take it, it's usually after the sentence has
- 5 been served?
- 6 MR. JOSEFFER: There's some variance. In
- 7 fact, the 50 States follow 49 different approaches to
- 8 revoking and restoring civil rights. So there's an
- 9 exception to just about anything in this area, which
- 10 again underscores why anomalies are inevitable, and
- 11 therefore don't really call Congress's intention into
- 12 question.
- 13 But the standard practice is that after a
- 14 defendant has finished serving his sentence, and that
- 15 would include not just maybe one day in jail but also
- 16 the probationary period following that -- but after the
- 17 defendant has finished serving his sentence, if
- 18 restoration is automatic, it will either be at the
- 19 conclusion of the sentence or at some time period
- 20 thereafter, which in some instances can be significantly
- 21 thereafter.
- JUSTICE STEVENS: At any time in
- 23 consideration of these statutes did Congress consider,
- 24 to your knowledge, perhaps making the test be the length
- 25 of the actual sentence served rather than eligibility

- 1 for -- it seems to me one normal way of differentiating
- 2 between those who are most trustworthy and those less
- 3 trustworthy would be by looking at the actual sentence
- 4 served.
- 5 MR. JOSEFFER: I think that's true. I quess
- 6 there are two parts to that. One is that, I mean, the
- 7 provisions at issue here about the length of sentence
- 8 served, were in the statute before this amendment was
- 9 made. They were in the statute before 1986. So they're
- 10 not directly relevant to the intent of the '86 Congress.
- 11 But I'm not aware of -- I mean, of legislative history
- 12 predating 1986 in which Congress looked at the length as
- 13 opposed to the maximum term. And also, one thing that
- 14 reflects is that what Congress was not doing here was
- 15 just looking to defer to the States' trustworthiness
- 16 determinations as this Court explained in Caron. The
- 17 whole point of this law was to get tougher on gun crime
- 18 than many of the States were at the time.
- 19 If the Court has no further questions?
- 20 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Thank you,
- 21 Mr. Joseffer.
- 22 Mr. Coad, you have three minutes remaining.
- 23 REBUTTAL ARGUMENT OF RICHARD A. COAD
- 24 ON BEHALF OF PETITIONER
- MR. COAD: Thank you, Your Honor.

1	First I would like to respond to my
2	colleague's last point. He speculates that about
3	legislate history and I think actually it is the exact
4	exact opposite. Congress enacted a Firearm Owners
5	Protection Act to broaden exemptions to the gun control
6	act. There's no question about that, and it did so in a
7	way that would respect State law decisions about who
8	should be eligible for exemptions.
9	And secondly, I was asked about by the
10	Court about substantive difference between automatic
11	restoration of rights versus a State automatically
12	allowing an individual to retain rights. In many
13	instances there's no passage of time. There are no
14	additional conditions that an offender must meet in
15	order to get that restoration. It is just as automatic
16	as not having them taken away in the first instance.
17	And I think my last point to the Court: If
18	the meaning of restored in (a)(20) is so clear, as the
19	Government says it is, then I don't know why Congress
20	would need to have added language to (a)(33) to clarify
21	that they were limiting that concept to only rights that
22	were taken away and restored.
23	Thank you.
24	CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Thank you, Mr. Coad.

The case is submitted.

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