| 1 | IN THE SUPREME COURT OF THE UNITED STATES | |
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| 3 | SAMUEL JAMES JOHNSON, : | |
| 4 | Petitioner : | |
| 5 | v. : No. 13-7120 | |
| 6 | UNITED STATES. : | |
| 7 | x | |
| 8 | Washington, D.C. | |
| 9 | Wednesday, November 5, 2014 | |
| 10 | | |
| 11 | The above-entitled matter came on for oral | |
| 12 | argument before the Supreme Court of the United Stat | es |
| 13 | at 11:04 a.m. | |
| 14 | APPEARANCES: | |
| 15 | KATHERINE M. MENENDEZ, ESQ., Assistant Federal Defen | der |
| 16 | Minneapolis, Minn.; on behalf of Petitioner. | |
| 17 | JOHN F. BASH, ESQ., Assistant to the Solicitor Gener | al, |
| 18 | Department of Justice, Washington, D.C.; on behalf | of |
| 19 | Respondent. | |
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| 1 | CONTENTS | |
|----|-----------------------------|------|
| 2 | ORAL ARGUMENT OF | PAGE |
| 3 | KATHERINE M. MENENDEZ, ESQ. | |
| 4 | On behalf of the Petitioner | 3 |
| 5 | ORAL ARGUMENT OF | |
| 6 | JOHN F. BASH, ESQ. | |
| 7 | On behalf of the Respondent | 26 |
| 8 | REBUTTAL ARGUMENT OF | |
| 9 | KATHERINE M. MENENDEZ, ESQ. | |
| 10 | On behalf of the Petitioner | 50 |
| 11 | | |
| 12 | | |
| 13 | | |
| 14 | | |
| 15 | | |
| 16 | | |
| 17 | | |
| 18 | | |
| 19 | | |
| 20 | | |
| 21 | | |
| 22 | | |
| 23 | | |
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| 25 | | |

| 1 | PROCEEDINGS |
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| 2 | (11:04 a.m.) |
| 3 | CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: We will hear |
| 4 | argument next in Case 13-7120, Samuel Johnson v. United |
| 5 | States. |
| 6 | Ms. Menendez. |
| 7 | ORAL ARGUMENT OF KATHERINE M. MENENDEZ |
| 8 | ON BEHALF OF THE PETITIONER |
| 9 | MS. MENENDEZ: Mr. Chief Justice, and may it |
| 10 | please the Court: |
| 11 | Mere possession of a short-barreled shotgun |
| 12 | is not a violent felony within the definition of the |
| 13 | Armed Career Criminal Act's residual clause because it |
| 14 | is neither similar in the degree of risk nor similar in |
| 15 | kind to the enumerated offenses set forth in the |
| 16 | language that immediately precedes that clause. And |
| 17 | this Court has repeatedly held that those enumerated |
| 18 | offenses provide important both qualitative and |
| 19 | quantitative parameters to lower courts in examining |
| 20 | whether a particular predicate offense counts as a |
| 21 | violent felony. |
| 22 | Just 6 years ago in Begay, this Court made |
| 23 | clear that the enumerated offenses must be similar |
| 24 | I'm sorry, a question predicate offense must be similar |
| 25 | in kind to one of the enumerated offenses as well as |

| 1 | similar | in | dearee | of | risk. | And | when | t.hat. | proper |
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- 2 framework is applied to the question of mere possession
- 3 of a short-barreled shotgun, it satisfies neither test.
- 4 JUSTICE GINSBURG: Should the Court --
- 5 should the Court take into account that in the
- 6 sentencing guidelines a possession of a short-barreled
- 7 shotgun is ranked under career, is under the career
- 8 offenses?
- 9 MS. MENENDEZ: Your Honor, in Guideline
- 10 Amendment 674 in 2004, which Your Honor asks about, the
- 11 Sentencing Commission included mere possession of an
- 12 unregistered short-barreled shotgun or possession of a
- 13 short-barreled shotgun as a crime of violence. But it
- 14 did not do so after an examination of the empirical data
- or an assessment of the pool of data that gives us great
- 16 confidence in the Sentencing Commission's decisions.
- 17 In marked contrast, Your Honor, in 1991,
- 18 when the Sentencing Commission adopted Amendment 433
- 19 that concluded that being a felon in possession of a
- 20 firearm should not count as a crime of violence under
- 21 the guidelines, it reached that conclusion after an
- 22 extensive examination of empirical data. The difference
- 23 between the adoption of those two amendments highlights
- 24 the reason that the Sentencing Commission's decision on
- 25 this point does not deserve deference in this case.

| 1 | An additional consideration, Your Honor, is |
|----|--|
| 2 | that in making that decision in 2004, the Sentencing |
| 3 | Commission was not anticipating the guidance that this |
| 4 | Court provided in James, Begay, Chambers, and Sykes, and |
| 5 | it doesn't engage in any of the proper analysis. So |
| 6 | whether we look at it as the Sentencing Commission not |
| 7 | serving their traditional role as factfinders and the |
| 8 | keepers of empirical data or whether we acknowledge the |
| 9 | fact that it preceded very important guidance from this |
| 10 | Court, I don't think it controls this Court's decision. |
| 11 | JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: Is it |
| 12 | JUSTICE ALITO: Is it possible |
| 13 | JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: I'm sorry. |
| 14 | JUSTICE ALITO: Is it possible for any |
| 15 | possession offense to qualify as a violent felony? |
| 16 | MS. MENENDEZ: Your Honor, I believe it |
| 17 | would be possible for a very rare possession offense to |
| 18 | qualify as a violent felony if the possession alone |
| 19 | presents a serious potential risk of injury. |
| 20 | Respectfully, I believe the flaw with the other side's |
| 21 | position in this case is their entire analysis is based |
| 22 | not on the risk inherent in the mere possession, but on |
| 23 | the risk inherent in committing a further violent crime |
| 24 | with that weapon. And so I believe that any mere |
| 25 | possession of a firearm, including a short-barreled |

- 1 firearm, is not going to satisfy the definition.
- 2 JUSTICE KAGAN: But if I understand the
- 3 government's argument, it's that there's a very strong
- 4 correlation between possession in this case and use for
- 5 criminal purposes of a kind that clearly would pose a
- 6 risk of -- of violent conduct and injury. So are you
- 7 saying that we never can take that kind of correlation
- 8 into account, that possession crimes just have to be
- 9 treated in a box, and we can't think about whether the
- 10 possession of something increases the risk of use which
- 11 then will pose a serious risk of injury?
- MS. MENENDEZ: Your -- Your Honor, my
- 13 response is twofold. First, although the government has
- 14 asserted that correlation, they have not substantiated
- 15 it in any way. And there's no data before the Court
- 16 that supports the claim that merely possessing a
- 17 short-barreled shotgun is somehow connected with
- 18 frequent or even regular use.
- 19 JUSTICE KAGAN: So -- so that seems right,
- 20 that it's a question to pose to the government. It's
- 21 like, what's in back of this correlation? But is your
- 22 argument, then, they haven't made their empirical case
- 23 or even if they had lots of statistics, it still
- 24 wouldn't be enough?
- MS. MENENDEZ: And that is correct, Your

- 1 Honor. I think even if they had made the empirical
- 2 case, it wouldn't be enough. And here's why.
- 3 JUSTICE SCALIA: is there any other
- 4 use for a short-barreled shotgun?
- 5 MS. MENENDEZ: Your Honor, as many as 40,000
- 6 Americans have purchased these weapons legally,
- 7 registered them lawfully and have found that they serve
- 8 some purpose. Whether that purpose is in hunting for a
- 9 person of a smaller stature or home defense, the
- 10 question before the Court is not whether there is some
- 11 reason to have them. Many people believe there is. The
- 12 question is whether merely possessing such a weapon is a
- 13 violent felony. And with due respect, Your Honor, I
- 14 don't think there's any support for the assertion that
- 15 these are somehow uniquely more dangerous.
- 16 JUSTICE SCALIA: People have purchased this
- 17 even though it's criminal to possess it?
- 18 MS. MENENDEZ: It is not, Your Honor. In
- 19 fact, it's fully lawful to possess a short-barreled
- 20 shotgun in many States as long as it's registered
- 21 federally, somebody passes a background check, and pays
- 22 a \$200 tax. And the government's own statistics
- 23 document, Your Honor, that as many as tens of thousands
- 24 of Americans have followed those processes in order to
- 25 legally purchase or own one of these weapons. And, in

- 1 fact, I was surprised in doing the research for this
- 2 case that you can get these on line in States where
- 3 their possession is legal as long as you comply with the
- 4 Federal regulations.
- 5 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: How many States is it
- 6 illegal, do you remember?
- 7 MS. MENENDEZ: Your Honor, I believe there's
- 8 10 States that outright ban possession regardless of
- 9 compliance with Federal regulations. And then in the
- 10 remainder of the States, the question is whether, if its
- 11 possession is legal in compliance with either State
- 12 registrations or always in compliance with the Federal
- 13 registrations.
- 14 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: Just a factual question.
- On his plea for this possession, was he charged with
- 16 another crime?
- 17 MS. MENENDEZ: Yes, he was, Your Honor. He
- 18 was charged with a -- a marijuana-related crime. And
- 19 both of those were pleaded guilty to with Alford pleas,
- 20 Your Honor.
- 21 Your Honor, I think the question is how much
- 22 speculation is permitted. And as Your Honor correctly
- 23 points out, it is our position that even if the
- 24 government brought forth better data, that still
- 25 wouldn't justify allowing mere possession to count as a

- 1 crime of violence. The reason, I think, is inherent in
- 2 this Court's jurisprudence from James, Begay, and the
- 3 other cases. We have to begin this with a consideration
- 4 of the elements. In fact, in the James case --
- 5 JUSTICE ALITO: But you said that a
- 6 possession offense could qualify. So if someone
- 7 possesses a nuclear bomb, that could qualify?
- 8 MS. MENENDEZ: Your Honor, I think that
- 9 might be --
- 10 JUSTICE ALITO: A biological or chemical
- 11 weapon, that could qualify?
- MS. MENENDEZ: And I think that is the
- 13 precise thing that could qualify. And here is why, with
- 14 due respect, Your Honor. Possessing a biological or a
- 15 chemical agent, by itself, presents a substantial risk,
- 16 just alone, even if it's under your bed.
- 17 JUSTICE ALITO: Well, how do we know that?
- 18 You -- you could make the same argument that you've just
- 19 made, that we don't know what the -- the risk is that
- 20 this will, in the case of a biological weapon, the risk
- 21 that it will cause an infection unintentionally. We
- 22 don't know that. That statistic is no more available
- 23 than the statistic on sawed-off shotguns, is it?
- 24 MS. MENENDEZ: Your Honor, I suspect that we
- 25 would be better able to document the certainty that even

- 1 doing nothing more than possessing such an item --
- 2 JUSTICE ALITO: How would you do that?
- 3 You'd look at all the -- you try to -- to identify the
- 4 universe of people who have possessed biological weapons
- 5 and see how many times somebody has gotten infected
- 6 unintentionally?
- 7 MS. MENENDEZ: Your Honor, that -- that
- 8 might be appropriate, or perhaps the science alone. But
- 9 that demonstrates the difference with this. This is no
- 10 more dangerous than any other firearm if it's kept in a
- 11 locked gun safe, kept in a closet, kept under a
- 12 mattress, under a bed or any of the other myriad places.
- 13 We've highlighted for the Court 14 different cases on
- 14 page 14 of our reply brief where such a weapon was found
- in completely nonviolent circumstances, somewhere in a
- 16 home or even in a trunk, in a locked gun safe.
- 17 JUSTICE ALITO: So you would say the same
- 18 thing about any weapon.
- 19 MS. MENENDEZ: Any firearm for certain, Your
- Honor.
- 21 JUSTICE ALITO: Any firearm? Mortars?
- MS. MENENDEZ: I'm sorry?
- 23 JUSTICE ALITO: Mortars? Artillery pieces?
- 24 MS. MENENDEZ: Your Honor, I think mere
- 25 possession does not pose the kind of substantial risk

- 1 that this statute is talking about. I think that when
- 2 we get into the very, I'm sure, hypothetical instance of
- 3 the bomb that's inherently dangerous, like a biological
- 4 agent, that might be different even untouched, Your
- 5 Honor.
- 6 JUSTICE ALITO: Rockets would not be --
- 7 illegal possession of a rocket, that wouldn't be a
- 8 violent felony in your submission. Maybe that's right.
- 9 MS. MENENDEZ: I believe that's correct,
- 10 Your Honor.
- 11 JUSTICE ALITO: That's correct.
- MS. MENENDEZ: I believe that using a rocket
- in a crime of violence or in any other circumstance
- 14 would be. And, in fact, Your Honor, I think that in
- 15 many of these cases, for instance possession of a
- 16 biological agent or a nuclear weapon, the person would
- 17 likely be charged with some sort of terrorism offense,
- 18 which would, by itself, trigger the Armed Career
- 19 Criminal Act if they were free to go on and commit
- 20 future crimes, which I -- I somewhat doubt.
- In this case, though, I think there's
- 22 nothing different about mere possession of a
- 23 short-barreled shotgun as compared to other firearms
- that could be simply possessed. They are simply not
- enough.

| 1 | Your Honors, this Court's jurisprudence |
|----|--|
| 2 | clearly requires a categorical assessment of the |
| 3 | question, not an imagining of what further crimes could |
| 4 | ever happen as a result of the offense, but a looking at |
| 5 | what comes from the elements itself. I'd encourage the |
| 6 | Court to remember its decision in James. In James, the |
| 7 | Court first examined the elements of the burglary, the |
| 8 | attempted burglary statute in question, and noted that |
| 9 | mere possession of burglary tools was not enough to |
| 10 | constitute a violation of that attempted burglary |
| 11 | statute. And in part, because an overt act toward |
| 12 | entry, which presented the same sort of risk as the |
| 13 | burglary itself was present, the Court found that that |
| 14 | could present a risk sufficient to trigger the residual |
| 15 | clause. |
| 16 | This is work different This is much more |

- This is very different. This is much more
 like mere possession of the burglary tools, which would
 not be enough, than it is completing an additional overt
 act.
- Your Honor, the government uses the Court's

 language of ordinary case to invite this Court to engage

 in substantial speculation about someone -- what someone

 might do with a short-barreled shotgun. And with due

 respect, I don't believe that was the purpose of the

 ordinary case doctrine whatsoever. In fact, in James,

- 1 the ordinary case doctrine was borne not to enable
- 2 rampant and creative speculation, but to limit rampant
- 3 and creative speculation.
- 4 JUSTICE BREYER: But what you have -- what
- 5 were the numbers, if they're there, about how many
- 6 people are injured as a result of possession of a
- 7 short-barreled shotgun?
- 8 MS. MENENDEZ: There are no statistics.
- 9 JUSTICE BREYER: So we have absolutely no
- 10 idea?
- 11 MS. MENENDEZ: We have -- we have no
- 12 statistics that demonstrate, Your Honor, a correlation
- 13 between mere possession of a short-barreled shotgun
- 14 and --
- 15 JUSTICE BREYER: That's not what I'm
- 16 thinking of. I'm thinking of do we have a statistic
- 17 that says how many people are injured, forgetting how --
- 18 whether it's possession or not possession or anything
- 19 else?
- 20 MS. MENENDEZ: We don't have that, either,
- 21 Your Honor. We do have statistics offered both in our
- 22 brief and some reference in opposing counsel's brief
- 23 about how short-barreled shotguns are at most a de
- 24 minimis, de minimis percentage of harm from weapons in
- 25 general across the country, but that doesn't answer Your

- 1 Honor's question. And Your Honor, I think that that is
- 2 precisely why the Begay formulation remains very
- 3 important in this case.
- 4 This case, unlike Sykes, which had an ample
- 5 amount of data, although I think we could discuss at
- 6 length how useful that data is and how much data can be
- 7 manipulated, but there was a great deal of data
- 8 documenting deaths and injuries. And therefore, this
- 9 Court found that the examination of the nature of the
- 10 offense and whether it was purposeful, violent or
- 11 aggressive was redundant. That's not the case here,
- 12 Your Honor, because we don't have the statistical
- 13 analysis to make the risk assessment easy.
- I do think, though, that common sense weighs
- 15 heavily in favor of Mr. Johnson. And that is, as Your
- 16 Honor indicated in the Doe opinion many years ago on the
- 17 First Circuit, that merely possessing something is a
- 18 very far cry from using it in a crime. And the
- 19 government's entire analysis requires this Court to
- 20 assume that these weapons are most commonly possessed
- 21 only for the purpose of being used in a crime. That's
- 22 simply not supported by the data, and it's not even
- 23 supported by the case law provided by the government.
- 24 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: I'm sorry. Do we know
- 25 how many possession crimes have been prosecuted,

- 1 possession for short-barreled shotguns?
- 2 MS. MENENDEZ: I don't have that statistic,
- 3 I apologize, Your Honor. I can say that, having been an
- 4 assistant Federal defender for quite a long time, we
- 5 don't see these very commonly, but we do see people
- 6 prosecuted for possessing a short-barreled shotgun
- 7 that's not federally registered. It's not an incredibly
- 8 frequent crime.
- 9 However, this has greater implications,
- 10 obviously, Your Honor, because approximately 600 people
- 11 every year suffer the greater penalties of the Armed
- 12 Career Criminal Act as a result of enhancements such as
- 13 this.
- 14 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: That's what I mean.
- 15 It's about 600 a year?
- 16 MS. MENENDEZ: 600 ACCA cases each year,
- 17 more or less, Your Honor.
- 18 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: More or less. So we're
- 19 talking about 35,000 people or 40,000 who own the
- 20 shotguns legally.
- 21 MS. MENENDEZ: Oh, I apologize, Your Honor.
- 22 I -- I provided Your Honor an incorrect statistic. I'm
- 23 talking about people whose current conviction is for
- 24 felon in possession, triggering the Armed Career
- 25 Criminal Act.

| 1 | JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: I see what you mean. |
|----|--|
| 2 | MS. MENENDEZ: I apologize. I I do not |
| 3 | know how many people nationwide are prosecuted for |
| 4 | violation of one of the several States that outright |
| 5 | bans these or for violating some other portion. I do |
| 6 | know that they're not very common in the State of |
| 7 | Minnesota, which is where our statute arises. |
| 8 | Your Honors, it's also important to keep in |
| 9 | mind that in Minnesota as well as almost every place |
| 10 | else that this is criminalized or criminalized if not |
| 11 | properly registered, that constructive possession of the |
| 12 | weapon alone is enough to make somebody guilty. This |
| 13 | doesn't have to be on or near their person. It |
| 14 | certainly need not be used in a crime or possessed with |
| 15 | the intent to use it in a future crime. And, in fact, |
| 16 | some of the cases that we've proffered to the Court |
| 17 | involve possessing this in nothing more than a locked |
| 18 | gun case. That is simply not the sort of active, |
| 19 | purposeful, violent and aggressive or risky conduct that |
| 20 | the Armed Career Criminal Act's residual clause is |
| 21 | designed to apply to. |
| 22 | JUSTICE KAGAN: When you say "constructive |
| 23 | possession," what does that mean? |
| 24 | MS. MENENDEZ: That means where you don't |
| 25 | have an item directly on your person, Your Honor, but |

- 1 you have the intent, at least in the Eighth Circuit,
- 2 it's the intent to exercise dominion and control and the
- 3 power to do so. So, for instance, I have constructive
- 4 possession of the items in my briefcase, even though I
- 5 don't have them with me and I have constructive
- 6 possession of items in my home, even though that's back
- 7 in Minnesota. And so that demonstrates, Your Honor, the
- 8 broad application of mere possession crimes and how far
- 9 removed they can be from the parade of horribles, with
- 10 due respect, that the government suggests these are
- 11 inherently intrinsically tied to.
- 12 Your Honor, I'd also invite the Court to
- 13 examine closely the cases cited by opposing counsel in
- 14 their brief, because while they do cite 16 cases in
- 15 their brief in which mere -- I'm sorry, in which
- 16 short-barreled shotguns were used in violent crimes,
- 17 it's important for the Court to note that in only two of
- 18 those cases was there actually a conviction for a
- 19 weapons offense or mere possession of a weapon. So in
- 20 only two of those cases was the prior offense actually
- 21 before the Court today even being considered.
- In the other 14, and indeed also in those
- 23 two, the person was convicted of the far more serious
- 24 crime of violence that the weapon was used during,
- 25 ranging from assault to capital murder. And as Justice

- 1 Gruender, in his dissent in the Vincent case in the
- 2 Eighth Circuit made very clear, in such a case, that
- 3 much more serious offense would readily trigger
- 4 application of the Armed Career Criminal Act and we
- 5 wouldn't need to resort to the overinclusive
- 6 interpretation proffered by the Government.
- 7 JUSTICE ALITO: What are -- what do you
- 8 think is the basis for a State legislature's prohibiting
- 9 the possession of a short-barreled shotgun or a
- 10 short-barreled shotgun that is not properly registered?
- 11 MS. MENENDEZ: Your Honor, I can't say what
- 12 all the State legislatures' bases were, although I would
- 13 note that Michigan just last year changed its mind and
- 14 made these lawful. But I think that many State
- 15 legislatures, and indeed Congress in 1934 when it
- 16 decided to regulate these weapons, were persuaded by at
- 17 least the reputation of this qun, that it was associated
- 18 with gangster activity in the Prohibition era.
- 19 With due respect, although I am not at all
- 20 disagreeing that States are within their rights to ban
- 21 possession of this weapon, that reputation is somewhat
- 22 dated, and in fact today, you can get far more lethal
- 23 and far more intimidating weapons without even
- 24 triggering the application.
- 25 JUSTICE ALITO: Well, do you think that

- 1 those State legislatures came to the conclusion that
- 2 there was a strong correlation between the possession of
- 3 a short-barreled shotgun and the use of that weapon in
- 4 committing crimes?
- 5 MS. MENENDEZ: I think they may have come to
- 6 that conclusion. I'm unaware of them doing so based on
- 7 data, Your Honor, including the Minnesota Act. I am
- 8 unaware of even the National Firearms Act, when it was
- 9 adopted in 1934, relying on actual statistics about the
- 10 danger presented by this weapon --
- 11 JUSTICE ALITO: Do you think Congress --
- MS. MENENDEZ:: -- as opposed to --
- 13 JUSTICE ALITO: -- had statistics before it
- 14 when it listed the specifically enumerated offenses in
- 15 the Armed Career Criminal Act? Is this the sort of
- 16 thing with respect to which it is reasonable to expect
- 17 that there will be empirical evidence, or is this the
- 18 sort of thing, the sort of decision that legislatures
- 19 make based in -- on an impressionistic way and taking
- 20 into account common sense?
- 21 MS. MENENDEZ: Your Honor, I don't know
- 22 whether Congress, when it passed the residual clause,
- 23 assumed that we would come to such statistical analysis
- 24 of the --
- JUSTICE ALITO: Well, when they said

- 1 burglary is a violent offense, do you think they had
- 2 statistics about the percentage of all burglar -- of all
- 3 burglaries that occur within the United States that
- 4 result in violence?
- 5 MS. MENENDEZ: I don't believe so, Your
- 6 Honor. I think burglary motivated the Armed Career
- 7 Criminal Act in the first place. Burglary and robbery
- 8 seem to be the two -- the two predicate offenses that
- 9 most specifically the court -- I mean, I'm sorry,
- 10 Congress intended to include as triggering prior
- 11 offenses. Why? I think it's because they had the
- 12 belief that an armed burglar would be more dangerous
- than an unarmed burglar and wanted to capture people who
- 14 were repeat and persistent property offenders who would
- 15 then later possess a gun.
- 16 JUSTICE ALITO: Well, if that is a
- 17 reasonable conclusion for the national legislature to
- 18 reach in enacting the Armed Career Criminal Act, why is
- 19 it not equally defensible for a State legislature to
- 20 make the same decision with respect to the illegal
- 21 possession of a sawed-off shotgun?
- MS. MENENDEZ: It's absolutely appropriate
- 23 for them to make that decision. That should not control
- this Court's decision about whether merely possessing
- 25 that unlawful weapon is a violent felony. That decision

- 1 has to be governed by the residual clause language, and
- 2 it doesn't satisfy --
- 3 JUSTICE ALITO: Do you think that that
- 4 judgment on the part of legislature is entitled to any
- 5 respect from this Court?
- 6 MS. MENENDEZ: Your Honor, certainly it
- 7 matters that some legislatures have chosen to ban it,
- 8 but I think it matters even more that most legislatures
- 9 and the United States Congress do not outlaw this
- 10 weapon. They permit it to be possessed when lawfully
- 11 registered. And even in 19 --
- 12 JUSTICE ALITO: Well, that's what I'm
- 13 talking about, the cases where it is possessed
- 14 illegally, either because it is flatly banned or that it
- is possessed by somebody who will not register it for
- 16 whatever reason, very possibly because that person
- 17 doesn't want it known that he or she possesses the
- 18 weapon.
- 19 MS. MENENDEZ: Certainly, Your Honor. Or
- 20 because they're unaware of the registration requirement,
- 21 which in almost every State will nonetheless make it a
- 22 criminal conduct, or because they're unaware of the
- 23 characteristics of the weapon that require it to be
- 24 registered, which in some States doesn't protect one
- 25 from the conviction.

1 Your Honor, I think it's important, if we're 2 using the opinion of legislatures and Congress to help us determine whether this is a violent felony, it's 3 4 important to recognize that it is widely legal. 5 But you are right that the question before 6 the Court is the unlawful possession and whether 7 unlawful possession of a firearm is a violent felony. JUSTICE BREYER: What should we do if we 8 9 think that the reason that the legislature has made 10 possession unlawful is because the legislature believes 11 that possession will lead to a risk of physical injury? 12 Your Honor, I don't think MS. MENENDEZ: 13 that answers the question. I think the question has to 14 be grounded in the residual clause, and the residual 15 clause requires not just the possibility of future 16 injury, but that the offense itself, when examined categorically and based on its element, creates a 17 18 substantial --19 Well, it says -- it says if JUSTICE BREYER: 20 I use those words, I could repeat the same question and 21 say the reason that the legislature makes it unlawful to 22 possess a sawed-off shotgun is because the legislature 23 believes that the possession, that's the crime, presents 24 a serious potential risk of physical injury to another. 25

That's why they made it unlawful. What other reason

- 1 could there have been? And therefore, their judgment is
- 2 the same words that the statute uses, but for the word
- 3 otherwise.
- 4 MS. MENENDEZ: Your Honor, I -- I -- I don't
- 5 think there's any suggestion that either the Minnesota
- 6 legislature or the other minority legislatures that have
- 7 reached that conclusion did so based on an understanding --
- 8 JUSTICE BREYER: What other reason would
- 9 they have had for making possession unlawful?
- 10 MS. MENENDEZ: Because I think there's a
- 11 strong belief that firearms in general are unlawful,
- 12 that certain types of fire are -- are dangerous, that
- 13 certain types of firearms are more dangerous than
- 14 others, and that's appropriate. We aren't saying these
- 15 should be legal. We aren't saying these are --
- 16 JUSTICE BREYER: No, I'm just saying what
- 17 other reason could they have had for making this a
- 18 crime, the possession --
- 19 MS. MENENDEZ: Perhaps --
- 20 JUSTICE BREYER: -- unless they thought that
- 21 possession presents a serious potential risk of physical
- 22 injury to another? I'm not suggesting an answer. I
- 23 want to know what your answer is.
- 24 MS. MENENDEZ: Perhaps they were, in fact,
- 25 adopting a different standard which is: We, as the

- 1 Minnesota legislature, hypothetically, are going to ban
- 2 this weapon because we believe that it is somewhat more
- 3 dangerous than other weapons, and we would prefer it is
- 4 not possessed. I don't think we can assume that they
- 5 went this far, and this is the question the Court has to
- 6 answer.
- 7 Also, Your Honor, the Michigan legislature,
- 8 for instance, obviously disagreed when they recently
- 9 changed their law to no longer prohibit mere possession
- 10 of a short-barreled shotgun.
- I do think it is a recognition, Your Honor,
- 12 that legislatures think these are dangerous weapons, and
- 13 they are dangerous weapons, but that does not make their
- 14 mere possession violative of the residual clause of the
- 15 Armed Career Criminal Act. I think it's very important
- 16 in every case that we tie the examination not to a
- 17 possible thing that could be done with the gun in the
- 18 future, but to the actual risk presented by mere
- 19 possession. In the same way that in the James case the
- 20 Court was motivated by the fact that something more than
- 21 mere possession of burglary tools was required, here
- 22 something more than mere possession of the weapon should
- 23 be required.
- We would be having a much different
- 25 conversation if we were talking about a different part

- 1 of Section 924 of Title 18, 924(c), which penalizes
- 2 using a weapon, even a short-barreled shotgun, during a
- 3 crime of violence. That could certainly be a violent
- 4 felony. But the mere possession --
- 5 JUSTICE GINSBURG: You pointed out in your
- 6 brief that explosives -- one of the enumerated crimes is
- 7 use of explosives, but is no -- anywhere a crime of
- 8 possession.
- 9 MS. MENENDEZ: That's correct, Your Honor,
- 10 and I'm glad you reminded me because that was an
- important point for me to make, is that when we look at
- 12 these enumerated offenses as providing guidance for the
- 13 residual clause, it is very important that Congress
- 14 adopted use of explosives rather than possession. And
- in fact, in the legislative history, in 1986, they gave
- 16 examples of the sorts of things they believed would be
- 17 included by that provision, and it was not mere
- 18 possession of explosives.
- 19 JUSTICE ALITO: Has any legislature
- 20 prohibited the possession of explosives?
- 21 MS. MENENDEZ: I am sure that some have,
- 22 using certain language.
- 23 JUSTICE ALITO: They just flatly prohibited,
- 24 within our State, you cannot possess any explosives.
- 25 Has any legislature done that?

- 1 MS. MENENDEZ: I'm not aware of that, Your
- 2 Honor. I apologize, I don't know. I'm sure --
- 3 JUSTICE ALITO: Well, do you think it's a
- 4 possibility that there are States in which explosives
- 5 cannot be used for demolition purposes?
- 6 MS. MENENDEZ: No, I don't think that's
- 7 likely, Your Honor. But nonetheless, Your Honor, when
- 8 Congress was adopting this language, they chose to put
- 9 "use of" prior to the term "explosives." If they wanted
- 10 it to be more inclusive, they could have certainly made
- 11 it more inclusive. They did not. In fact, the examples
- 12 given were the use of explosives to destroy energy
- 13 facilities or transportation facilities.
- I see that I -- will reserve the rest of my
- 15 time for rebuttal, if I might. Thank you, Your Honors.
- 16 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Thank you, counsel.
- Mr. Bash.
- 18 ORAL ARGUMENT BY JOHN F. BASH
- 19 ON BEHALF OF UNITED STATES
- 20 MR. BASH: Mr. Chief Justice, and may it
- 21 please the Court:
- The ordinary case of possession of a
- 23 sawed-off shotgun is possession in connection with
- 24 serious criminal activity. That is the judgment that
- 25 Congress, State legislatures, this Court in Miller and

- 1 Heller, and lower courts have reached for 8 decades.
- 2 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: If that's the case, how
- 3 many charges do you have that are for mere possession,
- 4 not involved with an underlying crime?
- 5 MR. BASH: Most of these charges are brought
- 6 at the State level, so I don't have sort of the
- 7 comprehensive statistics. But what I will point out is
- 8 that Petitioner has now had two briefs to come forward
- 9 with examples of law-abiding citizens just kind of
- 10 caught up in this sawed-off shotgun regime.
- 11 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: She raises 14 cases in
- 12 her reply brief.
- 13 MR. BASH: If you look at all of those
- 14 cases, Your Honor, the vast majority of them, both cited
- in the opening brief and in the reply brief, involved
- 16 people involved in other very serious criminal activity,
- 17 meth dealing, sexual abuse, assaults. So those cases
- 18 only verify what I think has been this Court's judgment
- in Heller and Miller, Congress's judgment, the judgment
- 20 of State legislatures for a long time, that these are
- 21 exclusively used for unlawful purposes.
- JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: So why haven't they been
- 23 outlawed federally and why is it only a minority of
- 24 States that have outlawed their -- just their
- 25 possession, not their registration?

| 1 | MR. | BASH: | Because | Ι | think | what | the | National |
|---|-----|-------|---------|---|-------|------|-----|----------|
| | | | | | | | | |

- 2 Firearm Act reflects, and this was reflected in Attorney
- 3 General Cummings' arguments in favor of the law when it
- 4 was under consideration, is that if you're willing to
- 5 disclose your fingerprints and photograph to the Federal
- 6 Government and undergo a background check -- that's only
- 7 by regulation, but undergo a background check, it
- 8 dissipates the chance that you're going to be involved
- 9 in crimes.
- 10 Gang members, terrorists, and bank robbers
- 11 do not go around disclosing their fingerprints and
- 12 photograph to the government. So there are some
- 13 atypical gun collections who build collection of, I
- 14 think, rare firearms, and those are the sorts of
- 15 applications the ATF sees.
- But I just want to emphasize the point
- 17 about, sort of, how many of these things are lawfully
- 18 registered. We made a good faith attempt at an estimate
- in our brief, and it's 140,000 lawfully registered ever.
- 20 It appears that the vast majority of those are to law
- 21 enforcement agencies or to the manufacturers themselves.
- Just by way of comparison, the Congressional
- 23 Research Service put out a gun control analysis in 2012
- that estimated that there are currently 82 million
- 25 shotguns of all varieties, either in private hands or

- 1 available for purchase by private citizens. So the
- 2 number of -- whether it's 40,000, 50,000 ever, is a
- 3 vanishingly small number of sawed-off shotguns that have
- 4 been lawfully registered. I think --
- 5 JUSTICE GINSBURG: Wasn't there something in
- 6 one of these briefs that a manufacturer in States where
- 7 these weapons are lawful has advertised them as ideal
- 8 for use in self-defense?
- 9 MR. BASH: There is something like that in
- 10 one of the briefs. I don't think a manufacturer's, sort
- of, market strategy should govern the analysis. It
- 12 certainly shouldn't refute this Court's judgment,
- 13 Congress's judgment, the judgment of State legislatures
- 14 for decades, that these weapons have no lawful uses.
- 15 And I am not aware of, for example, a spike in
- 16 applications for registrations for sawed-off shotguns to
- 17 the ATF, which you might expect to see if these weapons
- 18 were suddenly being in common use for self-defense.
- I just wanted to address a point that I
- 20 think Justice Kagan raised with my friend, which was,
- 21 are we, sort of, solely relying on a correlative
- 22 relationship between the enumerated offense and the
- 23 potential for violence. I think it's a great deal more
- 24 than a correlative relationship. I think it's actually
- 25 precisely the same relationship between the crime and

- 1 the potential for violence present for burglary,
- 2 attempted burglary, extortion, which is to say this:
- 3 The enumerated crime enables the potential for violence
- 4 in a but-for causal sense, but the offender has to take
- 5 an additional act of volition to bring the violence to
- 6 fruition.
- 7 So, for example, with a burglary or an
- 8 attempted burglary, a burglar could say, if I'm
- 9 confronted by a homeowner or police officer, I am going
- 10 to flee. I am not going to attack anybody or I am going
- 11 to give up. The burglary enables that confrontation to
- 12 occur, but the offender has to take an additional act of
- 13 volition to actually bring violence to fruition.
- 14 JUSTICE KAGAN: I would think the analogy to
- 15 that is the person who uses the sawed-off shotgun in a
- 16 crime, but decides: I'm not going to shoot it. And
- 17 then you say: It doesn't really matter if you're not
- 18 going to shoot it; you just used it in a criminal
- 19 activity, that's enough for us.
- 20 But this is a good deal more attenuated than
- 21 that because this person could, for whatever reason,
- 22 maybe because he wants to commit a crime in the future
- 23 or maybe he's one of the odd collectors or people who
- 24 think that this is good for self-defense, this person
- 25 could have kept it in a locked closet, in a safe deposit

- 1 box, and never have brought it out and never have any
- 2 potential for use in a crime. I mean, it would be one
- 3 thing to say use in a crime causes enough risk of
- 4 serious injury, but this is a step further.
- 5 MR. BASH: I agree that a necessary premise
- of our argument is that the ordinary case of possession
- 7 is possession in connection with crimes. So if you
- 8 don't buy that, we're in trouble. But you should buy
- 9 that. It's what this Court said in Heller when it said
- 10 short-barreled shotguns are not typically used by law
- 11 abiding citizens for lawful purposes.
- 12 JUSTICE KAGAN: But they are two separate
- 13 offenses, right, possession of this gun and use of this
- 14 gun. And you're converting the one into the other for
- 15 purposes of ACCA.
- MR. BASH: And that makes total sense, and
- 17 let me explain why. If it wasn't like that, clause 2 of
- 18 the definition of violent felony -- it's at 11a of our
- 19 statutory appendix -- would do no work. The whole point
- 20 of that clause is to capture situations that were
- 21 pregnant with the possibility of violence but where the
- 22 apprehender was offended before the violence occurred.
- 23 If an offender used a firearm against somebody, he would
- 24 be squarely within clause 1, which is the use of force
- or the threatened or attempted use of force against

- 1 somebody.
- 2 The whole point of clause 2 is when you
- 3 catch someone who put themselves in the position to do
- 4 violence but the violence didn't materialize on that
- 5 occasion, they still fall within clause 2, and that
- 6 makes sense because that sort of behavior is reflective
- 7 of the armed career criminal. I mean, this is the
- 8 weapon of choice historically, along with machine guns,
- 9 of the armed career criminal. So it would be kind of
- 10 odd if the illegal possession of this weapon didn't
- 11 satisfy -- didn't count as a predicate under the Armed
- 12 Career Criminal Act.
- 13 JUSTICE KAGAN: Do you think the same would
- 14 be true of a felon in possession?
- 15 MR. BASH: No, and I think that's an
- 16 important difference. I think the felon in possession
- 17 statute reflects a slightly different judgment. It's
- 18 the judgment that someone who has committed a felony,
- 19 whether it's a violent felony or, you know, bank fraud
- 20 or something, has revealed themselves to be an
- 21 irresponsible person who can't be trusted with a
- 22 firearm. I think in that sense, it's more prophylactic
- 23 in nature, but you certainly don't have --
- 24 JUSTICE KAGAN: I would think that in the
- 25 felon -- a felon in possession law, I mean, honestly,

- 1 I'm sure the numbers dwarf the sawed-off shotguns, and
- 2 the whole point of that is, yes, they're people who have
- 3 shown themselves to be irresponsible, who have shown
- 4 themselves perhaps to use weapons irresponsibly, and
- 5 they're going to do it again, and there's a pretty
- 6 strong correlation of a kind of recidivism that makes
- 7 Congress pass that law.
- 8 MR. BASH: I think that's an accurate
- 9 description of felon in possession, but there are,
- 10 nevertheless, felons who legitimately want a handgun,
- 11 which has been in common use for decades, for
- 12 self-defense or for target practice or whatever.
- 13 The judgment that this Court has rendered
- 14 and that Congress has rendered is that these weapons do
- 15 not have other purposes in the ordinary case, and I
- 16 think that distinguishes really a sawed-off shotgun
- 17 offense almost from any other --
- 18 JUSTICE BREYER: Where did Congress say
- 19 that? Where? I mean, a felon in possession has
- 20 a gun, and you say he might keep it upstairs in his
- 21 closet, in the back of a car, in his hand, many places
- 22 he might possess it, and he might never use it for a
- 23 crime. Recognizing that, you say that doesn't fall
- 24 within the statute. Just substitute the words
- 25 "sawed-off shotgun." In the closet, back of a car,

- 1 glass case, maybe in his hand, maybe in somebody else's
- 2 hand. Maybe he just says to somebody: I have a
- 3 sawed-off shotgun up there; give me your money.
- 4 All right? All those things are possible
- 5 with either. And so since they're possible with either,
- 6 on what basis do we write an opinion that says that you
- 7 win with the sawed-off shotgun, but you lose with almost
- 8 every other kind of gun. What's our theory? What lines
- 9 would there be in that opinion?
- 10 MR. BASH: Here's the line. When you have a
- 11 firearm that has historically been exclusively
- 12 associated with violence, unlike a handgun, but just
- 13 like a sawed-off shotgun --
- 14 JUSTICE BREYER: My goodness, stop right
- 15 there for a second, because what we heard was there are
- 16 40,000 or more people in 10 States and others that don't
- 17 even make it unlawful. So how can we say it's more
- 18 associated with crime than, what, a handgun or a
- 19 regular -- or a torpedo? I don't know.
- 20 MR. BASH: I think we would contend that
- 21 unlawful possession of a torpedo --
- 22 (Laughter.)
- 23 JUSTICE BREYER: I realized you were going
- 24 to say that, and all I put that in was to express my own
- 25 lack of knowledge of which is which, and therefore I

- 1 can't just speak ex cathedra and say this. I would have
- 2 to have some proof.
- 3 MR. BASH: I understand the uncertainty in a
- 4 case without empirical data. It was the same
- 5 uncertainty that the Court had in James, where it said
- 6 we don't have empirical data to make the judgment. And
- 7 in both James and Sykes, the Court said at the end of
- 8 the day in some of these ACCA cases we need to rely on
- 9 our common sense judgment. But here I think what I hope
- 10 would be the Court's common sense judgment --
- 11 JUSTICE BREYER: Well, I don't -- I mean,
- 12 I've seen a lot of movies. James Cagney used to, but I
- 13 can't use that.
- MR. BASH: Well, let me just say -- let me
- 15 just say where I -- where I think you can ground the
- 16 common sense judgment. We've set forward in the brief
- 17 Federal statutes, State statutes, the legislative
- 18 history, Senate and House reports saying these weapons
- 19 are exclusively associated with lawbreaking and crime.
- 20 There is a history of that. That's why they've been
- 21 regulated. And I think, to go to a colloquy that my
- 22 colleague was having with one of the members of the
- 23 bench, the judgment of State legislatures and the
- 24 Federal Congress is not something sort of to be cast
- 25 away as the product of superstition. State legislators,

- 1 Congresspeople, talk with their constituents, they speak
- 2 with law enforcement agencies. They exercise reasonable
- 3 judgment based on the facts on the ground when they
- 4 enact laws like this.
- 5 And I don't think it can be really disputed,
- 6 as Justice Alito was alluding to earlier, that those
- 7 legislatures have made a judgment that these weapons are
- 8 exclusively associated with crime. And I think that's a
- 9 much better factual record --
- 10 JUSTICE BREYER: We couldn't say the same
- 11 thing with a Saturday night special?
- 12 MR. BASH: I don't know. I'm not familiar
- 13 with the term.
- 14 JUSTICE BREYER: They used to be. A
- 15 Saturday night special is a kind of pistol that was
- 16 really used very, very heavily with robberies and
- 17 crimes. They were viewed -- that was one of the first
- 18 things that people tried to get banned after
- 19 assassinations and so forth.
- 20 MR. BASH: I'm not saying that our argument
- 21 couldn't apply to any other weapons. I imagine we'd
- 22 have a similar case on unlawful possession of machine
- 23 guns, for example.
- JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: How many --
- JUSTICE BREYER: No, no. This isn't a

- 1 machine qun. It's a pistol, a handgun.
- MR. BASH: We'd have to do the work. I
- 3 don't mean to cut off --
- 4 JUSTICE BREYER: No.
- 5 MR. BASH: We'd have to do the work. Here I
- 6 think we have done the work. We have a legislative and
- 7 judicial consensus over decades that these are
- 8 exclusively used in crimes.
- 9 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: But we -- but we
- 10 know that's not true. We know there are 40,000
- 11 registered that by -- and, you know, and you yourself I
- 12 think said or -- that if you're willing to give your
- 13 photograph and fingerprint or whatever to the Federal
- 14 Government, you're probably not going to use it
- 15 illegally. So we know it's not true that these are
- 16 exclusively used in criminal activity.
- 17 MR. BASH: Well, I think there's two points
- 18 in that. One was the point I was alluding to earlier,
- 19 which is not only that Congress thinks sort of this
- 20 process ameliorates the -- the normal effect of
- 21 possession of a sawed-off shotgun and that these are
- 22 actually registered in extraordinarily small numbers
- 23 relative to total gun population.
- 24 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Well, what number
- would be enough? I mean if we had 100,000

- 1 registrations, does that mean that it's no longer
- 2 conduct that presents a serious potential risk?
- 3 MR. BASH: I'm not sure. I want to give you
- 4 two answers to that question. I mean, the first is
- 5 that, as this Court said in James, the relevant data
- 6 point is convictions. So there's no convictions for
- 7 lawful possession of a sawed-off shotgun. The relevant
- 8 data point is how many convictions for unlawful
- 9 possession are associated with otherwise nonviolent
- 10 activity, and Petitioner hasn't really pointed to any
- 11 cases of sort of law-abiding citizens using them for
- 12 other reasons.
- 13 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Well, then -- then
- 14 is possession, possession of explosives, an offense
- 15 under this enhancement provision?
- 16 MR. BASH: I think we'd run the same
- 17 analysis, and we talk about this at pages 47 to 48 of
- 18 our brief, which is to say explosives regulated by the
- 19 NFA, which are defined to be explosives designed as
- 20 weapons, yes, it's pretty much the same analysis we'd
- 21 run through which --
- 22 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Even though the
- 23 statute -- even though the statute says use of
- 24 explosives is covered?
- 25 MR. BASH: And I don't think --

| 1 | CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: You'd say, well, |
|----|--|
| 2 | under the catch-all phrase, mere possession is covered. |
| 3 | MR. BASH: No. And there's no redundancy, |
| 4 | because maybe we explained this unclearly. What we |
| 5 | tried to explain is that the use of explosives would |
| 6 | encompass a felony conviction for the use of any |
| 7 | explosives. So there are felony convictions for the use |
| 8 | of TNT or dynamite, explosives that are not inherently |
| 9 | dangerous in character, but could be used unlawfully. |
| 10 | The possession offense under the reasoning |
| 11 | that we've set forth in the brief would apply to |
| 12 | weaponized explosives, those regulated under the NFA |
| 13 | because they're designed as as weapons, napalm and |
| 14 | things like that, not to the unlawful possession of TNT, |
| 15 | even though the unlawful use of TNT would fall under the |
| 16 | use of explosives statute provided as a felony. So I |
| 17 | don't think there's any redundancy created there. |
| 18 | And I guess just to wrap up this colloquy, I |
| 19 | think it's possible to imagine an alternative universe |
| 20 | where sawed-off shotguns developed as self-defense |
| 21 | weapons in ordinary use. In that case, the ordinary |
| 22 | case analysis would look very different. You would say, |
| 23 | well, maybe there are some people who unlawfully acquire |
| 24 | these, just like some people unlawfully acquire handguns |
| 25 | for self-defense. But this Court has never recognized this |

- 1 this Court said very clearly in Heller in
- 2 distinguishing Miller, that these are not in lawful use
- 3 by law-abiding citizens.
- 4 That's not the way the real world looks. In
- 5 the real world these are unlawfully possessed for use in
- 6 crime. And once you accept that proposition, the final
- 7 step of our analysis is that when these items are
- 8 brought to crimes, it seriously increases the chance
- 9 that someone is going to be killed or wounded. We've
- 10 set forth the characteristics of the weapon and the sort
- of damage they do. I won't repeat that. But I don't
- 12 even really hear Petitioner to dispute that in the
- 13 ordinary case, when the -- in what we call the ordinary
- 14 case, when these are brought to crimes, they massively
- 15 increase the chance --
- 16 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Well, that's a
- 17 second step, unlike the others. When you're engaged in
- 18 a burglary, the -- the risk is there. When it's mere
- 19 possession, the risk isn't there. You have to take an
- 20 additional step of taking it and using it in a crime.
- 21 MR. BASH: And I think burglary has the
- 22 exact same connection. Burglar -- maybe it's easier to
- 23 see it with extortion, but the same analysis would apply
- 24 to burglary. When you -- extortion, as defined most
- 25 narrowly, as Justice Scalia would have defined it in

- 1 James to be a threat of violence to person or property,
- 2 that itself does not create the possibility of violence.
- 3 It's only if the extortionist is willing to follow
- 4 through on the threat to take an additional step, just
- 5 like the additional step of using a firearm, that the
- 6 violence materializes.
- 7 So the sort of connection between the
- 8 underlying offense and violence that Congress had in
- 9 mind did contemplate an additional step by the offender
- 10 himself.
- 11 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Well, or the
- 12 homeowner could happen to have a short-barreled shotgun
- 13 and shoot the burglar.
- MR. BASH: But remember --
- 15 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Then the violence
- 16 doesn't depend on any additional act by the burglar.
- 17 MR. BASH: It does, Mr. Chief Justice,
- 18 because the statute says violence to another. So if
- 19 the -- if the homeowner clocks the burglar, that's not
- 20 the violence the statute contemplates. And I suppose
- 21 you could imagine fanciful scenarios where the police
- 22 officer accidentally shoots the homeowner, but surely
- 23 that's not the sort of ordinary case violence that this
- 24 statute had in mind.
- 25 So I think --

- 1 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: So the parallel
- 2 you're drawing is that burglary itself doesn't present a
- 3 risk of violence until the burglar pulls a gun?
- 4 MR. BASH: Or -- or attacks the homeowner.
- 5 Like I said, I think it's most clear in extortion. I
- 6 mean, even -- the Court suggested in James that
- 7 extortion could be even much broader to include
- 8 blackmail and sort of prototypical extortion. But even
- 9 if we just accept Justice Scalia's view of extortion,
- 10 which is that it's a threat to person or property, there
- 11 must be some number of extortionists that say: Well,
- 12 I'm going to make the threat, but I'm actually not going
- 13 to follow through on the threat. And the violence --
- 14 JUSTICE GINSBURG: What about the -- what
- about the analogy to -- explosives, you say that there
- 16 could be lawful possession because explosives, it's use
- 17 that's given as an enumerated crime.
- 18 MR. BASH: And what we would say is, by
- 19 parity of reasoning to what we've set forth in the brief
- 20 with respect to firearms, weaponized explosives, that is
- 21 to say explosives that only have a use as a weapon,
- 22 could fall under the residual clause.
- 23 JUSTICE BREYER: Is there -- the proposition
- 24 then that I must accept I think for you to prevail is
- 25 possession of that which is normally used or has a very

- 1 serious risk of being used in a way that risks physical
- 2 injury to another falls within the statute. And instead
- 3 of drawing a line between possession and some other use
- 4 of the thing, we say sometimes possession is in itself
- 5 within the statute, sometimes it's not. If you possess
- 6 those things that have as a predominant use
- 7 participation in a matter that's likely to cause
- 8 physical injury to another, that's within the statute.
- 9 If that's the proposition, is there any case where
- 10 simple possession of anything has been interpreted as
- 11 falling within this language? I don't know the answer
- 12 to that.
- MR. BASH: You mean circuit or Supreme Court
- 14 cases?
- 15 JUSTICE BREYER: Any, any case.
- MR. BASH: Well, we won this. We've won
- 17 this issue in --
- 18 JUSTICE BREYER: Well, I know -- you've won
- 19 this issue in --
- 20 MR. BASH: In circuit courts. I think the
- 21 Eighth Circuit and the First Circuit.
- JUSTICE BREYER: But it's this issue.
- 23 There's not some other area I could look at?
- 24 MR. BASH: I think there's a case out of the
- 25 Fourth Circuit with possession of weapon in prisons.

- 1 Obviously the setting can change the analysis to some
- 2 degree. But I believe there's a Fourth Circuit. Maybe
- 3 my co -- my opponent will have a better recollection of
- 4 that.
- 5 JUSTICE BREYER: There's a Fourth Circuit
- 6 case and then this line right here. Okay.
- 7 MR. BASH: I -- I don't mean to suggest that
- 8 there's no other cases. I would not be surprised if
- 9 there were possession of machine gun and short-barreled
- 10 rifle and silencer; in other words, the very firearms
- 11 covered by the NFA. Also, I think short-barreled
- 12 shotguns are, just to underscore the point, more often
- 13 used in crimes, and so you're going to see a
- 14 proliferation of cases there.
- 15 JUSTICE GINSBURG: Why not burglar tools?
- 16 Isn't it -- burglar tools are outside, right?
- 17 Possession of burglar tools will not get you under ACCA.
- 18 MR. BASH: This Court reserved that question
- 19 in James in a footnote, because I think some States
- 20 purportedly had defined attempted burglary to be
- 21 something like possession or to include something like
- 22 possession of burglar tools. I think we'd have a much
- 23 harder case there because there's a longer chain of
- 24 attenuation.
- 25 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: Pardon --

1 JUSTICE GINSBURG: But there's no other use. 2 There's no other use for burglar tools than in burglary. I think that's true. I think 3 MR. BASH: 4 we'd have to build through the practical case, one, that 5 burglar tools -- the mere possession of burglar tools is 6 sort of inevitably associated with committing burglary. It may be that there's a lot of people who acquire them, 7 think about committing burglary, but don't make the sort 8 9 of attempt that James contemplated will result in a 10 confrontation, and then it's more attenuated because 11 you're linking up this burglary -- burglary tools with 12 committing burglary and then burglary with the 13 confrontation. 14 I think it's a much tighter nexus here. Ι 15 think if you ask an ordinary congressperson whether they 16 think there's a tighter connection between possession of a sawed-off shotgun and acts of violence rather than, 17 you know, possession of a crowbar and acts of violence, 18 I think most people would say, yes, that's sort of the 19 20 common sense answer that most legislators would give. 21 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: I'm a little still 22 confused about the felony possession, okay? You say 23 that's not a crime of violence. I -- I don't know how 24 to differentiate that from this because most felons, in 25 possession of a qun, I'm sure the statistics would show,

- 1 are committing crimes. So if the question is the risk
- 2 of injury to others, it would be a felon possessing a
- 3 handgun of any kind and not a common citizen. Because,
- 4 yes, common citizens more often than not, we hope, use
- 5 guns that they possess for lawful purposes; but felons,
- 6 I would think, just as a matter of logic, what Justice
- 7 Alito was asking, that felons more often than not use
- 8 guns in illegal activities.
- 9 MR. BASH: I -- I don't know. And for
- 10 one -- for one thing, we have a -- the judgment of the
- 11 sentencing commission here that we're in full accord
- 12 with that possession of a sawed-off shotgun is
- 13 fundamentally different than felony possession.
- 14 And they see --
- 15 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: Well, I understand that.
- 16 I just want you to give me some sort of analytical
- 17 approach on when to judge that -- when to judge that
- 18 risk, or how to differentiate that risk --
- 19 MR. BASH: I think the analytical --
- 21 no -- every possession crime doesn't become a crime of
- 22 violence.
- 23 MR. BASH: I understand the concern. And I
- think the analytical line to draw is that weapons that
- 25 by their nature are exclusively associated, or in the

- 1 ordinary case, associated with violent crimes count
- 2 under ACCA. I don't think that the felon in possession
- 3 statute reflects quite the judgment that every felon
- 4 that possesses a firearm is going to commit acts of
- 5 violence with it. I think it reflects the sort of
- 6 prophylactic concern that these folks have proven
- 7 themselves irresponsible lawbreakers -- even if they
- 8 committed a nonviolence felony and they've, you know,
- 9 lost their ability to responsibly care for firearms and
- 10 to handle firearms. I do think it's a different
- judgment than the judgment of why people can't
- 12 unlawfully possess mortars and artillery pieces and
- 13 torpedoes and -- and sawed-off rifles and shotguns and
- 14 machine guns. I think it's a different judgment.
- 15 The Court -- Petitioner has really not
- 16 refuted the historical understanding that these are
- 17 uniquely and purely associated with crime. And I think
- 18 a few thousand registrations since 1934, lawfully, does
- 19 not refute the common sense conclusion that the unlawful
- 20 possession of a sawed-off shotgun is associated with
- 21 crime.
- 22 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: That -- you're -- is
- that the 40,000 you're talking about?
- MR. BASH: I'm sorry --
- 25 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: When you say a few

- 1 thousand, is that the same statistic as --
- 2 MR. BASH: Yes. And I'll just say it's
- 3 140,000; we think it's a great deal lower than that.
- 4 That's the total number of registrations since 1934. As
- 5 we say in the brief, we can't have perfect certainty,
- 6 but it appears that the majority are registered with law
- 7 enforcement or manufacturers.
- 8 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: I might have used a
- 9 different word than a few thousand.
- 10 MR. BASH: Forgive me, a few ten thousand
- 11 or --
- 12 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Yes, that would --
- 13 (Laughter.)
- 14 MR. BASH: A few dozen thousand.
- 15 JUSTICE ALITO: In the Armed Career Criminal
- 16 Act in general, and the residual clause in particular,
- 17 has caused no end of problems for this Court. Are you
- 18 aware of any efforts made by the Justice Department to
- 19 propose legislation revising either the -- either the
- 20 Act in general or the residual clause?
- 21 MR. BASH: I am not aware of those efforts.
- 22 That doesn't mean they don't exist, but I, standing
- 23 here, am not aware of the efforts. But I --
- 24 JUSTICE BREYER: What would you think, which
- I once suggested and certainly didn't have the nerve to

- 1 follow through, that it's more likely that the
- 2 Department of Justice, with the aid of the sentencing
- 3 commission, could get the relevant statistics than it is
- 4 that a defendant could. So if no statistics appear, we
- 5 should draw a presumption against the department.
- 6 MR. BASH: Well, this Court has held
- 7 otherwise in James.
- 8 JUSTICE BREYER: Yes, yes. I realize that.
- 9 MR. BASH: So, I mean, I think that's a
- 10 statutory stare decisis holding that -- that governs --
- JUSTICE BREYER: But could you do something,
- 12 that is to say, even without legislation? Is it
- 13 possible that the department, through its statistical
- 14 gathering resources, and it has some, working with the
- 15 sentencing commission, could help us more on the -- on
- 16 the underlying statistical data that would give us a
- 17 clue as to what was dangerous and what was not?
- 18 MR. BASH: I think -- I think that's
- 19 conceivable. I'm not familiar with all the sort of
- 20 statistical resources of the Department of Justice. But
- 21 I just want to emphasize, this is the clear case. This
- 22 is the case where Congress and State legislatures and
- 23 this Court in Heller and Miller have said for decades.
- 24 So I don't think there's a fair argument that criminals
- are not on notice that possession of an unlawful shotgun

- 1 can carry very serious consequences. Maybe in a closer
- 2 case down the road you say, well, the department could
- 3 have come up with statistics, and that would be -- you
- 4 know, we're going to rule against the department for
- 5 that reason. But, I mean, we have a quote from Judge
- 6 Boudin in the brief in the Shaw case, where, you know,
- 7 anyone that watches television or reads the newspaper
- 8 knows that these are especially associated with crimes.
- 9 So I don't think it came as a surprise to Mr. Johnson
- 10 that when he commits two robberies and one illegal
- 11 possession of a sawed-off shotgun, eventually that's
- 12 going to catch up with him.
- 13 If the Court has no further questions.
- 14 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Thank you, counsel.
- Ms. Menendez, you have four minutes
- 16 remaining.
- 17 REBUTTAL ARGUMENT OF KATHERINE M. MENENDEZ
- 18 ON BEHALF OF PETITIONER
- 19 MS. MENENDEZ: Thank you, Mr. Chief Justice.
- 20 Just briefly. You're -- with respect to
- 21 Justice Breyer's question, there are a couple of related
- 22 contexts where there are some appellate decisions. The
- 23 Eighth Circuit in Archer, which is cited in our brief,
- 24 has held that possession of a concealed weapon is not a
- 25 violent felony under the Armed Career Criminal Act.

- In addition, in the Fourth -- I'm sorry, the
- 2 Ninth Circuit in a case called Fish, which I am not sure
- 3 whether we've cited it in our brief, but it's a 2004
- 4 decision, held that possession of a pipe bomb was not a
- 5 crime of violence under the sentencing guideline
- 6 provision, not the Armed Career Criminal Act.
- 7 And I do agree with my opposing counsel that
- 8 there's been one decision that went the way we disagree
- 9 with in the Fourth Circuit about possession of a weapon
- 10 in prison, which I think is a very different
- 11 circumstance.
- 12 Your Honors, I do think that it's important
- 13 to look at James, comparing attempted burglary as to
- 14 burglary. I think it gives us a great deal of guidance.
- 15 In James, the Court found that there wasn't any textual
- 16 justification for treating those differently. Here we
- 17 have a very clear textual justification in terms of use
- 18 of explosives, which gives us a strong signal that mere
- 19 possession wasn't contemplated. The government invites
- 20 this Court to do pretty convoluted reasoning, adopting
- 21 an unstated definition from a totally unrelated statute
- 22 in Title 26. And assuming that Congress meant when it
- 23 said use of explosives, that all things listed in the
- 24 National Firearms Act would be included by mere
- possession, I don't think we can make that leap.

| Τ | four honors, it's also not true that there |
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| 2 | is a unanimous belief that these are inherently |
| 3 | unjustifiable weapons. In fact, I think that the fact |
| 4 | is most legislatures allow these to be possessed in some |
| 5 | context or another, and Michigan has just indicated that |
| 6 | perhaps the old historical reputation of this weapon is |
| 7 | no longer deserved. But this Court doesn't have to like |
| 8 | the short-barreled shotgun or decide that it's even an |
| 9 | appropriate weapon for punish or for possession in |
| 10 | order to agree that we can't assume from its possession |
| 11 | alone that someone has only nefarious purpose. |
| 12 | In addition, Your Honors, the relevant |
| 13 | analysis has to begin with the offense. And the |
| 14 | government tries over and over again to say, well, it's |
| 15 | obvious that these would only be possessed for nefarious |
| 16 | reason, but they cannot substantiate that. They |
| 17 | disagree with the 14 cases I encourage the Court to look |
| 18 | at from page 14 of our reply brief, that those are mere |
| 19 | possession cases. By characterizing the people who |
| 20 | possessed those weapons, they were found during the |
| 21 | course of investigations of other crimes, but that |
| 22 | doesn't mean a single one of those possession acts was |
| 23 | actually possession during a crime. And this Court |
| 24 | certainly can't assume that merely because a criminal or |
| 25 | a had nerson had nossessed the Weapon that they |

| 1 | possessed it for nefarious purposes. |
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| 2 | Finally, Your Honors, I would really |
| 3 | encourage the Court to consider the the rule of |
| 4 | lenity and its application in this case. The government |
| 5 | has not brought statistics nor clear, decisive, textual |
| 6 | argument that mandate the application of one of the most |
| 7 | onerous sentencing provisions that we see in Federal |
| 8 | courts every day. This statute is applied to 600 people |
| 9 | a year. It lacks all clarity. And while this Court |
| LO | need not get into whether it is unconstitutionally vague |
| L1 | and the baby should go out with the bath water, the |
| L2 | Court can certainly decide that Congress did not speak |
| L3 | clearly on this question, and that it should not be |
| L 4 | applied to Mr. Johnson. |
| L5 | Unless there are any further questions, I |
| L 6 | appreciate the opportunity to present argument. |
| L7 | CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Thank you, counsel. |
| L8 | The case is submitted. |
| L 9 | (Whereupon, at 11:59 a.m., the case in the |
| 20 | above-entitled matter was submitted.) |
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|------------------------------|---------------------------------------|-------------------------------|---------------------|--|
| A | advertised 29:7 | appear 49:4 | 12:2 14:13 | 28:1 29:9 31:5,16 |
| abiding 31:11 | agencies 28:21 36:2 | appearances 1:14 | assistant 1:15,17 | 32:15 33:8 34:10 |
| ability 47:9 | agent 9:15 11:4,16 | appears 28:20 48:6 | 15:4 | 34:20 35:3,14 |
| able 9:25 | aggressive 14:11 | appellate 50:22 | associated 18:17 | 36:12,20 37:2,5 |
| aboveentitled 1:11 | 16:19 | appendix 31:19 | 34:12,18 35:19 | 37:17 38:3,16,25 |
| 53:20 | ago 3:22 14:16 | application 17:8 | 36:8 38:9 45:6 | 39:3 40:21 41:14 |
| absolutely 13:9 | agree 31:5 51:7 | 18:4,24 53:4,6 | 46:25 47:1,17,20 | 41:17 42:4,18 |
| 20:22 | 52:10 | applications 28:15 | 50:8 | 43:13,16,20,24 |
| abuse 27:17 | aid 49:2 | 29:16 | assume 14:20 24:4 | 44:7,18 45:3 46:9 |
| acca 15:16 31:15 | alford 8:19 | applied 4:2 53:8,14 | 52:10,24 | 46:19,23 47:24 |
| 35:8 44:17 47:2 | alito 5:12,14 9:5,10 | apply 16:21 36:21 | assumed 19:23 | 48:2,10,14,21 |
| accept 40:6 42:9,24 | 9:17 10:2,17,21 | 39:11 40:23 | assuming 51:22 | 49:6,9,18 |
| accidentally 41:22 | 10:23 11:6,11 | appreciate 53:16 | atf 28:15 29:17 | basis 18:8 34:6 |
| accord 46:11 | 18:7,25 19:11,13 | apprehender 31:22 | attack 30:10 | bath 53:11 |
| account 4:5 6:8 | 19:25 20:16 21:3 | approach 46:17 | attacks 42:4 | bed 9:16 10:12 |
| 19:20 | 21:12 25:19,23 | appropriate 10:8 | attempt 28:18 45:9 | begay 3:22 5:4 9:2 |
| accurate 33:8 | 26:3 36:6 46:7 | 20:22 23:14 52:9 | attempted 12:8,10 | 14:2 |
| acknowledge 5:8 | 48:15 | approximately | 30:2,8 31:25 | behalf 1:16,18 2:4 |
| acquire 39:23,24 | allow 52:4 | 15:10 | 44:20 51:13 | 2:7,10 3:8 26:19 |
| 45:7 | allowing 8:25 | archer 50:23 | attenuated 30:20 | 50:18 |
| act 11:19 12:11,19 | alluding 36:6 37:18 | area 43:23 | 45:10 | behavior 32:6 |
| 15:12,25 18:4 | alternative 39:19 | arent 23:14,15 | attenuation 44:24 | belief 20:12 23:11 |
| 19:7,8,15 20:7,18 | ameliorates 37:20 | argument 1:12 2:2 | attorney 28:2 | 52:2 |
| 24:15 28:2 30:5 | amendment 4:10 | 2:5,8 3:4,7 6:3,22 | atypical 28:13 | believe 5:16,20,24 |
| 30:12 32:12 41:16 | 4:18 | 9:18 26:18 31:6 | available 9:22 29:1 | 7:11 8:7 11:9,12 |
| 48:16,20 50:25 | amendments 4:23 | 36:20 49:24 50:17 | aware 26:1 29:15 | 12:24 20:5 24:2 |
| 51:6,24 | americans 7:6,24 | 53:6,16 | 48:18,21,23 | 44:2 |
| active 16:18 | amount 14:5 | arguments 28:3 | В | believed 25:16 |
| activities 46:8 | ample 14:4 | arises 16:7 | baby 53:11 | believes 22:10,23 |
| activity 18:18 | analogy 30:14 | armed 3:13 11:18 | back 6:21 17:6 | bench 35:23 |
| 26:24 27:16 30:19 | 42:15 | 15:11,24 16:20 | 33:21,25 | better 8:24 9:25 |
| 37:16 38:10 | analysis 5:5,21 | 18:4 19:15 20:6 | background 7:21 | 36:9 44:3 |
| acts 3:13 16:20 | 14:13,19 19:23 | 20:12,18 24:15 | 28:6,7 | biological 9:10,14 |
| 45:17,18 47:4 | 28:23 29:11 38:17 38:20 39:22 40:7 | 32:7,9,11 48:15 50:25 51:6 | bad 52:25 | 9:20 10:4 11:3,16 blackmail 42:8 |
| 52:22 | 40:23 44:1 52:13 | | ban 8:8 18:20 21:7 | bomb 9:7 11:3 51:4 |
| actual 19:9 24:18 | analytical 46:16,19 | artillery 10:23 47:12 | 24:1 | borne 13:1 |
| addition 51:1 52:12 | 46:24 | asking 46:7 | bank 28:10 32:19 | boudin 50:6 |
| additional 5:1 | answer 13:25 23:22 | asking 40.7 asks 4:10 | banned 21:14 | box 6:9 31:1 |
| 12:18 30:5,12 | 23:23 24:6 43:11 | assassinations | 36:18 | breyer 13:4,9,15 |
| 40:20 41:4,5,9,16 | 45:20 | 36:19 | bans 16:5 | 22:8,19 23:8,16 |
| address 29:19 | answers 22:13 38:4 | assault 17:25 | based 5:21 19:6,19 | 23:20 33:18 34:14 |
| adopted 4:18 19:9 | anticipating 5:3 | assaults 27:17 | 22:17 23:7 36:3 | 34:23 35:11 36:10 |
| 25:14 | anybody 30:10 | asserted 6:14 | bases 18:12 | 36:14,25 37:4 |
| adopting 23:25 26:8 51:20 | apologize 15:3,21 | assertion 7:14 | bash 1:17 2:6 26:17 | 42:23 43:15,18,22 |
| adoption 4:23 | 16:2 26:2 | assessment 4:15 | 26:18,20 27:5,13 | 44:5 48:24 49:8 |
| auopuon 4.23 | | | | 10.21 17.0 |
| | 1 | • | 1 | 1 |

| | 1 | ı | ı | ı |
|----------------------------|---------------------|---------------------------------------|---------------------------|--------------------------|
| 49:11 | capture 20:13 | 26:10 29:12 32:23 | 12:15 16:20 19:22 | comparing 51:13 |
| breyers 50:21 | 31:20 | 48:25 52:24 53:12 | 21:1 22:14,15 | comparison 28:22 |
| brief 10:14 13:22 | car 33:21,25 | certainty 9:25 48:5 | 24:14 25:13 31:17 | completely 10:15 |
| 13:22 17:14,15 | care 47:9 | chain 44:23 | 31:20,24 32:2,5 | completing 12:18 |
| 25:6 27:12,15,15 | career 3:13 4:7,7 | chambers 5:4 | 42:22 48:16,20 | compliance 8:9,11 |
| 28:19 35:16 38:18 | 11:18 15:12,24 | chance 28:8 40:8 | clear 3:23 18:2 | 8:12 |
| 39:11 42:19 48:5 | 16:20 18:4 19:15 | 40:15 | 42:5 49:21 51:17 | comply 8:3 |
| 50:6,23 51:3 | 20:6,18 24:15 | change 44:1 | 53:5 | comprehensive |
| 52:18 | 32:7,9,12 48:15 | changed 18:13 24:9 | clearly 6:5 12:2 | 27:7 |
| briefcase 17:4 | 50:25 51:6 | character 39:9 | 40:1 53:13 | concealed 50:24 |
| briefly 50:20 | carry 50:1 | characteristics | clocks 41:19 | conceivable 49:19 |
| briefs 27:8 29:6,10 | case 3:4 4:25 5:21 | 21:23 40:10 | closely 17:13 | concern 46:23 47:6 |
| bring 30:5,13 | 6:4,22 7:2 8:2 9:4 | characterizing | closer 50:1 | concluded 4:19 |
| broad 17:8 | 9:20 11:21 12:21 | 52:19 | closet 10:11 30:25 | conclusion 4:21 |
| broader 42:7 | 12:25 13:1 14:3,4 | charged 8:15,18 | 33:21,25 | 19:1,6 20:17 23:7 |
| brought 8:24 27:5 | 14:11,23 16:18 | 11:17 | clue 49:17 | 47:19 |
| 31:1 40:8,14 53:5 | 18:1,2 24:16,19 | charges 27:3,5 | colleague 35:22 | conduct 6:6 16:19 |
| build 28:13 45:4 | 26:22 27:2 31:6 | check 7:21 28:6,7 | collection 28:13 | 21:22 38:2 |
| burglar 20:2,12,13 | 33:15 34:1 35:4 | chemical 9:10,15 | collections 28:13 | confidence 4:16 |
| 30:8 40:22 41:13 | 36:22 39:21,22 | chief 3:3,9 26:16,20 | collectors 30:23 | confrontation |
| 41:16,19 42:3 | 40:13,14 41:23 | 37:9,24 38:13,22 | colloquy 35:21 | 30:11 45:10,13 |
| 44:15,16,17,22 | 43:9,15,24 44:6 | 39:1 40:16 41:11 | 39:18 | confronted 30:9 |
| 45:2,5,5 | 44:23 45:4 47:1 | 41:15,17 42:1 | come 19:5,23 27:8 | confused 45:22 |
| burglaries 20:3 | 49:21,22 50:2,6 | 47:22,25 48:8,12 | 50:3 | congress 18:15 |
| burglary 12:7,8,9 | 51:2 53:4,18,19 | 50:14,19 53:17 | comes 12:5 | 19:11,22 20:10 |
| 12:10,13,17 20:1 | cases 9:3 10:13 | choice 32:8 | commission 4:11 | 21:9 22:2 25:13 |
| 20:6,7 24:21 30:1 | 11:15 15:16 16:16 | chose 26:8 | 4:18 5:3,6 46:11 | 26:8,25 33:7,14 |
| 30:2,7,8,11 40:18 | 17:13,14,18,20 | chosen 21:7 | 49:3,15 | 33:18 35:24 37:19 |
| 40:21,24 42:2 | 21:13 27:11,14,17 | circuit 14:17 17:1 | commissions 4:16 | 41:8 49:22 51:22 |
| 44:20 45:2,6,8,11 | 35:8 38:11 43:14 | 18:2 43:13,20,21 | 4:24 | 53:12 |
| 45:11,12,12 51:13 | 44:8,14 52:17,19 | 43:21,25 44:2,5 | commit 11:19 | congressional |
| 51:14 | cast 35:24 | 50:23 51:2,9 | 30:22 47:4 | 28:22 |
| butfor 30:4 | catch 32:3 50:12 | circumstance 11:13 | commits 50:10 | congresspeople |
| buy 31:8,8 | catchall 39:2 | 51:11 | committed 32:18 | 36:1 |
| | categorical 12:2 | circumstances | 47:8 | congressperson |
| C | categorically 22:17 | 10:15 | committing 5:23 | 45:15 |
| c 1:8,18 2:1 3:1 | cathedra 35:1 | cite 17:14 | 19:4 45:6,8,12 | congresss 27:19 |
| 25:1 | caught 27:10 | cited 17:13 27:14 | 46:1 | 29:13 |
| cagney 35:12 | causal 30:4 | 50:23 51:3 | common 14:14 | connected 6:17 |
| call 40:13 | cause 9:21 43:7 | citizen 46:3 | 16:6 19:20 29:18 | connection 26:23 |
| called 51:2 | caused 48:17 | citizens 27:9 29:1 | 33:11 35:9,10,16 | 31:7 40:22 41:7 |
| cant 6:9 18:11 | causes 31:3 | 31:11 38:11 40:3 | 45:20 46:3,4 | 45:16 |
| 32:21 35:1,13 | certain 10:19 23:12 | 46:4 | 47:19 | consensus 37:7 |
| 47:11 48:5 52:10 | 23:13 25:22 | claim 6:16 | commonly 14:20 | consequences 50:1 |
| 52:24 | certainly 16:14 | clarity 53:9 | 15:5 | consider 53:3 |
| capital 17:25 | 21:6,19 25:3 | clause 3:13,16 | compared 11:23 | consideration 5:1 |
| | | , , , , , , , , , , , , , , , , , , , | _ | |
| L | | | | |

| | | 1 | | 1 |
|-----------------------------------|------------------------------|---|-------------------------------|----------------------------|
| 9:3 28:4 | 5:10 6:15 7:10 | 21:22 24:15 26:24 | decisive 53:5 | disclose 28:5 |
| considered 17:21 | 10:13 12:6,7,13 | 27:16 30:18 32:7 | defendant 49:4 | disclosing 28:11 |
| constituents 36:1 | 12:21 14:9,19 | 32:9,12 37:16 | defender 1:15 15:4 | discuss 14:5 |
| constitute 12:10 | 16:16 17:12,17,21 | 48:15 50:25 51:6 | defense 7:9 | dispute 40:12 |
| constructive 16:11 | 20:9 21:5 22:6 | 52:24 | defensible 20:19 | disputed 36:5 |
| 16:22 17:3,5 | 24:5,20 26:21,25 | criminalized 16:10 | deference 4:25 | dissent 18:1 |
| contemplate 41:9 | 31:9 33:13 35:5,7 | 16:10 | defined 38:19 | dissipates 28:8 |
| contemplated 45:9 | 38:5 39:25 40:1 | criminals 49:24 | 40:24,25 44:20 | distinguishes 33:16 |
| 51:19 | 42:6 43:13 44:18 | crowbar 45:18 | definition 3:12 6:1 | distinguishing 40:2 |
| contemplates 41:20 | 47:15 48:17 49:6 | cry 14:18 | 31:18 51:21 | doctrine 12:25 13:1 |
| contend 34:20 | 49:23 50:13 51:15 | cummings 28:3 | degree 3:14 4:1 | document 7:23 |
| context 52:5 | 51:20 52:7,17,23 | current 15:23 | 44:2 | 9:25 |
| contexts 50:22 | 53:3,9,12 | currently 28:24 | demolition 26:5 | documenting 14:8 |
| contrast 4:17 | courts 3:19 5:10 | cut 37:3 | demonstrate 13:12 | doe 14:16 |
| control 17:2 20:23 | 9:2 12:1,20 20:24 | | demonstrates 10:9 | doesnt 5:5 13:25 |
| 28:23 | 27:1,18 29:12 | <u>D</u> | 17:7 | 16:13 21:2,17,24 |
| controls 5:10 | 35:10 43:20 53:8 | d 1:8,18 3:1 | department 1:18 | 30:17 33:23 41:16 |
| conversation 24:25 | covered 38:24 39:2 | damage 40:11 | 48:18 49:2,5,13 | 42:2 46:21 48:22 |
| converting 31:14 | 44:11 | danger 19:10 | 49:20 50:2,4 | 52:7,22 |
| convicted 17:23 | create 41:2 | dangerous 7:15 | depend 41:16 | doing 8:1 10:1 19:6 |
| conviction 15:23 | created 39:17 | 10:10 11:3 20:12 | deposit 30:25 | dominion 17:2 |
| 17:18 21:25 39:6 | creates 22:17 | 23:12,13 24:3,12 24:13 39:9 49:17 | description 33:9 | dont 5:10 7:14 9:19 |
| convictions 38:6,6 | creative 13:2,3 | | deserve 4:25 | 9:22 12:24 13:20 |
| 38:8 39:7 | crime 4:13,20 5:23 | data 4:14,15,22 5:8 | deserved 52:7 | 14:12 15:2,5 |
| convoluted 51:20 | 8:16,18 9:1 11:13 | 6:15 8:24 14:5,6,6 14:7,22 19:7 35:4 | designed 16:21 | 16:24 17:5 19:21 |
| correct 6:25 11:9 | 14:18,21 15:8 | 35:6 38:5,8 49:16 | 38:19 39:13 | 20:5 22:12 23:4 |
| 11:11 25:9 | 16:14,15 17:24 | dated 18:22 | destroy 26:12 | 24:4 26:2,6 27:6 |
| correctly 8:22 | 22:23 23:18 25:3 | day 35:8 53:8 | determine 22:3 | 29:10 31:8 32:23 |
| correlation 6:4,7 | 25:7 27:4 29:25 | de 13:23,24 | developed 39:20 | 34:16,19 35:6,11 |
| 6:14,21 13:12 | 30:3,16,22 31:2,3 | deal 14:7 29:23 | didnt 32:4,10,11 | 36:5,12 37:3 |
| 19:2 33:6 | 33:23 34:18 35:19 | 30:20 48:3 51:14 | 48:25 | 38:25 39:17 40:11 |
| correlative 29:21 | 36:8 40:6,20 | dealing 27:17 | difference 4:22 | 43:11 44:7 45:8 |
| 29:24 | 42:17 45:23 46:21 | deaths 14:8 | 10:9 32:16 different 10:13 | 45:23 46:9 47:2 |
| couldnt 36:10,21 counsel 17:13 | 46:21 47:17,21 51:5 52:23 | decades 27:1 29:14 | 11:4,22 12:16 | 48:22 49:24 50:9 51:25 |
| 26:16 50:14 51:7 | crimes 6:8 11:20 | 33:11 37:7 49:23 | 23:25 24:24,25 | doubt 11:20 |
| 53:17 | 12:3 14:25 17:8 | decide 52:8 53:12 | 32:17 39:22 46:13 | doubt 11.20 dozen 48:14 |
| counsels 13:22 | 17:16 19:4 25:6 | decided 18:16 | 47:10,14 48:9 | draw 46:24 49:5 |
| count 4:20 8:25 | 28:9 31:7 36:17 | decides 30:16 | 51:10 | drawing 42:2 43:3 |
| 32:11 47:1 | 37:8 40:8,14 | decision 4:24 5:2 | differentiate 45:24 | due 7:13 9:14 12:23 |
| country 13:25 | 44:13 46:1 47:1 | 5:10 12:6 19:18 | 46:18 | 17:10 18:19 |
| country 13.23 | 50:8 52:21 | 20:20,23,24,25 | differently 51:16 | dwarf 33:1 |
| couple 50:21 | criminal 3:13 6:5 | 51:4,8 | directly 16:25 | dynamite 39:8 |
| course 52:21 | 7:17 11:19 15:12 | decisions 4:16 | disagree 51:8 52:17 | |
| court 1:1,12 3:10 | 15:25 16:20 18:4 | 50:22 | disagreed 24:8 | E |
| 3:17,22 4:4,5 5:4 | 19:15 20:7,18 | decisis 49:10 | disagreeing 18:20 | e 2:1 3:1,1 |
| ,22,5 5.1 | 20.7,10 | | | , , , |
| | · | • | <u> </u> | • |

| earlier 36:6 37:18 | eventually 50:11 | 52:3,3 | 19:8 23:11,13 | gang 28:10 |
|--------------------------|---------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|--------------------------|
| easier 40:22 | evidence 19:17 | factfinders 5:7 | 28:14 42:20 44:10 | gangster 18:18 |
| easy 14:13 | ex 35:1 | facts 36:3 | 47:9,10 51:24 | gathering 49:14 |
| effect 37:20 | exact 40:22 | factual 8:14 36:9 | first 6:13 12:7 | general 1:17 13:25 |
| efforts 48:18,21,23 | examination 4:14 | fair 49:24 | 14:17 20:7 36:17 | 23:11 28:3 48:16 |
| eighth 17:1 18:2 | 4:22 14:9 24:16 | faith 28:18 | 38:4 43:21 | 48:20 |
| 43:21 50:23 | examine 17:13 | fall 32:5 33:23 | fish 51:2 | ginsburg 4:4 25:5 |
| either 8:11 13:20 | examined 12:7 | 39:15 42:22 | flatly 21:14 25:23 | 29:5 42:14 44:15 |
| 21:14 23:5 28:25 | 22:16 | falling 43:11 | flaw 5:20 | 45:1 |
| 34:5,5 48:19,19 | examining 3:19 | falls 43:2 | flee 30:10 | give 30:11 34:3 |
| element 22:17 | example 29:15 30:7 | familiar 36:12 | folks 47:6 | 37:12 38:3 45:20 |
| elements 9:4 12:5,7 | 36:23 | 49:19 | follow 41:3 42:13 | 46:16 49:16 |
| elses 34:1 | examples 25:16 | fanciful 41:21 | 49:1 | given 26:12 42:17 |
| emphasize 28:16 | 26:11 27:9 | far 14:18 17:8,23 | followed 7:24 | gives 4:15 51:14,18 |
| 49:21 | exclusively 27:21 | 18:22,23 24:5 | footnote 44:19 | glad 25:10 |
| empirical 4:14,22 | 34:11 35:19 36:8 | favor 14:15 28:3 | force 31:24,25 | glass 34:1 |
| 5:8 6:22 7:1 | 37:8,16 46:25 | federal 1:15 8:4,9 | forgetting 13:17 | go 11:19 28:11 |
| 19:17 35:4,6 | exercise 17:2 36:2 | 8:12 15:4 28:5 | forgive 48:10 | 35:21 53:11 |
| enable 13:1 | exist 48:22 | 35:17,24 37:13 | formulation 14:2 | going 6:1 24:1 28:8 |
| enables 30:3,11 | expect 19:16 29:17 | 53:7 | forth 3:15 8:24 | 30:9,10,10,16,18 |
| enact 36:4 | explain 31:17 39:5 | federally 7:21 15:7 | 36:19 39:11 40:10 | 33:5 34:23 37:14 |
| enacting 20:18 | explained 39:4 | 27:23 | 42:19 | 40:9 42:12,12 |
| encompass 39:6 | explosives 25:6,7 | felon 4:19 15:24 | forward 27:8 35:16 | 44:13 47:4 50:4 |
| encourage 12:5 | 25:14,18,20,24 | 32:14,16,25,25 | found 7:7 10:14 | 50:12 |
| 52:17 53:3 | 26:4,9,12 38:14 | 33:9,19 46:2 47:2 | 12:13 14:9 51:15 | good 28:18 30:20 |
| energy 26:12 | 38:18,19,24 39:5 | 47:3 | 52:20 | 30:24 |
| enforcement 28:21 | 39:7,8,12,16 | felons 33:10 45:24 | four 50:15 | goodness 34:14 |
| 36:2 48:7 | 42:15,16,20,21 | 46:5,7 | fourth 43:25 44:2,5 | gotten 10:5 |
| engage 5:5 12:21 | 51:18,23 | felony 3:12,21 5:15 | 51:1,9 | govern 29:11 |
| engaged 40:17 | express 34:24 | 5:18 7:13 11:8 | framework 4:2 | governed 21:1 |
| enhancement 38:15 | extensive 4:22 | 20:25 22:3,7 25:4 | fraud 32:19 | government 6:13 |
| enhancements | extortion 30:2 | 31:18 32:18,19 | free 11:19 | 6:20 8:24 12:20 |
| 15:12 | 40:23,24 42:5,7,8 | 39:6,7,16 45:22 | frequent 6:18 15:8 | 14:23 17:10 18:6 |
| entire 5:21 14:19 | 42:9 | 46:13 47:8 50:25 | friend 29:20 | 28:6,12 37:14 |
| entitled 21:4 | extortionist 41:3 | final 40:6 | fruition 30:6,13 | 51:19 52:14 53:4 |
| entry 12:12 | extortionists 42:11 | finally 53:2 | full 46:11 | governments 6:3 |
| enumerated 3:15 | extraordinarily | fingerprint 37:13 | fully 7:19 | 7:22 14:19 |
| 3:17,23,25 19:14 | 37:22 | fingerprints 28:5 | fundamentally | governs 49:10 |
| 25:6,12 29:22 | | 28:11 | 46:13 | great 4:15 14:7 |
| 30:3 42:17 | <u>F</u> | fire 23:12 | further 5:23 12:3 | 29:23 48:3 51:14 |
| equally 20:19 | f 1:17 2:6 26:18 | firearm 4:20 5:25 | 31:4 50:13 53:15 | greater 15:9,11 |
| era 18:18 | facilities 26:13,13 | 6:1 10:10,19,21 | future 11:20 16:15 | ground 35:15 36:3 |
| especially 50:8 | fact 5:9 7:19 8:1 | 22:7 28:2 31:23 | 22:15 24:18 30:22 | grounded 22:14 |
| esq 1:15,17 2:3,6,9 | 9:4 11:14 12:25 | 32:22 34:11 41:5 | | gruender 18:1 |
| estimate 28:18 | 16:15 18:22 23:24 | 47:4 | <u>G</u> | guess 39:18 |
| estimated 28:24 | 24:20 25:15 26:11 | firearms 11:23 | g 3:1 | guidance 5:3,9 |
| | | | <u> </u> | |
| | | | | |

| | I | | I | I |
|---------------------------|-------------------------|---------------------------------------|----------------------------|---------------------|
| 25:12 51:14 | 17:6 | 38:3 42:12,12 | intrinsically 17:11 | 14:24 15:14,18 |
| guideline 4:9 51:5 | homeowner 30:9 | 45:21,25 47:24 | investigations | 16:1,22 17:25 |
| guidelines 4:6,21 | 41:12,19,22 42:4 | 49:19 51:1 | 52:21 | 18:7,25 19:11,13 |
| guilty 8:19 16:12 | honestly 32:25 | imagine 36:21 | invite 12:21 17:12 | 19:25 20:16 21:3 |
| gun 10:11,16 16:18 | honor 4:9,10,17 5:1 | 39:19 41:21 | invites 51:19 | 21:12 22:8,19 |
| 18:17 20:15 24:17 | 5:16 6:12 7:1,5,13 | imagining 12:3 | involve 16:17 | 23:8,16,20 25:5 |
| 28:13,23 31:13,14 | 7:18,23 8:7,17,20 | immediately 3:16 | involved 27:4,15,16 | 25:19,23 26:3,16 |
| 33:20 34:8 37:1 | 8:21,22 9:8,14,24 | implications 15:9 | 28:8 | 26:20 27:2,11,22 |
| 37:23 42:3 44:9 | 10:7,20,24 11:5 | important 3:18 5:9 | irresponsible 32:21 | 29:5,20 30:14 |
| 45:25 | 11:10,14 12:20 | 14:3 16:8 17:17 | 33:3 47:7 | 31:12 32:13,24 |
| guns 32:8 36:23 | 13:12,21 14:1,12 | 22:1,4 24:15 | irresponsibly 33:4 | 33:18 34:14,23 |
| 46:5,8 47:14 | 14:16 15:3,10,17 | 25:11,13 32:16 | isnt 36:25 40:19 | 35:11 36:6,10,14 |
| | 15:21,22 16:25 | 51:12 | 44:16 | 36:24,25 37:4,9 |
| H | 17:7,12 18:11 | impressionistic | issue 43:17,19,22 | 37:24 38:13,22 |
| hand 33:21 34:1,2 | 19:7,21 20:6 21:6 | 19:19 | item 10:1 16:25 | 39:1 40:16,25 |
| handgun 33:10 | 21:19 22:1,12 | include 20:10 42:7 | items 17:4,6 40:7 | 41:11,15,17 42:1 |
| 34:12,18 37:1 | 23:4 24:7,11 25:9 | 44:21 | ive 35:12 | 42:9,14,23 43:15 |
| 46:3 | 26:2,7,7 27:14 | included 4:11 | | 43:18,22 44:5,15 |
| handguns 39:24 | honors 12:1 14:1 | 25:17 51:24 | J | 44:25 45:1,21 |
| handle 47:10 | 16:8 26:15 51:12 | including 5:25 19:7 | james 1:3 5:4 9:2,4 | 46:6,15,20 47:22 |
| hands 28:25 | 52:1,12 53:2 | inclusive 26:10,11 | 12:6,6,25 24:19 | 47:25 48:8,12,15 |
| happen 12:4 41:12 | hope 35:9 46:4 | incorrect 15:22 | 35:5,7,12 38:5 | 48:18,24 49:2,8 |
| harder 44:23 | horribles 17:9 | increase 40:15 | 41:1 42:6 44:19 | 49:11,20 50:14,19 |
| harm 13:24 | house 35:18 | increases 6:10 40:8 | 45:9 49:7 51:13 | 50:21 53:17 |
| hasnt 38:10 | hunting 7:8 | incredibly 15:7 | 51:15 | justification 51:16 |
| havent 6:22 27:22 | hypothetical 11:2 | indicated 14:16 | john 1:17 2:6 26:18 | 51:17 |
| hear 3:3 40:12 | hypothetically 24:1 | 52:5 | johnson 1:3 3:4 | justify 8:25 |
| heard 34:15 | | inevitably 45:6 | 14:15 50:9 53:14 | |
| heavily 14:15 36:16 | I | infected 10:5 | judge 46:17,17 | K |
| held 3:17 49:6 | id 12:5 17:12 | infection 9:21 | 50:5 | kagan 6:2,19 16:22 |
| 50:24 51:4 | idea 13:10 | inherent 5:22,23 | judgment 21:4 23:1 | 29:20 30:14 31:12 |
| heller 27:1,19 31:9 | ideal 29:7 | 9:1 | 26:24 27:18,19,19 | 32:13,24 |
| 40:1 49:23 | identify 10:3 | inherently 11:3 | 29:12,13,13 32:17 | katherine 1:15 2:3 |
| help 22:2 49:15 | ill 48:2 | 17:11 39:8 52:2 | 32:18 33:13 35:6 | 2:9 3:7 50:17 |
| heres 7:2 34:10 | illegal 8:6 11:7 | injured 13:6,17 | 35:9,10,16,23 | keep 16:8 33:20 |
| hes 30:23 | 20:20 32:10 46:8 | injuries 14:8 | 36:3,7 46:10 47:3 | keepers 5:8 |
| highlighted 10:13 | 50:10 | injury 5:19 6:6,11 | 47:11,11,14 | kept 10:10,11,11 |
| highlights 4:23 | illegally 21:14 | 22:11,16,24 23:22 | judicial 37:7 | 30:25 |
| historical 47:16 | 37:15 | 31:4 43:2,8 46:2 | jurisprudence 9:2 | killed 40:9 |
| 52:6 | im 3:24 5:13 10:22 | instance 11:2,15 | 12:1 | kind 3:15,25 6:5,7 |
| historically 32:8 | 11:2 13:15,16 | 17:3 24:8 | justice 1:18 3:3,9 | 10:25 27:9 32:9 |
| 34:11 | 14:24 15:22 17:15 | intended 20:10 | 4:4 5:11,12,13,14 | 33:6 34:8 36:15 |
| history 25:15 35:18 | 19:6 20:9 21:12 | intended 20.10 intent 16:15 17:1,2 | 6:2,19 7:3,16 8:5 | 46:3 |
| 35:20 | 23:16,22 25:10 | interpretation 18:6 | 8:14 9:5,10,17 | know 9:17,19,22 |
| holding 49:10 | 26:1,2 30:8,16 | interpreted 43:10 | 10:2,17,21,23 | 14:24 16:3,6 |
| home 7:9 10:16 | 33:1 36:12,20 | intimidating 18:23 | 11:6,11 13:4,9,15 | 19:21 23:23 26:2 |
| | , | intimuating 10.23 | ,,-, | |
| | I | I | I | I |

| | • | • | i | |
|--|---|--|--|--|
| 32:19 34:19 36:12 | legislatures 18:8,12 | manipulated 14:7 | 40:18 45:5 51:18 | nerve 48:25 |
| 37:10,10,11,15 | 18:15 19:1,18 | manufacturer 29:6 | 51:24 52:18 | never 6:7 31:1,1 |
| 43:11,18 45:18,23 | 21:7,8 22:2 23:6 | manufacturers | merely 6:16 7:12 | 33:22 39:25 |
| 46:9 47:8 50:4,6 | 24:12 26:25 27:20 | 28:21 29:10 48:7 | 14:17 20:24 52:24 | nevertheless 33:10 |
| knowledge 34:25 | 29:13 35:23 36:7 | marijuanarelated | meth 27:17 | newspaper 50:7 |
| known 21:17 | 49:22 52:4 | 8:18 | michigan 18:13 | nexus 45:14 |
| knows 50:8 | legitimately 33:10 | marked 4:17 | 24:7 52:5 | nfa 38:19 39:12 |
| | length 14:6 | market 29:11 | miller 26:25 27:19 | 44:11 |
| L | lenity 53:4 | massively 40:14 | 40:2 49:23 | night 36:11,15 |
| lack 34:25 | lethal 18:22 | materialize 32:4 | million 28:24 | ninth 51:2 |
| lacks 53:9 | level 27:6 | materializes 41:6 | mind 16:9 18:13 | nonviolence 47:8 |
| language 3:16 | limit 13:2 | matter 1:11 30:17 | 41:9,24 | nonviolent 10:15 |
| 12:21 21:1 25:22 | line 8:2 34:10 43:3 | 43:7 46:6 53:20 | minimis 13:24,24 | 38:9 |
| 26:8 43:11 | 44:6 46:24 | matters 21:7,8 | minn 1:16 | normal 37:20 |
| laughter 34:22 | lines 34:8 | mattress 10:12 | minneapolis 1:16 | normally 42:25 |
| 48:13 | linking 45:11 | mean 15:14 16:1,23 | minnesota 16:7,9 | note 17:17 18:13 |
| law 14:23 24:9 28:3 | listed 19:14 51:23 | 20:9 31:2 32:7,25 | 17:7 19:7 23:5 | noted 12:8 |
| 28:20 31:10 32:25 | little 45:21 | 33:19 35:11 37:3 | 24:1 | notice 49:25 |
| 33:7 36:2 48:6 | locked 10:11,16 | 37:25 38:1,4 42:6 | minority 23:6 | november 1:9 |
| lawabiding 27:9 | 16:17 30:25 | 43:13 44:7 48:22 | 27:23 | nuclear 9:7 11:16 |
| 38:11 40:3 | logic 46:6 | 49:9 50:5 52:22 | minutes 50:15 | number 29:2,3 |
| lawbreakers 47:7 | long 7:20 8:3 15:4 | means 16:24 | money 34:3 | 37:24 42:11 48:4 |
| lawbreaking 35:19 | 27:20 | meant 51:22 | mortars 10:21,23 | numbers 13:5 33:1 |
| lawful 7:19 18:14 | longer 24:9 38:1 | members 28:10 | 47:12 | 37:22 |
| | 1011201 24.7 30.1 | IIICIIIDCI 5 20.10 | T/.14 | 31.44 |
| 29:7,14 31:11 | 44:23 52:7 | 35:22 | | |
| 29:7,14 31:11 38:7 40:2 42:16 | S | | motivated 20:6 24:20 | |
| 29:7,14 31:11 38:7 40:2 42:16 46:5 | 44:23 52:7 | 35:22 | motivated 20:6 | O o 2:1 3:1 |
| 29:7,14 31:11 38:7 40:2 42:16 46:5 lawfully 7:7 21:10 | 44:23 52:7 look 5:6 10:3 25:11 | 35:22 menendez 1:15 2:3 | motivated 20:6 24:20 | |
| 29:7,14 31:11 38:7 40:2 42:16 46:5 lawfully 7:7 21:10 28:17,19 29:4 | 44:23 52:7 look 5:6 10:3 25:11 27:13 39:22 43:23 | 35:22 menendez 1:15 2:3 2:9 3:6,7,9 4:9 | motivated 20:6 24:20 movies 35:12 | O o 2:1 3:1 obvious 52:15 obviously 15:10 |
| 29:7,14 31:11 38:7 40:2 42:16 46:5 lawfully 7:7 21:10 28:17,19 29:4 47:18 | 44:23 52:7 look 5:6 10:3 25:11 27:13 39:22 43:23 51:13 52:17 | 35:22 menendez 1:15 2:3 2:9 3:6,7,9 4:9 5:16 6:12,25 7:5 | motivated 20:6 24:20 movies 35:12 murder 17:25 myriad 10:12 | O o 2:1 3:1 obvious 52:15 obviously 15:10 24:8 44:1 |
| 29:7,14 31:11 38:7 40:2 42:16 46:5 lawfully 7:7 21:10 28:17,19 29:4 47:18 laws 36:4 | 44:23 52:7 look 5:6 10:3 25:11 27:13 39:22 43:23 51:13 52:17 looking 12:4 | 35:22 menendez 1:15 2:3 2:9 3:6,7,9 4:9 5:16 6:12,25 7:5 7:18 8:7,17 9:8,12 | motivated 20:6 24:20 movies 35:12 murder 17:25 myriad 10:12 N | O o 2:1 3:1 obvious 52:15 obviously 15:10 24:8 44:1 occasion 32:5 |
| 29:7,14 31:11 38:7 40:2 42:16 46:5 lawfully 7:7 21:10 28:17,19 29:4 47:18 laws 36:4 lead 22:11 | 44:23 52:7 look 5:6 10:3 25:11 27:13 39:22 43:23 51:13 52:17 looking 12:4 looks 40:4 | 35:22 menendez 1:15 2:3 2:9 3:6,7,9 4:9 5:16 6:12,25 7:5 7:18 8:7,17 9:8,12 9:24 10:7,19,22 | motivated 20:6 24:20 movies 35:12 murder 17:25 myriad 10:12 N n 2:1,1 3:1 | O o 2:1 3:1 obvious 52:15 obviously 15:10 24:8 44:1 occasion 32:5 occur 20:3 30:12 |
| 29:7,14 31:11 38:7 40:2 42:16 46:5 lawfully 7:7 21:10 28:17,19 29:4 47:18 laws 36:4 lead 22:11 leap 51:25 | 44:23 52:7 look 5:6 10:3 25:11 27:13 39:22 43:23 51:13 52:17 looking 12:4 looks 40:4 lose 34:7 | 35:22 menendez 1:15 2:3 2:9 3:6,7,9 4:9 5:16 6:12,25 7:5 7:18 8:7,17 9:8,12 9:24 10:7,19,22 10:24 11:9,12 | motivated 20:6 24:20 movies 35:12 murder 17:25 myriad 10:12 N n 2:1,1 3:1 napalm 39:13 | O o 2:1 3:1 obvious 52:15 obviously 15:10 24:8 44:1 occasion 32:5 occur 20:3 30:12 occurred 31:22 |
| 29:7,14 31:11 38:7 40:2 42:16 46:5 lawfully 7:7 21:10 28:17,19 29:4 47:18 laws 36:4 lead 22:11 leap 51:25 legal 8:3,11 22:4 | 44:23 52:7 look 5:6 10:3 25:11 27:13 39:22 43:23 51:13 52:17 looking 12:4 looks 40:4 lose 34:7 lost 47:9 | 35:22 menendez 1:15 2:3 2:9 3:6,7,9 4:9 5:16 6:12,25 7:5 7:18 8:7,17 9:8,12 9:24 10:7,19,22 10:24 11:9,12 13:8,11,20 15:2 | motivated 20:6 24:20 movies 35:12 murder 17:25 myriad 10:12 N n 2:1,1 3:1 napalm 39:13 narrowly 40:25 | O o 2:1 3:1 obvious 52:15 obviously 15:10 24:8 44:1 occasion 32:5 occur 20:3 30:12 |
| 29:7,14 31:11 38:7 40:2 42:16 46:5 lawfully 7:7 21:10 28:17,19 29:4 47:18 laws 36:4 lead 22:11 leap 51:25 legal 8:3,11 22:4 23:15 | 44:23 52:7 look 5:6 10:3 25:11 27:13 39:22 43:23 51:13 52:17 looking 12:4 looks 40:4 lose 34:7 lost 47:9 lot 35:12 45:7 | 35:22 menendez 1:15 2:3 2:9 3:6,7,9 4:9 5:16 6:12,25 7:5 7:18 8:7,17 9:8,12 9:24 10:7,19,22 10:24 11:9,12 13:8,11,20 15:2 15:16,21 16:2,24 | motivated 20:6 24:20 movies 35:12 murder 17:25 myriad 10:12 N n 2:1,1 3:1 napalm 39:13 narrowly 40:25 national 19:8 20:17 | O o 2:1 3:1 obvious 52:15 obviously 15:10 24:8 44:1 occasion 32:5 occur 20:3 30:12 occurred 31:22 odd 30:23 32:10 offended 31:22 |
| 29:7,14 31:11 38:7 40:2 42:16 46:5 lawfully 7:7 21:10 28:17,19 29:4 47:18 laws 36:4 lead 22:11 leap 51:25 legal 8:3,11 22:4 23:15 legally 7:6,25 15:20 | 44:23 52:7 look 5:6 10:3 25:11 27:13 39:22 43:23 51:13 52:17 looking 12:4 looks 40:4 lose 34:7 lost 47:9 lot 35:12 45:7 lots 6:23 | 35:22 menendez 1:15 2:3 2:9 3:6,7,9 4:9 5:16 6:12,25 7:5 7:18 8:7,17 9:8,12 9:24 10:7,19,22 10:24 11:9,12 13:8,11,20 15:2 15:16,21 16:2,24 18:11 19:5,12,21 | motivated 20:6 24:20 movies 35:12 murder 17:25 myriad 10:12 N n 2:1,1 3:1 napalm 39:13 narrowly 40:25 national 19:8 20:17 28:1 51:24 | O o 2:1 3:1 obvious 52:15 obviously 15:10 24:8 44:1 occasion 32:5 occur 20:3 30:12 occurred 31:22 odd 30:23 32:10 offended 31:22 offender 30:4,12 |
| 29:7,14 31:11 38:7 40:2 42:16 46:5 lawfully 7:7 21:10 28:17,19 29:4 47:18 laws 36:4 lead 22:11 leap 51:25 legal 8:3,11 22:4 23:15 legally 7:6,25 15:20 legislation 48:19 | 44:23 52:7 look 5:6 10:3 25:11 27:13 39:22 43:23 51:13 52:17 looking 12:4 looks 40:4 lose 34:7 lost 47:9 lot 35:12 45:7 lots 6:23 lower 3:19 27:1 48:3 | 35:22 menendez 1:15 2:3 2:9 3:6,7,9 4:9 5:16 6:12,25 7:5 7:18 8:7,17 9:8,12 9:24 10:7,19,22 10:24 11:9,12 13:8,11,20 15:2 15:16,21 16:2,24 18:11 19:5,12,21 20:5,22 21:6,19 | motivated 20:6 24:20 movies 35:12 murder 17:25 myriad 10:12 N n 2:1,1 3:1 napalm 39:13 narrowly 40:25 national 19:8 20:17 28:1 51:24 nationwide 16:3 | O o 2:1 3:1 obvious 52:15 obviously 15:10 24:8 44:1 occasion 32:5 occur 20:3 30:12 occurred 31:22 odd 30:23 32:10 offended 31:22 offender 30:4,12 31:23 41:9 |
| 29:7,14 31:11 38:7 40:2 42:16 46:5 lawfully 7:7 21:10 28:17,19 29:4 47:18 laws 36:4 lead 22:11 leap 51:25 legal 8:3,11 22:4 23:15 legally 7:6,25 15:20 legislation 48:19 49:12 | 44:23 52:7 look 5:6 10:3 25:11 27:13 39:22 43:23 51:13 52:17 looking 12:4 looks 40:4 lose 34:7 lost 47:9 lot 35:12 45:7 lots 6:23 lower 3:19 27:1 48:3 | 35:22 menendez 1:15 2:3 2:9 3:6,7,9 4:9 5:16 6:12,25 7:5 7:18 8:7,17 9:8,12 9:24 10:7,19,22 10:24 11:9,12 13:8,11,20 15:2 15:16,21 16:2,24 18:11 19:5,12,21 20:5,22 21:6,19 22:12 23:4,10,19 | motivated 20:6 24:20 movies 35:12 murder 17:25 myriad 10:12 N n 2:1,1 3:1 napalm 39:13 narrowly 40:25 national 19:8 20:17 28:1 51:24 nationwide 16:3 nature 14:9 32:23 | O o 2:1 3:1 obvious 52:15 obviously 15:10 24:8 44:1 occasion 32:5 occur 20:3 30:12 occurred 31:22 odd 30:23 32:10 offended 31:22 offender 30:4,12 31:23 41:9 offenders 20:14 |
| 29:7,14 31:11 38:7 40:2 42:16 46:5 lawfully 7:7 21:10 28:17,19 29:4 47:18 laws 36:4 lead 22:11 leap 51:25 legal 8:3,11 22:4 23:15 legally 7:6,25 15:20 legislation 48:19 49:12 legislative 25:15 | 44:23 52:7 look 5:6 10:3 25:11 27:13 39:22 43:23 51:13 52:17 looking 12:4 looks 40:4 lose 34:7 lost 47:9 lot 35:12 45:7 lots 6:23 lower 3:19 27:1 48:3 M m 1:13,15 2:3,9 3:2 | 35:22 menendez 1:15 2:3 2:9 3:6,7,9 4:9 5:16 6:12,25 7:5 7:18 8:7,17 9:8,12 9:24 10:7,19,22 10:24 11:9,12 13:8,11,20 15:2 15:16,21 16:2,24 18:11 19:5,12,21 20:5,22 21:6,19 22:12 23:4,10,19 23:24 25:9,21 | motivated 20:6 24:20 movies 35:12 murder 17:25 myriad 10:12 N n 2:1,1 3:1 napalm 39:13 narrowly 40:25 national 19:8 20:17 28:1 51:24 nationwide 16:3 nature 14:9 32:23 46:25 | O o 2:1 3:1 obvious 52:15 obviously 15:10 24:8 44:1 occasion 32:5 occur 20:3 30:12 occurred 31:22 odd 30:23 32:10 offended 31:22 offender 30:4,12 31:23 41:9 offenders 20:14 offense 3:20,24 |
| 29:7,14 31:11 38:7 40:2 42:16 46:5 lawfully 7:7 21:10 28:17,19 29:4 47:18 laws 36:4 lead 22:11 leap 51:25 legal 8:3,11 22:4 23:15 legally 7:6,25 15:20 legislation 48:19 49:12 legislative 25:15 35:17 37:6 | 44:23 52:7 look 5:6 10:3 25:11 27:13 39:22 43:23 51:13 52:17 looking 12:4 looks 40:4 lose 34:7 lost 47:9 lot 35:12 45:7 lots 6:23 lower 3:19 27:1 48:3 M m 1:13,15 2:3,9 3:2 3:7 50:17 53:19 | 35:22 menendez 1:15 2:3 2:9 3:6,7,9 4:9 5:16 6:12,25 7:5 7:18 8:7,17 9:8,12 9:24 10:7,19,22 10:24 11:9,12 13:8,11,20 15:2 15:16,21 16:2,24 18:11 19:5,12,21 20:5,22 21:6,19 22:12 23:4,10,19 23:24 25:9,21 26:1,6 50:15,17 | motivated 20:6 24:20 movies 35:12 murder 17:25 myriad 10:12 N n 2:1,1 3:1 napalm 39:13 narrowly 40:25 national 19:8 20:17 28:1 51:24 nationwide 16:3 nature 14:9 32:23 46:25 near 16:13 | O 2:1 3:1 obvious 52:15 obviously 15:10 24:8 44:1 occasion 32:5 occur 20:3 30:12 occurred 31:22 odd 30:23 32:10 offended 31:22 offender 30:4,12 31:23 41:9 offenders 20:14 offense 3:20,24 5:15,17 9:6 11:17 |
| 29:7,14 31:11 38:7 40:2 42:16 46:5 lawfully 7:7 21:10 28:17,19 29:4 47:18 laws 36:4 lead 22:11 leap 51:25 legal 8:3,11 22:4 23:15 legally 7:6,25 15:20 legislation 48:19 49:12 legislative 25:15 35:17 37:6 legislators 35:25 | 44:23 52:7 look 5:6 10:3 25:11 27:13 39:22 43:23 51:13 52:17 looking 12:4 looks 40:4 lose 34:7 lost 47:9 lot 35:12 45:7 lots 6:23 lower 3:19 27:1 48:3 M m 1:13,15 2:3,9 3:2 3:7 50:17 53:19 machine 32:8 36:22 | 35:22 menendez 1:15 2:3 2:9 3:6,7,9 4:9 5:16 6:12,25 7:5 7:18 8:7,17 9:8,12 9:24 10:7,19,22 10:24 11:9,12 13:8,11,20 15:2 15:16,21 16:2,24 18:11 19:5,12,21 20:5,22 21:6,19 22:12 23:4,10,19 23:24 25:9,21 26:1,6 50:15,17 50:19 | motivated 20:6 24:20 movies 35:12 murder 17:25 myriad 10:12 N n 2:1,1 3:1 napalm 39:13 narrowly 40:25 national 19:8 20:17 28:1 51:24 nationwide 16:3 nature 14:9 32:23 46:25 near 16:13 necessary 31:5 | O o 2:1 3:1 obvious 52:15 obviously 15:10 24:8 44:1 occasion 32:5 occur 20:3 30:12 occurred 31:22 odd 30:23 32:10 offended 31:22 offender 30:4,12 31:23 41:9 offenders 20:14 offense 3:20,24 5:15,17 9:6 11:17 12:4 14:10 17:19 |
| 29:7,14 31:11 38:7 40:2 42:16 46:5 lawfully 7:7 21:10 28:17,19 29:4 47:18 laws 36:4 lead 22:11 leap 51:25 legal 8:3,11 22:4 23:15 legally 7:6,25 15:20 legislation 48:19 49:12 legislative 25:15 35:17 37:6 legislators 35:25 45:20 | 44:23 52:7 look 5:6 10:3 25:11 27:13 39:22 43:23 51:13 52:17 looking 12:4 looks 40:4 lose 34:7 lost 47:9 lot 35:12 45:7 lots 6:23 lower 3:19 27:1 48:3 M m 1:13,15 2:3,9 3:2 3:7 50:17 53:19 machine 32:8 36:22 37:1 44:9 47:14 | 35:22 menendez 1:15 2:3 2:9 3:6,7,9 4:9 5:16 6:12,25 7:5 7:18 8:7,17 9:8,12 9:24 10:7,19,22 10:24 11:9,12 13:8,11,20 15:2 15:16,21 16:2,24 18:11 19:5,12,21 20:5,22 21:6,19 22:12 23:4,10,19 23:24 25:9,21 26:1,6 50:15,17 50:19 mere 3:11 4:2,11 | motivated 20:6 24:20 movies 35:12 murder 17:25 myriad 10:12 N n 2:1,1 3:1 napalm 39:13 narrowly 40:25 national 19:8 20:17 28:1 51:24 nationwide 16:3 nature 14:9 32:23 46:25 near 16:13 necessary 31:5 need 16:14 18:5 | O 2:1 3:1 obvious 52:15 obviously 15:10 24:8 44:1 occasion 32:5 occur 20:3 30:12 occurred 31:22 odd 30:23 32:10 offended 31:22 offender 30:4,12 31:23 41:9 offenders 20:14 offense 3:20,24 5:15,17 9:6 11:17 12:4 14:10 17:19 17:20 18:3 20:1 |
| 29:7,14 31:11 38:7 40:2 42:16 46:5 lawfully 7:7 21:10 28:17,19 29:4 47:18 laws 36:4 lead 22:11 leap 51:25 legal 8:3,11 22:4 23:15 legally 7:6,25 15:20 legislation 48:19 49:12 legislative 25:15 35:17 37:6 legislators 35:25 45:20 legislature 20:17 | 44:23 52:7 look 5:6 10:3 25:11 27:13 39:22 43:23 51:13 52:17 looking 12:4 looks 40:4 lose 34:7 lost 47:9 lot 35:12 45:7 lots 6:23 lower 3:19 27:1 48:3 M m 1:13,15 2:3,9 3:2 3:7 50:17 53:19 machine 32:8 36:22 37:1 44:9 47:14 majority 27:14 | 35:22 menendez 1:15 2:3 2:9 3:6,7,9 4:9 5:16 6:12,25 7:5 7:18 8:7,17 9:8,12 9:24 10:7,19,22 10:24 11:9,12 13:8,11,20 15:2 15:16,21 16:2,24 18:11 19:5,12,21 20:5,22 21:6,19 22:12 23:4,10,19 23:24 25:9,21 26:1,6 50:15,17 50:19 mere 3:11 4:2,11 5:22,24 8:25 | motivated 20:6 24:20 movies 35:12 murder 17:25 myriad 10:12 N n 2:1,1 3:1 napalm 39:13 narrowly 40:25 national 19:8 20:17 28:1 51:24 nationwide 16:3 nature 14:9 32:23 46:25 near 16:13 necessary 31:5 need 16:14 18:5 35:8 53:10 | O 2:1 3:1 obvious 52:15 obviously 15:10 24:8 44:1 occasion 32:5 occur 20:3 30:12 occurred 31:22 odd 30:23 32:10 offended 31:22 offender 30:4,12 31:23 41:9 offenders 20:14 offense 3:20,24 5:15,17 9:6 11:17 12:4 14:10 17:19 17:20 18:3 20:1 22:16 29:22 33:17 |
| 29:7,14 31:11 38:7 40:2 42:16 46:5 lawfully 7:7 21:10 28:17,19 29:4 47:18 laws 36:4 lead 22:11 leap 51:25 legal 8:3,11 22:4 23:15 legally 7:6,25 15:20 legislation 48:19 49:12 legislative 25:15 35:17 37:6 legislators 35:25 45:20 legislature 20:17 20:19 21:4 22:9 | 44:23 52:7 look 5:6 10:3 25:11 27:13 39:22 43:23 51:13 52:17 looking 12:4 looks 40:4 lose 34:7 lost 47:9 lot 35:12 45:7 lots 6:23 lower 3:19 27:1 48:3 M m 1:13,15 2:3,9 3:2 3:7 50:17 53:19 machine 32:8 36:22 37:1 44:9 47:14 majority 27:14 28:20 48:6 | 35:22 menendez 1:15 2:3 2:9 3:6,7,9 4:9 5:16 6:12,25 7:5 7:18 8:7,17 9:8,12 9:24 10:7,19,22 10:24 11:9,12 13:8,11,20 15:2 15:16,21 16:2,24 18:11 19:5,12,21 20:5,22 21:6,19 22:12 23:4,10,19 23:24 25:9,21 26:1,6 50:15,17 50:19 mere 3:11 4:2,11 5:22,24 8:25 10:24 11:22 12:9 | motivated 20:6 24:20 movies 35:12 murder 17:25 myriad 10:12 N n 2:1,1 3:1 napalm 39:13 narrowly 40:25 national 19:8 20:17 28:1 51:24 nationwide 16:3 nature 14:9 32:23 46:25 near 16:13 necessary 31:5 need 16:14 18:5 35:8 53:10 nefarious 52:11,15 | O 2:1 3:1 obvious 52:15 obviously 15:10 24:8 44:1 occasion 32:5 occur 20:3 30:12 occurred 31:22 odd 30:23 32:10 offended 31:22 offender 30:4,12 31:23 41:9 offenders 20:14 offense 3:20,24 5:15,17 9:6 11:17 12:4 14:10 17:19 17:20 18:3 20:1 22:16 29:22 33:17 38:14 39:10 41:8 |
| 29:7,14 31:11 38:7 40:2 42:16 46:5 lawfully 7:7 21:10 28:17,19 29:4 47:18 laws 36:4 lead 22:11 leap 51:25 legal 8:3,11 22:4 23:15 legally 7:6,25 15:20 legislation 48:19 49:12 legislative 25:15 35:17 37:6 legislators 35:25 45:20 legislature 20:17 20:19 21:4 22:9 22:10,21,22 23:6 | 44:23 52:7 look 5:6 10:3 25:11 27:13 39:22 43:23 51:13 52:17 looking 12:4 looks 40:4 lose 34:7 lost 47:9 lot 35:12 45:7 lots 6:23 lower 3:19 27:1 48:3 M m 1:13,15 2:3,9 3:2 3:7 50:17 53:19 machine 32:8 36:22 37:1 44:9 47:14 majority 27:14 28:20 48:6 making 5:2 23:9,17 | 35:22 menendez 1:15 2:3 2:9 3:6,7,9 4:9 5:16 6:12,25 7:5 7:18 8:7,17 9:8,12 9:24 10:7,19,22 10:24 11:9,12 13:8,11,20 15:2 15:16,21 16:2,24 18:11 19:5,12,21 20:5,22 21:6,19 22:12 23:4,10,19 23:24 25:9,21 26:1,6 50:15,17 50:19 mere 3:11 4:2,11 5:22,24 8:25 10:24 11:22 12:9 12:17 13:13 17:8 | motivated 20:6 24:20 movies 35:12 murder 17:25 myriad 10:12 N n 2:1,1 3:1 napalm 39:13 narrowly 40:25 national 19:8 20:17 28:1 51:24 nationwide 16:3 nature 14:9 32:23 46:25 near 16:13 necessary 31:5 need 16:14 18:5 35:8 53:10 nefarious 52:11,15 53:1 | O 2:1 3:1 obvious 52:15 obviously 15:10 24:8 44:1 occasion 32:5 occur 20:3 30:12 occurred 31:22 odd 30:23 32:10 offended 31:22 offender 30:4,12 31:23 41:9 offenders 20:14 offense 3:20,24 5:15,17 9:6 11:17 12:4 14:10 17:19 17:20 18:3 20:1 22:16 29:22 33:17 38:14 39:10 41:8 52:13 |
| 29:7,14 31:11 38:7 40:2 42:16 46:5 lawfully 7:7 21:10 28:17,19 29:4 47:18 laws 36:4 lead 22:11 leap 51:25 legal 8:3,11 22:4 23:15 legally 7:6,25 15:20 legislation 48:19 49:12 legislative 25:15 35:17 37:6 legislators 35:25 45:20 legislature 20:17 20:19 21:4 22:9 | 44:23 52:7 look 5:6 10:3 25:11 27:13 39:22 43:23 51:13 52:17 looking 12:4 looks 40:4 lose 34:7 lost 47:9 lot 35:12 45:7 lots 6:23 lower 3:19 27:1 48:3 M m 1:13,15 2:3,9 3:2 3:7 50:17 53:19 machine 32:8 36:22 37:1 44:9 47:14 majority 27:14 28:20 48:6 | 35:22 menendez 1:15 2:3 2:9 3:6,7,9 4:9 5:16 6:12,25 7:5 7:18 8:7,17 9:8,12 9:24 10:7,19,22 10:24 11:9,12 13:8,11,20 15:2 15:16,21 16:2,24 18:11 19:5,12,21 20:5,22 21:6,19 22:12 23:4,10,19 23:24 25:9,21 26:1,6 50:15,17 50:19 mere 3:11 4:2,11 5:22,24 8:25 10:24 11:22 12:9 12:17 13:13 17:8 17:15,19 24:9,14 | motivated 20:6 24:20 movies 35:12 murder 17:25 myriad 10:12 N n 2:1,1 3:1 napalm 39:13 narrowly 40:25 national 19:8 20:17 28:1 51:24 nationwide 16:3 nature 14:9 32:23 46:25 near 16:13 necessary 31:5 need 16:14 18:5 35:8 53:10 nefarious 52:11,15 | O 2:1 3:1 obvious 52:15 obviously 15:10 24:8 44:1 occasion 32:5 occur 20:3 30:12 occurred 31:22 odd 30:23 32:10 offended 31:22 offender 30:4,12 31:23 41:9 offenders 20:14 offense 3:20,24 5:15,17 9:6 11:17 12:4 14:10 17:19 17:20 18:3 20:1 22:16 29:22 33:17 38:14 39:10 41:8 |
| 29:7,14 31:11 38:7 40:2 42:16 46:5 lawfully 7:7 21:10 28:17,19 29:4 47:18 laws 36:4 lead 22:11 leap 51:25 legal 8:3,11 22:4 23:15 legally 7:6,25 15:20 legislation 48:19 49:12 legislative 25:15 35:17 37:6 legislators 35:25 45:20 legislature 20:17 20:19 21:4 22:9 22:10,21,22 23:6 | 44:23 52:7 look 5:6 10:3 25:11 27:13 39:22 43:23 51:13 52:17 looking 12:4 looks 40:4 lose 34:7 lost 47:9 lot 35:12 45:7 lots 6:23 lower 3:19 27:1 48:3 M m 1:13,15 2:3,9 3:2 3:7 50:17 53:19 machine 32:8 36:22 37:1 44:9 47:14 majority 27:14 28:20 48:6 making 5:2 23:9,17 | 35:22 menendez 1:15 2:3 2:9 3:6,7,9 4:9 5:16 6:12,25 7:5 7:18 8:7,17 9:8,12 9:24 10:7,19,22 10:24 11:9,12 13:8,11,20 15:2 15:16,21 16:2,24 18:11 19:5,12,21 20:5,22 21:6,19 22:12 23:4,10,19 23:24 25:9,21 26:1,6 50:15,17 50:19 mere 3:11 4:2,11 5:22,24 8:25 10:24 11:22 12:9 12:17 13:13 17:8 17:15,19 24:9,14 24:18,21,22 25:4 | motivated 20:6 24:20 movies 35:12 murder 17:25 myriad 10:12 N n 2:1,1 3:1 napalm 39:13 narrowly 40:25 national 19:8 20:17 28:1 51:24 nationwide 16:3 nature 14:9 32:23 46:25 near 16:13 necessary 31:5 need 16:14 18:5 35:8 53:10 nefarious 52:11,15 53:1 | O 2:1 3:1 obvious 52:15 obviously 15:10 24:8 44:1 occasion 32:5 occur 20:3 30:12 occurred 31:22 odd 30:23 32:10 offended 31:22 offender 30:4,12 31:23 41:9 offenders 20:14 offense 3:20,24 5:15,17 9:6 11:17 12:4 14:10 17:19 17:20 18:3 20:1 22:16 29:22 33:17 38:14 39:10 41:8 52:13 |

| | _ | _ | _ | |
|--|---|--|---|---|
| 3:25 4:8 19:14 | particular 3:20 | 27:7 28:16 29:19 | 32:14,16,25 33:9 | prior 17:20 20:10 |
| 20:8,11 25:12 | 48:16 | 31:19 32:2 33:2 | 33:19 34:21 36:22 | 26:9 |
| 31:13 | pass 33:7 | 37:18 38:6,8 | 37:21 38:7,9,14 | prison 51:10 |
| offered 13:21 | passed 19:22 | 44:12 | 38:14 39:2,10,14 | prisons 43:25 |
| officer 30:9 41:22 | passes 7:21 | pointed 25:5 38:10 | 40:19 42:16,25 | private 28:25 29:1 |
| oh 15:21 | pays 7:21 | points 8:23 37:17 | 43:3,4,10,25 44:9 | probably 37:14 |
| okay 44:6 45:22 | penalizes 25:1 | police 30:9 41:21 | 44:17,21,22 45:5 | problems 48:17 |
| old 52:6 | penalties 15:11 | pool 4:15 | 45:16,18,22,25 | process 37:20 |
| once 40:6 48:25 | people 7:11,16 10:4 | population 37:23 | 46:12,13,21 47:2 | processes 7:24 |
| onerous 53:7 | 13:6,17 15:5,10 | portion 16:5 | 47:20 49:25 50:11 | product 35:25 |
| opening 27:15 | 15:19,23 16:3 | pose 6:5,11,20 | 50:24 51:4,9,19 | proffered 16:16 |
| opinion 14:16 22:2 | 20:13 27:16 30:23 | 10:25 | 51:25 52:9,10,19 | 18:6 |
| 34:6,9 | 33:2 34:16 36:18 | position 5:21 8:23 | 52:22,23 | prohibit 24:9 |
| opponent 44:3 | 39:23,24 45:7,19 | 32:3 | possibility 22:15 | prohibited 25:20 |
| opportunity 53:16 | 47:11 52:19 53:8 | possess 7:17,19 | 26:4 31:21 41:2 | 25:23 |
| opposed 19:12 | percentage 13:24 | 20:15 22:22 25:24 | possible 5:12,14,17 | prohibiting 18:8 |
| opposing 13:22 | 20:2 | 33:22 43:5 46:5 | 24:17 34:4,5 | prohibition 18:18 |
| 17:13 51:7 | perfect 48:5 | 47:12 | 39:19 49:13 | proliferation 44:14 |
| oral 1:11 2:2,5 3:7 | permit 21:10 | possessed 10:4 | possibly 21:16 | proof 35:2 |
| 26:18 | permitted 8:22 | 11:24 14:20 16:14 | potential 5:19 | proper 4:1 5:5 |
| order 7:24 52:10 | persistent 20:14 | 21:10,13,15 24:4 | 22:24 23:21 29:23 | properly 16:11 |
| ordinary 12:21,25 | person 7:9 11:16 | 40:5 52:4,15,20 | 30:1,3 31:2 38:2 | 18:10 |
| 13:1 26:22 31:6 | 16:13,25 17:23 | 52:25 53:1 | power 17:3 | property 20:14 |
| 33:15 39:21,21 | 21:16 30:15,21,24 | possesses 9:7 21:17 | practical 45:4 | 41:1 42:10 |
| 40:13,13 41:23 | 32:21 41:1 42:10 | 47:4 | practice 33:12 | prophylactic 32:22 |
| 45:15 47:1 | 52:25 | possessing 6:16 | preceded 5:9 | 47:6 |
| outlaw 21:9 | persuaded 18:16 | 7:12 9:14 10:1 | precedes 3:16 | propose 48:19 |
| outlawed 27:23,24 | petitioner 1:4,16 | 14:17 15:6 16:17 | precise 9:13 | proposition 40:6 |
| outright 8:8 16:4 | 2:4,10 3:8 27:8 | 20:24 46:2 | precisely 14:2 | 42:23 43:9 |
| | 20 10 10 17 17 | | | |
| outside 44:16 | 38:10 40:12 47:15 | possession 3:11 4:2 | 29:25 | prosecuted 14:25 |
| overinclusive 18:5 | 50:18 | 4:6,11,12,19 5:15 | 29:25 predicate 3:20,24 | prosecuted 14:25 15:6 16:3 |
| | 50:18 photograph 28:5 | 4:6,11,12,19 5:15 5:17,18,22,25 6:4 | 29:25 predicate 3:20,24 20:8 32:11 | prosecuted 14:25 15:6 16:3 protect 21:24 |
| overinclusive 18:5 overt 12:11,18 | 50:18 photograph 28:5 28:12 37:13 | 4:6,11,12,19 5:15 5:17,18,22,25 6:4 6:8,10 8:3,8,11,15 | 29:25 predicate 3:20,24 20:8 32:11 predominant 43:6 | prosecuted 14:25 15:6 16:3 protect 21:24 prototypical 42:8 |
| overinclusive 18:5 overt 12:11,18 P | 50:18 photograph 28:5 28:12 37:13 phrase 39:2 | 4:6,11,12,19 5:15 5:17,18,22,25 6:4 6:8,10 8:3,8,11,15 8:25 9:6 10:25 | 29:25 predicate 3:20,24 20:8 32:11 predominant 43:6 prefer 24:3 | prosecuted 14:25 15:6 16:3 protect 21:24 prototypical 42:8 proven 47:6 |
| overinclusive 18:5 overt 12:11,18 | 50:18 photograph 28:5 28:12 37:13 phrase 39:2 physical 22:11,24 | 4:6,11,12,19 5:15 5:17,18,22,25 6:4 6:8,10 8:3,8,11,15 8:25 9:6 10:25 11:7,15,22 12:9 | 29:25 predicate 3:20,24 20:8 32:11 predominant 43:6 prefer 24:3 pregnant 31:21 | prosecuted 14:25 15:6 16:3 protect 21:24 prototypical 42:8 proven 47:6 provide 3:18 |
| overinclusive 18:5 overt 12:11,18 | 50:18 photograph 28:5 28:12 37:13 phrase 39:2 physical 22:11,24 23:21 43:1,8 | 4:6,11,12,19 5:15 5:17,18,22,25 6:4 6:8,10 8:3,8,11,15 8:25 9:6 10:25 11:7,15,22 12:9 12:17 13:6,13,18 | 29:25 predicate 3:20,24 20:8 32:11 predominant 43:6 prefer 24:3 pregnant 31:21 premise 31:5 | prosecuted 14:25 15:6 16:3 protect 21:24 prototypical 42:8 proven 47:6 provide 3:18 provided 5:4 14:23 |
| overinclusive 18:5 overt 12:11,18 P p 3:1 page 2:2 10:14 52:18 | 50:18 photograph 28:5 28:12 37:13 phrase 39:2 physical 22:11,24 23:21 43:1,8 pieces 10:23 47:12 | 4:6,11,12,19 5:15 5:17,18,22,25 6:4 6:8,10 8:3,8,11,15 8:25 9:6 10:25 11:7,15,22 12:9 12:17 13:6,13,18 13:18 14:25 15:1 | 29:25 predicate 3:20,24 20:8 32:11 predominant 43:6 prefer 24:3 pregnant 31:21 premise 31:5 present 12:13,14 | prosecuted 14:25 15:6 16:3 protect 21:24 prototypical 42:8 proven 47:6 provide 3:18 provided 5:4 14:23 15:22 39:16 |
| overinclusive 18:5 overt 12:11,18 P p 3:1 page 2:2 10:14 52:18 pages 38:17 | 50:18 photograph 28:5 28:12 37:13 phrase 39:2 physical 22:11,24 23:21 43:1,8 pieces 10:23 47:12 pipe 51:4 | 4:6,11,12,19 5:15 5:17,18,22,25 6:4 6:8,10 8:3,8,11,15 8:25 9:6 10:25 11:7,15,22 12:9 12:17 13:6,13,18 13:18 14:25 15:1 15:24 16:11,23 | 29:25 predicate 3:20,24 20:8 32:11 predominant 43:6 prefer 24:3 pregnant 31:21 premise 31:5 present 12:13,14 30:1 42:2 53:16 | prosecuted 14:25 15:6 16:3 protect 21:24 prototypical 42:8 proven 47:6 provide 3:18 provided 5:4 14:23 15:22 39:16 providing 25:12 |
| overinclusive 18:5 overt 12:11,18 P p 3:1 page 2:2 10:14 52:18 pages 38:17 parade 17:9 | 50:18 photograph 28:5 28:12 37:13 phrase 39:2 physical 22:11,24 23:21 43:1,8 pieces 10:23 47:12 pipe 51:4 pistol 36:15 37:1 | 4:6,11,12,19 5:15 5:17,18,22,25 6:4 6:8,10 8:3,8,11,15 8:25 9:6 10:25 11:7,15,22 12:9 12:17 13:6,13,18 13:18 14:25 15:1 15:24 16:11,23 17:4,6,8,19 18:9 | 29:25 predicate 3:20,24 20:8 32:11 predominant 43:6 prefer 24:3 pregnant 31:21 premise 31:5 present 12:13,14 30:1 42:2 53:16 presented 12:12 | prosecuted 14:25 15:6 16:3 protect 21:24 prototypical 42:8 proven 47:6 provide 3:18 provided 5:4 14:23 15:22 39:16 providing 25:12 provision 25:17 |
| overinclusive 18:5 overt 12:11,18 P p 3:1 page 2:2 10:14 52:18 pages 38:17 parade 17:9 parallel 42:1 | 50:18 photograph 28:5 28:12 37:13 phrase 39:2 physical 22:11,24 23:21 43:1,8 pieces 10:23 47:12 pipe 51:4 pistol 36:15 37:1 place 16:9 20:7 | 4:6,11,12,19 5:15 5:17,18,22,25 6:4 6:8,10 8:3,8,11,15 8:25 9:6 10:25 11:7,15,22 12:9 12:17 13:6,13,18 13:18 14:25 15:1 15:24 16:11,23 17:4,6,8,19 18:9 18:21 19:2 20:21 | 29:25 predicate 3:20,24 20:8 32:11 predominant 43:6 prefer 24:3 pregnant 31:21 premise 31:5 present 12:13,14 30:1 42:2 53:16 presented 12:12 19:10 24:18 | prosecuted 14:25 15:6 16:3 protect 21:24 prototypical 42:8 proven 47:6 provide 3:18 provided 5:4 14:23 15:22 39:16 providing 25:12 provision 25:17 38:15 51:6 |
| overinclusive 18:5 overt 12:11,18 P p 3:1 page 2:2 10:14 52:18 pages 38:17 parade 17:9 parallel 42:1 parameters 3:19 | 50:18 photograph 28:5 28:12 37:13 phrase 39:2 physical 22:11,24 23:21 43:1,8 pieces 10:23 47:12 pipe 51:4 pistol 36:15 37:1 place 16:9 20:7 places 10:12 33:21 | 4:6,11,12,19 5:15 5:17,18,22,25 6:4 6:8,10 8:3,8,11,15 8:25 9:6 10:25 11:7,15,22 12:9 12:17 13:6,13,18 13:18 14:25 15:1 15:24 16:11,23 17:4,6,8,19 18:9 18:21 19:2 20:21 22:6,7,10,11,23 | 29:25 predicate 3:20,24 20:8 32:11 predominant 43:6 prefer 24:3 pregnant 31:21 premise 31:5 present 12:13,14 30:1 42:2 53:16 presented 12:12 19:10 24:18 presents 5:19 9:15 | prosecuted 14:25 15:6 16:3 protect 21:24 prototypical 42:8 proven 47:6 provided 3:18 provided 5:4 14:23 15:22 39:16 providing 25:12 provision 25:17 38:15 51:6 provisions 53:7 |
| overinclusive 18:5 overt 12:11,18 P p 3:1 page 2:2 10:14 52:18 pages 38:17 parade 17:9 parallel 42:1 parameters 3:19 pardon 44:25 | 50:18 photograph 28:5 28:12 37:13 phrase 39:2 physical 22:11,24 23:21 43:1,8 pieces 10:23 47:12 pipe 51:4 pistol 36:15 37:1 place 16:9 20:7 places 10:12 33:21 plea 8:15 | 4:6,11,12,19 5:15 5:17,18,22,25 6:4 6:8,10 8:3,8,11,15 8:25 9:6 10:25 11:7,15,22 12:9 12:17 13:6,13,18 13:18 14:25 15:1 15:24 16:11,23 17:4,6,8,19 18:9 18:21 19:2 20:21 22:6,7,10,11,23 23:9,18,21 24:9 | 29:25 predicate 3:20,24 20:8 32:11 predominant 43:6 prefer 24:3 pregnant 31:21 premise 31:5 present 12:13,14 30:1 42:2 53:16 presented 12:12 19:10 24:18 presents 5:19 9:15 22:23 23:21 38:2 | prosecuted 14:25 15:6 16:3 protect 21:24 prototypical 42:8 proven 47:6 provide 3:18 provided 5:4 14:23 15:22 39:16 providing 25:12 provision 25:17 38:15 51:6 provisions 53:7 pulls 42:3 |
| p p 3:1 page 2:2 10:14 52:18 pages 38:17 parade 17:9 parallel 42:1 parameters 3:19 pardon 44:25 parity 42:19 | 50:18 photograph 28:5 28:12 37:13 phrase 39:2 physical 22:11,24 23:21 43:1,8 pieces 10:23 47:12 pipe 51:4 pistol 36:15 37:1 place 16:9 20:7 places 10:12 33:21 plea 8:15 pleaded 8:19 | 4:6,11,12,19 5:15 5:17,18,22,25 6:4 6:8,10 8:3,8,11,15 8:25 9:6 10:25 11:7,15,22 12:9 12:17 13:6,13,18 13:18 14:25 15:1 15:24 16:11,23 17:4,6,8,19 18:9 18:21 19:2 20:21 22:6,7,10,11,23 23:9,18,21 24:9 24:14,19,21,22 | 29:25 predicate 3:20,24 20:8 32:11 predominant 43:6 prefer 24:3 pregnant 31:21 premise 31:5 present 12:13,14 30:1 42:2 53:16 presented 12:12 19:10 24:18 presents 5:19 9:15 22:23 23:21 38:2 presumption 49:5 | prosecuted 14:25 15:6 16:3 protect 21:24 prototypical 42:8 proven 47:6 provide 3:18 provided 5:4 14:23 15:22 39:16 providing 25:12 provision 25:17 38:15 51:6 provisions 53:7 pulls 42:3 punish 52:9 |
| p p 3:1 page 2:2 10:14 52:18 pages 38:17 parade 17:9 parallel 42:1 parameters 3:19 part 12:11 21:4 | 50:18 photograph 28:5 28:12 37:13 phrase 39:2 physical 22:11,24 23:21 43:1,8 pieces 10:23 47:12 pipe 51:4 pistol 36:15 37:1 place 16:9 20:7 places 10:12 33:21 plea 8:15 pleaded 8:19 pleas 8:19 | 4:6,11,12,19 5:15 5:17,18,22,25 6:4 6:8,10 8:3,8,11,15 8:25 9:6 10:25 11:7,15,22 12:9 12:17 13:6,13,18 13:18 14:25 15:1 15:24 16:11,23 17:4,6,8,19 18:9 18:21 19:2 20:21 22:6,7,10,11,23 23:9,18,21 24:9 24:14,19,21,22 25:4,8,14,18,20 | 29:25 predicate 3:20,24 20:8 32:11 predominant 43:6 prefer 24:3 pregnant 31:21 premise 31:5 present 12:13,14 30:1 42:2 53:16 presented 12:12 19:10 24:18 presents 5:19 9:15 22:23 23:21 38:2 presumption 49:5 pretty 33:5 38:20 | prosecuted 14:25 15:6 16:3 protect 21:24 prototypical 42:8 proven 47:6 provided 3:18 provided 5:4 14:23 15:22 39:16 providing 25:12 provision 25:17 38:15 51:6 provisions 53:7 pulls 42:3 punish 52:9 purchase 7:25 29:1 |
| overinclusive 18:5 overt 12:11,18 P p 3:1 page 2:2 10:14 52:18 pages 38:17 parade 17:9 parallel 42:1 parameters 3:19 pardon 44:25 parity 42:19 part 12:11 21:4 24:25 | 50:18 photograph 28:5 28:12 37:13 phrase 39:2 physical 22:11,24 23:21 43:1,8 pieces 10:23 47:12 pipe 51:4 pistol 36:15 37:1 place 16:9 20:7 places 10:12 33:21 plea 8:15 pleaded 8:19 pleas 8:19 please 3:10 26:21 | 4:6,11,12,19 5:15 5:17,18,22,25 6:4 6:8,10 8:3,8,11,15 8:25 9:6 10:25 11:7,15,22 12:9 12:17 13:6,13,18 13:18 14:25 15:1 15:24 16:11,23 17:4,6,8,19 18:9 18:21 19:2 20:21 22:6,7,10,11,23 23:9,18,21 24:9 24:14,19,21,22 25:4,8,14,18,20 26:22,23 27:3,25 | 29:25 predicate 3:20,24 20:8 32:11 predominant 43:6 prefer 24:3 pregnant 31:21 premise 31:5 present 12:13,14 30:1 42:2 53:16 presented 12:12 19:10 24:18 presents 5:19 9:15 22:23 23:21 38:2 presumption 49:5 pretty 33:5 38:20 51:20 | prosecuted 14:25 15:6 16:3 protect 21:24 prototypical 42:8 proven 47:6 provide 3:18 provided 5:4 14:23 15:22 39:16 providing 25:12 provision 25:17 38:15 51:6 provisions 53:7 pulls 42:3 punish 52:9 purchase 7:25 29:1 purchased 7:6,16 |
| p p 3:1 page 2:2 10:14 52:18 pages 38:17 parade 17:9 parallel 42:1 parameters 3:19 part 12:11 21:4 | 50:18 photograph 28:5 28:12 37:13 phrase 39:2 physical 22:11,24 23:21 43:1,8 pieces 10:23 47:12 pipe 51:4 pistol 36:15 37:1 place 16:9 20:7 places 10:12 33:21 plea 8:15 pleaded 8:19 pleas 8:19 | 4:6,11,12,19 5:15 5:17,18,22,25 6:4 6:8,10 8:3,8,11,15 8:25 9:6 10:25 11:7,15,22 12:9 12:17 13:6,13,18 13:18 14:25 15:1 15:24 16:11,23 17:4,6,8,19 18:9 18:21 19:2 20:21 22:6,7,10,11,23 23:9,18,21 24:9 24:14,19,21,22 25:4,8,14,18,20 | 29:25 predicate 3:20,24 20:8 32:11 predominant 43:6 prefer 24:3 pregnant 31:21 premise 31:5 present 12:13,14 30:1 42:2 53:16 presented 12:12 19:10 24:18 presents 5:19 9:15 22:23 23:21 38:2 presumption 49:5 pretty 33:5 38:20 | prosecuted 14:25 15:6 16:3 protect 21:24 prototypical 42:8 proven 47:6 provided 3:18 provided 5:4 14:23 15:22 39:16 providing 25:12 provision 25:17 38:15 51:6 provisions 53:7 pulls 42:3 punish 52:9 purchase 7:25 29:1 |

purportedly 44:20 40:12 47:15 53:2 respondent 1:19 satisfies 4:3 regulation 28:7 purpose 7:8.8 reason 4:24 7:11 regulations 8:4.9 2:7 satisfy 6:1 21:2 12:24 14:21 52:11 related 50:21 response 6:13 32:11 9:1 21:16 22:9,21 purposeful 14:10 22:25 23:8,17 relationship 29:22 responsibly 47:9 saturday 36:11,15 16:19 30:21 50:5 52:16 29:24,25 rest 26:14 sawedoff 9:23 purposes 6:5 26:5 reasonable 19:16 relative 37:23 result 12:4 13:6 20:21 22:22 26:23 20:17 36:2 15:12 20:4 45:9 27:21 31:11,15 relevant 38:5.7 27:10 29:3,16 49:3 52:12 33:15 46:5 53:1 reasoning 39:10 revealed 32:20 30:15 33:1,16,25 put 26:8 28:23 32:3 rely 35:8 42:19 51:20 revising 48:19 34:3,7,13 37:21 34:24 reasons 38:12 relying 19:9 29:21 rifle 44:10 38:7 39:20 45:17 **rebuttal** 2:8 26:15 remainder 8:10 **rifles** 47:13 46:12 47:13,20 Q remaining 50:16 **right** 6:19 11:8 50:11 50:17 qualify 5:15,18 9:6 recidivism 33:6 remains 14:2 22:5 31:13 34:4 saying 6:7 23:14,15 9:7,11,13 recognition 24:11 **remember** 8:6 12:6 34:14 44:6,16 23:16 35:18 36:20 qualitative 3:18 recognize 22:4 41.14 **rights** 18:20 says 13:17 22:19,19 quantitative 3:19 recognized 39:25 reminded 25:10 risk 3:14 4:1 5:19 34:2,6 38:23 **question** 3:24 4:2 recognizing 33:23 removed 17:9 5:22,23 6:6,10,11 41:18 6:20 7:10.12 8:10 recollection 44:3 rendered 33:13,14 9:15,19,20 10:25 scalia 7:3,16 40:25 8:14,21 12:3,8 record 36.9 repeat 20:14 22:20 12:12.14 14:13 scalias 42:9 14:1 22:5,13,13 scenarios 41:21 redundancy 39:3 40:11 22:11,24 23:21 22:20 24:5 38:4 39:17 repeatedly 3:17 24:18 31:3 38:2 science 10:8 44:18 46:1 50:21 redundant 14:11 **reply** 10:14 27:12 40:18,19 42:3 **second** 34:15 40:17 53:13 27:15 52:18 reference 13:22 43:1 46:1,18,18 section 25:1 questions 50:13 reflected 28:2 reports 35:18 risks 43:1 see 10:5 15:5,5 16:1 53:15 reflective 32:6 reputation 18:17 risky 16:19 26:14 29:17 40:23 quite 15:4 47:3 reflects 28:2 32:17 18:21 52:6 road 50:2 44:13 46:14 53:7 **quote** 50:5 robberies 36:16 47:3.5 require 21:23 seen 35:12 refute 29:12 47:19 required 24:21,23 50:10 sees 28:15 R refuted 47:16 requirement 21:20 robbers 28:10 selfdefense 29:8.18 r 3·1 requires 12:2 14:19 regardless 8:8 robbery 20:7 30:24 33:12 39:20 raised 29:20 **regime** 27:10 22:15 roberts 3:3 26:16 39:25 raises 27:11 **senate** 35:18 register 21:15 research 8:1 28:23 37:9,24 38:13,22 rampant 13:2,2 registered 7:7,20 reserve 26:14 39:1 40:16 41:11 sense 14:14 19:20 ranging 17:25 15:7 16:11 18:10 41:15 42:1 47:22 reserved 44:18 30:4 31:16 32:6 ranked 4.7 residual 3:13 12:14 32:22 35:9,10,16 21:11,24 28:18,19 47:25 48:8,12 rare 5:17 28:14 29:4 37:11,22 16:20 19:22 21:1 50:14 53:17 45:20 47:19 reach 20:18 48:6 22:14,14 24:14 rocket 11:7.12 sentencing 4:6,11 reached 4:21 23:7 registration 21:20 25:13 42:22 48:16 4:16,18,24 5:2,6 rockets 11:6 27:1 27:25 48:20 **role** 5:7 46:11 49:2,15 readily 18:3 registrations 8:12 resort 18:5 rule 50:4 53:3 51:5 53:7 reads 50:7 8:13 29:16 38:1 resources 49:14,20 run 38:16,21 separate 31:12 real 40:4,5 47:18 48:4 respect 7:13 9:14 serious 5:19 6:11 realize 49:8 S regular 6:18 34:19 12:24 17:10 18:19 17:23 18:3 22:24 realized 34:23 s 2:1 3:1 regulate 18:16 19:16 20:20 21:5 23:21 26:24 27:16 really 30:17 33:16 safe 10:11,16 30:25 regulated 35:21 42:20 50:20 31:4 38:2 43:1 36:5,16 38:10 samuel 1:3 3:4 38:18 39:12 respectfully 5:20 50:1

| | | _ | _ | |
|----------------------------|----------------------------------|----------------------|-------------------------------------|--------------------|
| seriously 40:8 | simply 11:24,24 | 20:19 21:21 25:24 | suggest 44:7 | 15:7,14 17:6 |
| serve 7:7 | 14:22 16:18 | 26:25 27:6,20 | suggested 42:6 | 21:12 22:23,25 |
| service 28:23 | single 52:22 | 29:13 35:17,23,25 | 48:25 | 23:14 25:9 26:6 |
| serving 5:7 | situations 31:20 | 49:22 | suggesting 23:22 | 27:2 28:6 30:19 |
| set 3:15 35:16 | slightly 32:17 | states 1:1,6,12 3:5 | suggestion 23:5 | 32:15 33:8 35:20 |
| 39:11 40:10 42:19 | small 29:3 37:22 | 7:20 8:2,5,8,10 | suggests 17:10 | 36:8 37:10 40:4 |
| setting 44:1 | smaller 7:9 | 16:4 18:20 20:3 | superstition 35:25 | 40:16 41:19,23 |
| sexual 27:17 | solely 29:21 | 21:9,24 26:4,19 | support 7:14 | 42:17 43:7,8,9 |
| shaw 50:6 | solicitor 1:17 | 27:24 29:6 34:16 | supported 14:22,23 | 45:3,19,23 48:4 |
| shoot 30:16,18 | somebody 7:21 | 44:19 | supports 6:16 | 49:9,18 50:11 |
| 41:13 | 10:5 16:12 21:15 | statistic 9:22,23 | suppose 41:20 | theory 34:8 |
| shoots 41:22 | 31:23 32:1 34:1,2 | 13:16 15:2,22 | supreme 1:1,12 | theres 6:3,15 7:14 |
| shortbarreled 3:11 | somewhat 11:20 | 48:1 | 43:13 | 8:7 11:21 23:5,10 |
| 4:3,6,12,13 5:25 | 18:21 24:2 | statistical 14:12 | sure 11:2 25:21 | 33:5 37:17 38:6 |
| 6:17 7:4,19 11:23 | sorry 3:24 5:13 | 19:23 49:13,16,20 | 26:2 33:1 38:3 | 39:3,17 43:23,24 |
| 12:23 13:7,13,23 | 10:22 14:24 17:15 | statistics 6:23 7:22 | 45:25 51:2 | 44:2,5,8,23 45:1,2 |
| 15:1,6 17:16 18:9 | 20:9 47:24 51:1 | 13:8,12,21 19:9 | surely 41:22 | 45:7,16 49:24 |
| 18:10 19:3 24:10 | sort 11:17 12:12 | 19:13 20:2 27:7 | surprise 50:9 | 51:8 |
| 25:2 31:10 41:12 | 16:18 19:15,18,18 | 45:25 49:3,4 50:3 | surprised 8:1 44:8 | theyre 13:5 16:6 |
| 44:9,11 52:8 | 27:6 28:17 29:10 | 53:5 | suspect 9:24 | 21:20,22 33:2,5 |
| shotgun 3:11 4:3,7 | 29:21 32:6 35:24 | stature 7:9 | suspect 5.24 sykes 5:4 14:4 35:7 | 34:5 39:13 |
| 4:12,13 6:17 7:4 | 37:19 38:11 40:10 | statute 11:1 12:8 | Syrcs 5.7 17.7 55.7 | theyve 35:20 47:8 |
| 7:20 11:23 12:23 | 41:7,23 42:8 45:6 | 12:11 16:7 23:2 | T | thing 9:13 10:18 |
| 13:7,13 15:6 18:9 | 45:8,19 46:16 | 32:17 33:24 38:23 | t 2:1,1 | 19:16,18 24:17 |
| 18:10 19:3 20:21 | 47:5 49:19 | 38:23 39:16 41:18 | take 4:5 6:7 30:4,12 | 31:3 36:11 43:4 |
| 22:22 24:10 25:2 | sorts 25:16 28:14 | 41:20,24 43:2,5,8 | 40:19 41:4 | 46:10 |
| 26:23 27:10 30:15 | sotomayor 5:11,13 | 47:3 51:21 53:8 | talk 36:1 38:17 | things 25:16 28:17 |
| 33:16,25 34:3,7 | 8:5,14 14:24 | statutes 35:17,17 | talking 11:1 15:19 | 34:4 36:18 39:14 |
| 34:13 37:21 38:7 | 15:14,18 16:1 | statutory 31:19 | 15:23 21:13 24:25 | 43:6 51:23 |
| 41:12 45:17 46:12 | 27:2,11,22 36:24 | 49:10 | 47:23 | think 5:10 6:9 7:1 |
| 47:20 49:25 50:11 | 44:25 45:21 46:15 | step 31:4 40:7,17 | target 33:12 | 7:14 8:21 9:1,8,12 |
| 52:8 | 46:20 | 40:20 41:4,5,9 | tax 7:22 | 10:24 11:1,14,21 |
| shotguns 9:23 | speak 35:1 36:1 | stop 34:14 | television 50:7 | 14:1,5,14 18:8,14 |
| 13:23 15:1,20 | 53:12 | strategy 29:11 | ten 48:10 | 18:25 19:5,11 |
| 17:16 28:25 29:3 | special 36:11,15 | strong 6:3 19:2 | tens 7:23 | 20:1,6,11 21:3,8 |
| 29:16 31:10 33:1 | specifically 19:14 | 23:11 33:6 51:18 | term 26:9 36:13 | 22:1,9,12,13 23:5 |
| 39:20 44:12 47:13 | 20:9 | submission 11:8 | terms 51:17 | 23:10 24:4,11,12 |
| shouldnt 29:12 | speculation 8:22 | submitted 53:18,20 | terrorism 11:17 | 24:15 26:3,6 |
| show 45:25 | 12:22 13:2,3 | substantial 9:15 | terrorists 28:10 | 27:18 28:1,14 |
| show 43.23 shown 33:3,3 | spike 29:15 | 10:25 12:22 22:18 | test 4:3 | 29:4,10,20,23,24 |
| sides 5:20 | squarely 31:24 | substantiate 52:16 | textual 51:15,17 | 30:14,24 32:13,15 |
| signal 51:18 | standard 23:25 | substantiated 6:14 | 53:5 | 32:16,22,24 33:8 |
| silencer 44:10 | standard 25:25 standing 48:22 | substitute 33:24 | thank 26:15,16 | 33:16 34:20 35:9 |
| similar 3:14,14,23 | standing 46.22 | suddenly 29:18 | 50:14,19 53:17 | 35:15,21 36:5,8 |
| 3:24 4:1 36:22 | state 8:11 16:6 18:8 | suffer 15:11 | thats 11:3,8,9,11 | 37:6,12,17 38:16 |
| simple 43:10 | 18:12,14 19:1 | sufficient 12:14 | 13:15 14:11,21 | 38:25 39:17,19 |
| Simple 73.10 | 10.12,17 17.1 | Summerche 12.17 | , | 30.23 37.17,17 |
| | <u> </u> | 1 | ı | <u> </u> |

| 40:21 41:25 42:5 | 18:24 20:10 | unlawfully 39:9,23 | violent 3:12,21 | 45:4 |
|----------------------------|-----------------------|--------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|
| 42:24 43:20,24 | trouble 31:8 | 39:24 40:5 47:12 | 5:15,18,23 6:6 | wednesday 1:9 |
| 44:11,19,22 45:3 | true 32:14 37:10,15 | unregistered 4:12 | 7:13 11:8 14:10 | weighs 14:14 |
| 45:3,8,14,15,16 | 45:3 52:1 | unrelated 51:21 | 16:19 17:16 20:1 | went 24:5 51:8 |
| 45:19 46:6,19,24 | trunk 10:16 | unstated 51:21 | 20:25 22:3,7 25:3 | weve 10:13 16:16 |
| 47:2,5,10,14,17 | trusted 32:21 | untouched 11:4 | 31:18 32:19 47:1 | 35:16 39:11 40:9 |
| 48:3,24 49:9,18 | try 10:3 | upstairs 33:20 | 50:25 | 42:19 43:16 51:3 |
| 49:18,24 50:9 | two 4:23 17:17,20 | use 6:4,10,18 7:4 | volition 30:5,13 | whats 6:21 34:8 |
| 51:10,12,14,25 | 17:23 20:8,8 27:8 | 16:15 19:3 22:20 | | whatsoever 12:25 |
| 52:3 | 31:12 37:17 38:4 | 25:7,14 26:9,12 | W | widely 22:4 |
| thinking 13:16,16 | 50:10 | 29:8,18 31:2,3,13 | want 21:17 23:23 | willing 28:4 37:12 |
| thinks 37:19 | twofold 6:13 | 31:24,25 33:4,11 | 28:16 33:10 38:3 | 41:3 |
| thought 23:20 | types 23:12,13 | 33:22 35:13 37:14 | 46:16 49:21 | win 34:7 |
| thousand 47:18 | typically 31:10 | 38:23 39:5,6,7,15 | wanted 20:13 26:9 | won 43:16,16,18 |
| 48:1,9,10,14 | | 39:16,21 40:2,5 | 29:19 | wont 40:11 |
| thousands 7:23 | U | 42:16,21 43:3,6 | wants 30:22 | word 23:2 48:9 |
| threat 41:1,4 42:10 | unanimous 52:2 | 45:1,2 46:4,7 | washington 1:8,18 | words 22:20 23:2 |
| 42:12,13 | unarmed 20:13 | 51:17,23 | wasnt 29:5 31:17 | 33:24 44:10 |
| threatened 31:25 | unaware 19:6,8 | useful 14:6 | 51:15,19 | work 31:19 37:2,5 |
| tie 24:16 | 21:20,22 | uses 12:20 23:2 | watches 50:7 | 37:6 |
| tied 17:11 | uncertainty 35:3,5 | 29:14 30:15 | water 53:11 | working 49:14 |
| tighter 45:14,16 | unclearly 39:4 | | way 6:15 19:19 | world 40:4,5 |
| time 15:4 26:15 | unconstitutionally | V | 24:19 28:22 40:4 | wouldnt 6:24 7:2 |
| 27:20 | 53:10 | v 1:5 3:4 | 43:1 51:8 | 8:25 11:7 18:5 |
| times 10:5 | undergo 28:6,7 | vague 53:10 | weapon 5:24 7:12 | wounded 40:9 |
| title 25:1 51:22 | underlying 27:4 | vanishingly 29:3 | 9:11,20 10:14,18 | wrap 39:18 |
| tnt 39:8,14,15 | 41:8 49:16 | varieties 28:25 | 11:16 16:12 17:19 | write 34:6 |
| today 17:21 18:22 | underscore 44:12 | vast 27:14 28:20 | 17:24 18:21 19:3 | |
| tools 12:9,17 24:21 | understand 6:2 | verify 27:18 | 19:10 20:25 21:10 | X |
| 44:15,16,17,22 | 35:3 46:15,23 | view 42:9 | 21:18,23 24:2,22 | x 1:2,7 |
| 45:2,5,5,11 | understanding | viewed 36:17 | 25:2 32:8,10 | Y |
| torpedo 34:19,21 | 23:7 47:16 | vincent 18:1 | 40:10 42:21 43:25 | |
| torpedoes 47:13 | unintentionally | violating 16:5 | 50:24 51:9 52:6,9 | year 15:11,15,16 |
| total 31:16 37:23 | 9:21 10:6 | violation 12:10 | 52:25 | 18:13 53:9 |
| 48:4 | uniquely 7:15 | 16:4 | weaponized 39:12 | years 3:22 14:16 |
| totally 51:21 | 47:17 | violative 24:14 | 42:20 | youd 10:3 39:1 |
| traditional 5:7 | united 1:1,6,12 3:4 | violence 4:13,20 | weapons 7:6,25 | youre 28:4,8 30:17 |
| transportation | 20:3 21:9 26:19 | 9:1 11:13 17:24 | 10:4 13:24 14:20 | 31:14 37:12,14 |
| 26:13 | universe 10:4 39:19 | 20:4 25:3 29:23 | 17:19 18:16,23 | 40:17 42:2 44:13 |
| treated 6:9 | unjustifiable 52:3 | 30:1,3,5,13 31:21 | 24:3,12,13 29:7 | 45:11 47:22,23 |
| treating 51:16 | unlawful 20:25 | 31:22 32:4,4 | 29:14,17 33:4,14 | 50:20 |
| tried 36:18 39:5 | 22:6,7,10,21,25 | 34:12 41:1,2,6,8 | 35:18 36:7,21 | youve 9:18 43:18 |
| tries 52:14 | 23:9,11 27:21 | 41:15,18,20,23 | 38:20 39:13,21 | $\overline{\mathbf{z}}$ |
| trigger 11:18 12:14 | 34:17,21 36:22 | 42:3,13 45:17,18 | 46:24 52:3,20 | |
| 18:3 | 38:8 39:14,15 | 45:23 46:22 47:5 | wed 36:21 37:2,5 | 0 |
| triggering 15:24 | 47:19 49:25 | 51:5 | 38:16,20 44:22 | 000 7:5 15:19,19 |
| | | | | ĺ |
| | | | | |

| | | | Page 64 |
|---------------------------|------------------------|--|---------|
| 28:19 29:2,2 | 6 | | |
| | | | |
| 34:16 37:10,25 | 63:22 | | |
| 47:23 48:3 | 600 15:10,15,16 | | |
| 04 1:13 3:2 | 53:8 | | |
| 1 | 674 4:10 | | |
| 1 31:24 | 7 | | |
| 10 8:8 34:16 | | | |
| 100 37:25 | 8 | | |
| 11 1:13 3:2 53:19 | 8 27:1 | | |
| 11a 31:18 | 82 28:24 | | |
| 137120 1:5 3:4 | 9 | | |
| 14 10:13,14 17:22 | | | |
| 27:11 52:17,18 | 924 25:1,1 | | |
| 140 28:19 48:3 | | | |
| 16 17:14 | | | |
| 18 25:1 | | | |
| 19 21:11 | | | |
| 1934 18:15 19:9 | | | |
| 47:18 48:4 | | | |
| 1986 25:15 | | | |
| 1991 4:17 | | | |
| 2 | | | |
| | | | |
| 2 31:17 32:2,5 | | | |
| 200 7:22 | | | |
| 2004 4:10 5:2 51:3 | | | |
| 2012 28:23 | | | |
| 2014 1:9 | | | |
| 26 2:7 51:22 | | | |
| 3 | | | |
| 3 2:4 | | | |
| 35 15:19 | | | |
| 4 | | | |
| 40 7:5 15:19 29:2 | | | |
| 34:16 37:10 47:23 | | | |
| 433 4:18 | | | |
| 47 38:17 | | | |
| 48 38:17 | | | |
| JO.1/ | | | |
| 5 | | | |
| 5 1:9 | | | |
| 50 2:10 29:2 | | | |
| 59 53:19 | | | |
| | | | |
| | | | |
| | | | |