1	IN THE SUPREME COURT OF THE UNITED STATES
2	x
3	EXPRESSIONS HAIR DESIGN, :
4	ET AL., :
5	Petitioners : No. 15-1391
6	v. :
7	ERIC T. SCHNEIDERMAN, ATTORNEY :
8	GENERAL OF NEW YORK, ET AL. :
9	Respondents. :
10	x
11	Washington, D.C.
12	Tuesday, January 10, 2017
13	
13 14	The above-entitled matter came on for oral
	The above-entitled matter came on for oral argument before the Supreme Court of the United States
14	
14 15	argument before the Supreme Court of the United States
14 15 16	argument before the Supreme Court of the United States at 10:04 a.m.
14 15 16 17	argument before the Supreme Court of the United States at 10:04 a.m. APPEARANCES:
14 15 16 17	argument before the Supreme Court of the United States at 10:04 a.m. APPEARANCES: DEEPAK GUPTA, ESQ., Washington, D.C.; on behalf
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1	PROCEEDINGS
2	(10:04 a.m.)
3	CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: We will hear
4	argument first this morning in Case 15-1391, Expressions
5	Hair Design v. Schneiderman.
6	Mr. Gupta.
7	ORAL ARGUMENT OF DEEPAK GUPTA
8	ON BEHALF OF THE PETITIONERS
9	MR. GUPTA: Mr. Chief Justice, and may it
10	please the Court:
11	This case is about whether the State may
12	criminalize truthful speech that merchants believe is
13	their most effective way of communicating the hidden
14	cost of credit cards to their customers.
15	By design, New York's law suppresses the
16	message that you pay more
17	JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: I'm sorry. I I
18	you're two groups of of Petitioners. One wants to
19	just give a cash price without any information about the
20	surcharge, and the other, I thought, wanted to give two
21	separate prices. So not everybody doesn't want to give
22	truthful information about the surcharge.
23	MR. GUPTA: No well, they do, Your Honor.
24	They all want to do the same thing. They they I
25	think what you're referring to is that some of them are

- 1 doing different things now.
- One of the Petitioners, Expressions Hair
- 3 Design, is engaging in dual pricing, they're charging
- 4 two different prices, one for cash, one for credit, but
- 5 they are trying as hard as they can to describe that as
- 6 a -- as a discount so that they comply with the law.
- 7 The other Petitioners right now are
- 8 refraining from dual pricing altogether, because they
- 9 don't want to run the risk of -- of failing to comply
- 10 with this regime. But if we win this case, all of the
- 11 Petitioners would like to charge two different prices
- 12 for cash or for credit, and they would like to be able
- 13 to characterize the price difference as a surcharge for
- 14 using a credit card.
- 15 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: That's not what I
- 16 understood, but your adversary can tell me.
- 17 JUSTICE KAGAN: Mr. Gupta, what -- what
- 18 speech precisely do you think is being restricted?
- 19 MR. GUPTA: The -- the message that when you
- 20 use a credit card, you're paying more, and to be more
- 21 precise, I think if you look at Joint Appendix 103
- through 104, you'll find there the supplemental
- 23 declaration of Expressions Hair Design where they say
- 24 exactly what they'd like to do. And if you look at the
- 25 yellow brief, it's page 1 of the yellow brief, we have a

- 1 chart. And what we'd like to do, ideally, is describe
- 2 the pastrami sandwich as \$10, and then tell you that
- 3 it's going to cost a certain percentage more, 2 percent
- 4 more, to pay with a credit card.
- JUSTICE KAGAN: Well, I quess that's why I
- 6 said like what speech precisely, and you said the
- 7 message that you're going to pay more if you use a
- 8 credit card.
- 9 MR. GUPTA: Right.
- 10 JUSTICE KAGAN: But, you know, as -- this --
- 11 this statute is not written in terms of speech, it's --
- 12 it's written in terms of imposing a surcharge. And --
- 13 and let's say that somebody -- let's say that there is a
- 14 merchant and the merchant charges the list price for
- something as a dollar and the person comes up to the
- 16 cash register and offers a dollar bill.
- MR. GUPTA: Uh-huh.
- 18 JUSTICE KAGAN: And -- and the cashier says,
- 19 oh, no. For you it's 95 cents because I impose a
- 20 surcharge for people who use credit cards; right?
- MR. GUPTA: Uh-huh.
- JUSTICE KAGAN: Now, would that violate this
- 23 law?
- MR. GUPTA: I -- you know, I don't know, and
- 25 what -- part of the difficulty is -- and the reason, we

- 1 have a vagueness challenge --
- JUSTICE KAGAN: You don't know? How would
- 3 it violate the law?
- 4 MR. GUPTA: I don't think -- I don't think
- 5 it would. I don't think it would. And certainly the
- 6 State hasn't taken that position --
- JUSTICE KAGAN: You don't think it would.
- 8 MR. GUPTA: I don't think it would.
- 9 JUSTICE KAGAN: Even though you're
- 10 describing something as a surcharge. Because -- the
- 11 reason it wouldn't violate the law is because the
- 12 conduct is, you know -- it -- it fits the law, right,
- that essentially you're not imposing a surcharge on
- 14 credit card users. Whatever you call it, however you
- 15 describe it, you're not imposing a surcharge on credit
- 16 card users.
- 17 MR. GUPTA: Well, I think the way this law
- 18 works is that you can engage in precisely the same
- 19 conduct. You can charge the two different prices, one
- 20 for cash, one for credit, and what -- what runs afoul of
- 21 the law is describing the price difference one way as a
- 22 surcharge versus a credit, and you know that --
- 23 JUSTICE KAGAN: See, that's what you keep --
- 24 you -- you said that again --
- MR. GUPTA: Right.

- 1 JUSTICE KAGAN: -- and I think my
- 2 hypothetical was designed to show that that's just not
- 3 right.
- I mean, I can imagine ways in which you
- 5 might say that this is restricting speech, but that's
- 6 not it. Because as long as the price listed is the
- 7 higher price, is the price that a credit card company
- 8 has to pay, as long as that's true, you can describe it
- 9 any which way you please. And you can describe it in
- 10 terms of impose -- of -- of imposing a surcharge or
- 11 charging credit card customers more, and it still is not
- 12 going to violate this law.
- MR. GUPTA: I -- I don't think so,
- 14 Justice Kagan, and I think in your hypothetical --
- 15 the -- it -- in your hypothetical, the merchant hasn't
- 16 telegraphed to the consumer at the same time the two
- 17 prices, right? That's not what our clients want to
- 18 engage in.
- 19 If -- if New York wants to continue to
- 20 enforce this statute against deceptive practices or
- 21 false advertising, we have no problem with that. This
- 22 is an as-applied challenge, and the merchants in this
- 23 case want to engage in truthful speech. They want to
- 24 disclose more. They want to --
- 25 JUSTICE BREYER: They want to do more. They

- 1 want to impose a surcharge.
- 2 MR. GUPTA: No. No --
- JUSTICE BREYER: Then what's the problem
- 4 with saying -- you -- you don't -- you're too young to
- 5 know what the OPA was.
- 6 MR. GUPTA: I think -- I think so, Justice
- 7 Breyer.
- 8 (Laughter.)
- 9 JUSTICE BREYER: It's called the Office of
- 10 Price Administration.
- MR. GUPTA: Right.
- 12 JUSTICE BREYER: Ken Galbraith ran it for
- 13 awhile. And they would -- what they would do, he said
- is they'd go around and they'd smell what the right
- 15 price was.
- MR. GUPTA: Mm-hmm.
- 17 JUSTICE BREYER: And after they said that in
- 18 World War II, you couldn't charge a higher price.
- 19 Would you have come in and said, Ken
- 20 Galbraith says you can only charge \$13 for this item.
- 21 It violates our free speech.
- MR. GUPTA: Absolutely --
- JUSTICE BREYER: Because we want to charge
- 24 \$15.
- MR. GUPTA: Absolutely not, Justice Breyer.

- 1 JUSTICE BREYER: And very well what this
- 2 statute says is, you can't impose a surcharge. Very
- 3 well, you can't.
- 4 MR. GUPTA: Right.
- 5 JUSTICE BREYER: And you want to.
- 6 MR. GUPTA: I --
- JUSTICE BREYER: What's that got to do with
- 8 speech? I grant you, all business activity takes place
- 9 through speech.
- 10 MR. GUPTA: Right.
- 11 JUSTICE BREYER: So explain to me what it's
- 12 got to do with speech.
- MR. GUPTA: And I agree, if you look at this
- 14 statute, it doesn't scream First Amendment probably --
- JUSTICE BREYER: Not only doesn't it scream
- 16 it, I want to know --
- 17 MR. GUPTA: Right.
- JUSTICE BREYER: Unless you want to say
- 19 whenever a businessman is regulated in what he can do,
- 20 or she --
- MR. GUPTA: Mm-hmm. Right.
- JUSTICE BREYER: -- that violates the First
- 23 Amendment or at least potentially because they do it
- 24 through speech.
- MR. GUPTA: Right. But this is a regime

- 1 that says you are allowed to call it a surcharge, you
- 2 just can't call it a discount. And the enforcement --
- 3 JUSTICE BREYER: I don't see that in the
- 4 statute. My statute that I'm reading says you can't
- 5 charge a surcharge.
- 6 MR. GUPTA: Well --
- JUSTICE BREYER: But you can charge a
- 8 discount.
- 9 Now, I know, Paul MacAvoy, I hate to bring
- 10 up these long-gone names, but he was an economist with
- 11 whom I wrote a book. And he would have said what you
- 12 said, that, well, a discount and a surcharge are the
- 13 same thing economically.
- MR. GUPTA: Right.
- 15 JUSTICE BREYER: But we live in a world that
- 16 not everybody is an economist, and many people think
- 17 it's quite a different thing, and there are a lot of
- 18 studies in this thing that the -- you know, that said it
- 19 was a different thing. That's what they can't do.
- 20 MR. GUPTA: Certainly -- right. Certainly
- 21 consumers react to the way price information is
- 22 communicated --
- 23 JUSTICE BREYER: Not in the way -- you have
- 24 the regular price. If you go above the regular price,
- 25 it's a surcharge. If you go below the regular price,

- 1 it's a discount.
- 2 MR. GUPTA: But in this case, both sides
- 3 agree the way the regular price is -- is defined is in
- 4 relation to how you communicate that. Look at page 28
- 5 of the red brief. They define regular price based on
- 6 how it's communicated.
- 7 I think both sides come to this case with
- 8 two propositions that they agree on. We all agree that
- 9 the regulation of prices, the kind of price regulation
- 10 you're talking about, Justice Breyer, is economic
- 11 conduct that doesn't implicate First Amendment concerns.
- 12 We also agree -- we also all agree and know from
- 13 Virginia Board that communicating price information to
- 14 consumers is protected by the First Amendment and is at
- 15 the heart of the commercial speech doctrine.
- JUSTICE ALITO: Can I go back to --
- MR. GUPTA: Plus --
- 18 JUSTICE ALITO: -- Justice Kagan's
- 19 hypothetical. It doesn't address the situation where
- 20 dual prices are posted, but it addresses a situation
- 21 where there is a dual-price regime. Some consumers are
- 22 going to pay more; some consumers are going to pay less.
- MR. GUPTA: Right.
- JUSTICE ALITO: And in her hypothetical, she
- 25 says the sticker price is the higher price. And then

- 1 when the cash purchaser comes to the cash register, the
- 2 purchaser gets a pleasant surprise. No, you are going
- 3 to be charged less.
- But I thought your argument was that this --
- 5 if that is the correct interpretation of the statute,
- 6 and -- and I don't really know what the statute means
- 7 and we don't have a definitive interpretation. But if
- 8 that is the correct interpretation of the statute, what
- 9 New York State has done is to force the merchant to
- 10 say -- to post a particular sticker price -- namely, the
- 11 higher sticker price -- as opposed to the lower sticker
- 12 price.
- So that is mandated speech. Isn't that your
- 14 argument?
- 15 MR. GUPTA: I think if New York -- it's not
- 16 mandated speech in the sense they haven't told us
- 17 precisely what to say.
- 18 JUSTICE ALITO: Well, under that
- 19 interpretation, if it's okay to post the higher price
- 20 and nothing more, and if the higher price is the credit
- 21 card price, they are -- they are forcing the merchant to
- 22 speak in a particular way.
- 23 MR. GUPTA: I think what they are doing
- 24 is -- they are -- they are forcing the merchant to speak
- in a particular way in the sense that you have to

- 1 characterize the price difference a certain way in order
- 2 to comply with the statute.
- JUSTICE KAGAN: Mr. Gupta, this exchange --
- 4 I mean, I think that these are two very different
- 5 theories of what makes this a speech restriction. And I
- 6 guess the reason I asked my question was because Justice
- 7 Alito's theory does not appear to be your theory, and I
- 8 want to know which theory we're really talking about
- 9 here.
- 10 Justice Alito's theory is that when the
- 11 legislation says you have to post the higher price, that
- 12 that in itself is a restriction on speech. And that's
- 13 an interesting argument, and maybe he's right about
- 14 that. I don't know.
- Now, your brief took a different position.
- 16 Your brief essentially said the problem is that this --
- 17 this -- this legislation affects the way a cashier or
- 18 somebody in a store -- just affects -- it affects the
- 19 way they describe transactions generally, you know, and
- 20 the cashier is going to be worried that she can't say to
- 21 the customer, you charge more if you use a credit card.
- 22 And I guess I wanted to know, which theory is your
- 23 theory?
- MR. GUPTA: I think our theory is what you
- 25 just described.

- 1 JUSTICE KAGAN: The latter one.
- 2 MR. GUPTA: But I think Justice Alito is not
- 3 wrong that if -- it would certainly implicate First
- 4 Amendment concerns if the -- if the State were to say,
- 5 here is how you have to display your prices. But that
- 6 would be -- it could be, theoretically, a disclosure
- 7 regime; right? And that's what the solicitor general
- 8 has posited, a disclosure regime --
- 9 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: Counselor, can I --
- 10 I'm -- part of -- I'm a little bit like Justice Alito
- 11 and less than Justice Kagan. I'm not sure what you or
- 12 anybody is saying about this statute or what it means,
- 13 but not because it's necessarily vague. I just don't
- 14 see anything about speech in the statute.
- 15 MR. GUPTA: Well --
- JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: The statute simply says,
- 17 "No seller in any sales transaction may impose a
- 18 surcharge on a holder who elects to use a credit card in
- 19 lieu of payment by cash, check, or similar means." To
- 20 me, it's very simple: One price for everything.
- MR. GUPTA: Well, Justice Kagan --
- JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: You walk in and --
- 23 forget about -- I don't know where they get the discount
- 24 from or that the statute permits that, because what it
- 25 says on its -- to me, on its plain terms is one price.

- 1 And you told Justice Breyer that that was okay.
- 2 Certainly would be -- I'm hard-pressed to see if that's
- 3 the interpretation given to what I view as the plain
- 4 meaning of the statute, that that would be
- 5 unconstitutional.
- 6 MR. GUPTA: But this is not a statute that
- 7 functions in a vacuum; right? And in the other States
- 8 that enacted statutes at the same time, some of them put
- 9 in their text a surcharge is okay; a surcharge is not
- 10 okay --
- 11 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: New York didn't.
- 12 MR. GUPTA: -- a discount is not okay.
- New York didn't, but it -- but everyone has
- 14 agreed that it has been interpreted in parallel with
- 15 those statutes. And --
- JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: Well, this is a really
- 17 nice agreement, except the State below had two different
- 18 interpretations.
- 19 MR. GUPTA: But the -- but the State has
- 20 never wavered from its interpretation that framing the
- 21 price difference as a -- as a discount is perfectly
- 22 permissible under this regime.
- 23 And you don't have to take my word for it
- 24 and look only at the text of the statute. You can look
- 25 at the way it's been enforced. So the statute was

- 1 enacted in the 1980s. A few years thereafter, there was
- 2 the first reported criminal prosecution under that
- 3 statute.
- And in that case, a gas station owner had
- 5 the posted prices, cash and credit. But the -- what --
- 6 what caused the criminal prosecution is that the cashier
- 7 made the mistake of describing the price difference as a
- 8 nickel more for using a credit card rather than a nickel
- 9 less for cash. It was that speech and that speech only
- 10 that triggered the criminal prosecution. And the
- 11 prosecutor in that case and the judge all agreed that's
- 12 what the statute meant.
- 13 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: And you tell me that
- 14 that's what the State is going to tell me, that if they
- 15 post credit card price 2.10, cash price \$2, that if the
- 16 cash -- if the person comes to the cashier and gives
- 17 them a credit card, the cashier is going to say, you
- 18 know you're paying a surcharge of 10 cents; you're
- 19 going -- you're going to be prosecuted for that?
- 20 MR. GUPTA: Well, the State can try to run
- 21 away from the enforcement history, but I think it would
- 22 be very difficult to run away from the most recent
- 23 enforcement history. The State went after 50 or so
- 24 merchants in 2008 and 2009. There were sweeps. You
- 25 have, in the Joint Appendix, declarations from merchants

- 1 who were caught up in that sweep, lawyers, the trade
- 2 association head.
- 3 And what happened in all of those cases was
- 4 that somebody called up on the phone from the attorney
- 5 general's office pretending to be a customer, and they
- 6 said, what are your prices? And those merchants said,
- 7 well, it costs, you know, say, \$10 to buy the heating
- 8 oil and then, you know, this many cents more to pay with
- 9 a credit card.
- 10 And that was the only speech that they
- 11 engaged in. They -- they disclosed their prices.
- 12 There's nothing deceptive about that. And they were --
- 13 they were -- they were targeted by the attorney
- 14 general's office. And then they asked the attorney
- 15 general, how do we comply with this statute? And you'll
- 16 find that at Joint Appendix 107.
- 17 The attorney general's office didn't say,
- 18 disclose the total credit card price. They said, you
- 19 have to frame it as a discount. You can charge more all
- 20 you want.
- 21 And I think that shows that this speech is
- 22 regulating nothing --
- 23 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Now, does your --
- MR. GUPTA: -- this statute is regulating
- 25 nothing but speech.

1 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Does your argument 2 depend upon the fact that there is no difference from 3 the consumer's perspective if he sees this product is \$100, come in and buy it, and then he gets to the cash 4 register and there's a surcharge, no, it's \$103, and 5 6 it's \$100, he goes to the cash register, pays cash, and 7 they say, well, happy you, it's \$97? 8 And is your argument that a consumer sees no 9 difference in those two situations? 10 MR. GUPTA: No. Our -- our --11 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Can you agree with the -- the State that that is -- could be to some extent 12 13 misleading as far as the consumer --14 MR. GUPTA: I think --15 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: -- is concerned? 16 MR. GUPTA: I think it's really important to 17 understand that this is an as-applied challenge. And the only thing we are challenging is the application of 18 19 the statute to merchants who want to simultaneously 20 prominently disclose both the cash price and the credit 21 card price, but want to frame the credit card price as a 22 surcharge. Anything else is not within the scope of our 23 as-applied --24 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Well, under your --25 MR. GUPTA: -- challenge.

- 1 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Under your -- under
- 2 your argument -- I just want to understand. I
- 3 understand you say, well, that's -- it's not this case.
- 4 But under your argument, how would you analyze the --
- 5 the hypothetical that I posed?
- 6 MR. GUPTA: I think if the State wants to
- 7 have a regime where they think it's a deceptive practice
- 8 because you aren't telling people the -- the higher
- 9 price or the -- the price difference at the same time,
- 10 and that people are hoodwinked or there's bait and
- 11 switch, they are perfectly free to do that. It's odd
- 12 that there's a criminal regime in this case, and false
- 13 advertising law certainly makes it possible to do that
- 14 anyway. But if the State wants to enforce this statute
- 15 that way, we have no problem with that. They can
- 16 continue to do that.
- 17 If you look at Joint Appendix 144, you'll
- 18 see an example of a bait-and-switch scenario like that.
- 19 The odd thing there is that the State didn't invoke
- 20 its Section 518, the no-surcharge statute. They enacted
- 21 the false advertising statutes, which suggests that this
- 22 statute has something else in mind. And --
- 23 JUSTICE ALITO: I'm going to say when I
- 24 first read this statute without knowing anything about
- 25 the background with the Federal statute or reading the

- 1 briefs or the Second Circuit opinion, I interpreted it
- 2 the way Justice Sotomayor did, that it mandates a single
- 3 price. Now, that may be a -- an uninformed
- 4 interpretation, but I feel somewhat uncomfortable about
- 5 ruling on the constitutionality of this statute without
- 6 knowing how the court of appeals, New York court of
- 7 appeals would interpret the statute.
- 8 So why shouldn't we certify that question of
- 9 interpretation to that court before we plunge into this
- 10 First Amendment issue?
- 11 MR. GUPTA: Well, the State of New York
- 12 didn't ask for certification below. Believe it or not,
- 13 you know more about the New York statute than you know
- 14 about any of these statutes. And the other courts that
- 15 have confronted the Florida statute, the California
- 16 statute, they had no problems striking them down without
- 17 an enforcement history. They all have been understood
- 18 to mean the same thing. And -- and I think, you know,
- 19 what you said -- what this Court said in Sorrell is that
- 20 plaintiffs in a First Amendment challenge have a right
- 21 to prompt adjudication despite ambiguities in State law.
- 22 And so this Court used to abstain in First
- 23 Amendment challenges where there is some ambiguity in
- 24 State law. I think the -- the modern trend in this
- 25 Court's cases has been to take a crack at it. And, you

- 1 know, you have the enforcement history. You know what
- 2 the statute means on the ground. If you had a content
- 3 neutral statute and the State were enforcing it
- 4 consistently in a content discriminatory way, you
- 5 wouldn't say, well, we don't know what the statute
- 6 means, you can't challenge that.
- 7 In effect, when you bring an as-applied
- 8 challenge, you're bringing a challenge not just some
- 9 words in a statute book, but also to the way that the
- 10 statute is being enforced. And the injunction in an
- 11 as-applied challenge would look the same whether you
- 12 conceptualize that as a challenge to the statute as
- 13 written or to the State's enforcement policy. Either
- 14 way, we want an injunction that says --
- 15 JUSTICE BREYER: Well, now, this is exactly
- 16 what's worrying me. The State, you say, told some
- 17 merchants that they cannot say that they have a
- 18 surcharge. Is that what it is? Is that the problem?
- MR. GUPTA: You can --
- 20 JUSTICE BREYER: But they did say, you can
- 21 do exactly the same thing?
- MR. GUPTA: Exactly. They said you can
- 23 charge --
- JUSTICE BREYER: Did they say, do exactly
- 25 the same thing --

- 1 MR. GUPTA: Yes.
- JUSTICE BREYER: -- or did they say you can
- 3 have a discount?
- 4 MR. GUPTA: They said you can charge more
- 5 all you want.
- JUSTICE BREYER: You can charge more all you
- 7 want.
- 8 MR. GUPTA: You just have to call it a
- 9 discount.
- 10 JUSTICE BREYER: Did they say call it a
- 11 discount?
- MR. GUPTA: Yes.
- JUSTICE BREYER: So what we are doing here
- 14 is we are taking all the principles which are important
- of a First Amendment case and we are going to apply them
- 16 speedy determination not as applied, you know, across
- 17 the board. There are lots of protective things. And we
- 18 are diving headlong into an area called price
- 19 regulation.
- 20 It is a form of price regulation, and price
- 21 regulation goes on all over the place in regulatory
- 22 agencies. And so the word that I fear begins with an L
- 23 and ends with an R; it's called Lockner. And there we
- 24 go.
- Using the First Amendment as a tool to get

- 1 at price regulation that enforcers will sometimes say
- 2 the wrong thing. Okay? So that's a very general
- 3 question. But if you want to know what's worrying me,
- 4 that's it.
- 5 MR. GUPTA: Justice Breyer, I understand the
- 6 concern. I think it's a serious concern, but it's not a
- 7 concern at issue in this case. And that's because this
- 8 is not price regulation. This is the regulation of how
- 9 prices are communicated. And I think that the Joint --
- 10 the declaration in the Joint Appendix shows you that.
- 11 When the State says to someone, you can charge more all
- 12 you want, you just have to call it something different,
- 13 that's not price regulation. That's the regulation of
- 14 how prices are communicated.
- 15 And I think here's the test, Justice Breyer.
- 16 If you want to figure out -- because we all agree that
- 17 Virginia Board is the law, right? Communication of
- 18 price information is protected by the First Amendment.
- 19 But we also all agree that price regulation is economic
- 20 conduct. So you ask, can you come into compliance with
- 21 the law simply by changing what you say without changing
- 22 what you charge? And that is the scenario here. That's
- 23 exactly what the State told those merchants. They said,
- 24 you don't have to change what you charge, charge the
- 25 same thing. Change what you say.

- 1 JUSTICE KAGAN: Mr. Gupta, you're putting
- 2 really a lot of emphasis on a few cases in which
- 3 prosecutors describe the law in a certain way. But the
- 4 law as written doesn't really do any of the things that
- 5 you're saying. I mean, Justice Alito is right. The law
- 6 as written actually can be read -- and Justice Sotomayor
- 7 said this before -- as just requiring a single price.
- 8 Now, that's something that none of the parties here say,
- 9 but if you just look at the law, that's what the law
- 10 says.
- 11 MR. GUPTA: Right.
- 12 JUSTICE KAGAN: Let's take that out of the
- 13 picture. Even then the law can say, the only thing that
- 14 we are requiring is that you list the higher price.
- 15 That's the only thing that we are requiring. And then
- 16 you can describe what you're doing any way you like.
- 17 You can use the word "surcharge." You can use the word
- 18 "more." You can use the word "less." You can use the
- 19 word "discount." It doesn't matter. So long as you
- 20 list the higher price, you're in the clear. And that,
- 21 too, is very different from what you're saying, maybe
- 22 from what the prosecutor said. But just the way you
- 23 read this law, it just doesn't give -- I mean, what
- 24 these prosecutors say don't match what the law says.
- MR. GUPTA: Well, the law --

- 1 JUSTICE KAGAN: The law says, you know, this
- 2 is all about listing, you know, conduct; what you can
- 3 charge.
- 4 MR. GUPTA: But the law also means what it
- 5 means on the ground. And we have -- the State agrees we
- 6 have a credible fear of prosecution if we -- if we say
- 7 what we want to say. So there's no dispute about that.
- 8 The Document 51 in the district court, they conceded
- 9 that if we say what we want to say, we could be
- 10 prosecuted tomorrow, that shows there's a case in
- 11 controversy about whether we can be prosecuted for --
- 12 for truthful speech.
- JUSTICE KAGAN: Well, New York is saying in
- 14 its brief that that's not the case; that you can say
- 15 what you want to say; that you can call this a
- 16 surcharge; that you can communicate in the way you want
- 17 to communicate as long as your listed price is the -- is
- 18 the credit card price.
- 19 MR. GUPTA: But that makes it impossible. I
- 20 mean, that makes it impossible to frame the price as a
- 21 surcharge, because that -- that normalizes the credit
- 22 card price. It makes that the baseline price, and that
- 23 effectively defines away a surcharge. And that's been
- 24 the purpose of this --
- 25 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: So you think the Federal

- 1 law was unconstitutional as well.
- 2 MR. GUPTA: I think the Federal law was
- 3 unconstitutional, too. We don't have to win that fight
- 4 to win this case.
- 5 JUSTICE GINSBURG: Were there any
- 6 prosecutions under the Federal?
- 7 MR. GUPTA: There were not. And the reason
- 8 is that the Federal Trade Commission, the Federal
- 9 Reserve Board and the consumer groups all opposed that
- 10 regime because they thought it hid the cost of credit
- 11 from consumers. There was never any enforcement, but
- 12 you can look in the blue brief at pages 11 through 15.
- 13 We've tried to lay out how that regime worked, and I
- 14 don't think it is the way the Solicitor General has
- 15 characterized it. You cannot find any regulations from
- 16 the time that the Federal regime was in effect that
- 17 said, all you have to do is list the highest, you know,
- 18 credit card price. That would look like a disclosure
- 19 regime.
- 20 JUSTICE GINSBURG: As far as discounts are
- 21 concerned, is there some protection that the merchant
- 22 can offer a discount?
- 23 MR. GUPTA: That the merchant can offer a
- 24 discount; in other words, can they do that under this
- 25 statute? Is that --

- 1 JUSTICE GINSBURG: No. I thought that there
- 2 was some legislation that permitted --
- 3 MR. GUPTA: There's Federal legislation that
- 4 says that it is a violation of the statute to have
- 5 private ordering that forbids a discount and that's why
- 6 what you had, Justice Ginsburg, were contract rules that
- 7 made it illegal for merchants to frame the price
- 8 difference as a surcharge. Those contract rules were
- 9 rescinded in 2013 in the face of antitrust scrutiny, and
- 10 that's what led to this litigation.
- If there are no further questions --
- 12 JUSTICE KAGAN: I'm sorry. You said
- 13 something very interesting.
- MR. GUPTA: Yes.
- 15 JUSTICE KAGAN: You said if you take the
- 16 statute, if you understand the statute to just mean that
- 17 the listed price has to be the credit card price, that
- 18 looks like a disclosure regime. Could you explain that?
- 19 MR. GUPTA: Sure. I think a disclosure
- 20 regime would look very different. It wouldn't be a
- 21 hidden accidental disclosure regime. It would tell you
- 22 exactly what it was requiring; right? And you wouldn't
- 23 have any confusion and then you would have to probably
- 24 analyze that under Zauderer, and you'd ask a few
- 25 questions: Is it specifically priced -- precise that

- 1 merchants have some warning or guidance? Is there some
- 2 evidence that it's furthering some anti-deception
- 3 interest?
- 4 We do math all the time. We -- we know that
- 5 we can add the sale -- sales charge as a percentage of
- 6 the service charge on a restaurant menu. Nobody thinks
- 7 that that's a problem for consumers to do math. So why
- 8 in this one place are they requiring the total price?
- 9 Could it be because they want to suppress the message
- 10 that merchants want to get across? Is it unjustified or
- 11 burdensome? Is it impossible for merchants, if they
- 12 have to frame only one price, to do it this way or is it
- 13 going to dissuade them from getting their message
- 14 across --
- 15 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Thank you, counsel.
- 16 We'll afford you a minute for rebuttal.
- MR. GUPTA: Okay.
- 18 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Mr. Feigin?
- 19 ORAL ARGUMENT OF ERIC J. FEIGIN
- 20 FOR UNITED STATES, AS AMICUS CURIAE,
- 21 SUPPORTING NEITHER PARTY
- MR. FEIGIN: Thank you, Mr. Chief Justice,
- 23 and may it please the Court:
- I want to focus on what I take to be the
- 25 core of the First Amendment dispute between the parties,

- 1 which I think centers around a merchant who, for
- 2 example, wants to label a soda as costing \$1.95 with a 5
- 3 percent credit card surcharge, and the question is
- 4 whether the State can require the merchant to
- 5 specifically identify a price of \$2.05 before charging a
- 6 customer who wants to use a credit card that amount.
- 7 A law like that is very similar to a law
- 8 that simply regulates pricing or requires a merchant to
- 9 honor their offers to make or enter into a contract of
- 10 the sort that we normally wouldn't think is subject to
- 11 any First Amendment scrutiny. We nevertheless think
- 12 that the requirement that everyone seems to agree is
- imposed here is best viewed under this Court's
- 14 precedence as a speech regulation because, in effect,
- it's prescribing how the merchant communicates an
- 16 otherwise lawful pricing scheme.
- 17 But to the extent that New York's law, like
- 18 the Federal law, simply requires a disclosure in
- 19 dollars-and-cents form of any higher credit card price
- 20 in circumstances where the merchant has decided to
- 21 display the lower cash price in dollars-and-cents form,
- 22 it's a perfectly valid consumer disclosure law under
- 23 this Court's decision in Zauderer. We --
- JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: Mr. Feigin, could you
- 25 get more concrete for me? Take the list of four ways

- 1 that they would like to advertise in the reply brief.
- 2 Which ways do you think -- or would the New
- 3 York law potentially or actually make any of this
- 4 conduct illegal?
- 5 MR. FEIGIN: Your Honor, I don't think I can
- 6 answer that question as to the New York law. I --
- JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: Why?
- 8 MR. FEIGIN: Because I think we lack a
- 9 definitive interpretation from the New York court of
- 10 appeals. I think much of dispute between the parties,
- 11 as the first 25 minutes of questioning revealed,
- 12 involves what the New York law actually does under
- 13 particular circumstances.
- I can answer that question on the assumption
- 15 that the New York law tracks the former Federal law,
- 16 which, the only thing the Federal law actually did once
- 17 you trace through the definitional sections was to
- 18 require, as I said -- as I was saying earlier,
- 19 disclosure in dollars-and-cents form of a higher credit
- 20 card price when the merchant has decided to post a cash
- 21 price.
- JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: Fine. So look at
- 23 this -- if that's what this law means, which of these
- 24 four ways of advertising would be permissible and which
- would be unpermissible?

- 1 MR. FEIGIN: Option A, where it's a \$10 cash
- 2 price, \$10.20 credit price, would be fine. Option B,
- 3 where it's \$10 cash price, 20 cents surcharge per item
- 4 added to credit card purchases, would not be
- 5 permissible. You'd have to actually disclose in
- 6 dollars-and-cents form, it would be 10.20.
- JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: 10 -- you would have to
- 8 say \$10.20.
- 9 MR. FEIGIN: Correct. And I'd like --
- 10 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: So that's regulating
- 11 speech; it's not regulating price, because it's the same
- 12 price whether -- I can do that math.
- 13 MR. FEIGIN: The -- that is why we think
- 14 that this is better viewed as a speech regulation under
- 15 this Court's precedence.
- But let me explain why I think it's a
- 17 reasonable disclosure.
- JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: Finish this -- all
- 19 right.
- 20 MR. FEIGIN: Option C, Your Honor, which is
- 21 \$10, 2 percent surcharge, would be the same as Option B,
- 22 you'd actually have to say \$10.20. And then Option D,
- 23 which is \$10.20, 20-cent discount for cash purchases, is
- 24 fine because you're disclosing to the consumers the
- 25 highest possible price that they would have to pay in

- 1 dollars-and-cents form.
- 2 JUSTICE KAGAN: And -- and your
- 3 understanding of why it is a speech regulation, it -- is
- 4 because it affects the way you list prices; is that
- 5 right?
- 6 MR. FEIGIN: That's right, Your Honor.
- 7 So a law, for example, that simply required
- 8 a merchant who made a particular representation that the
- 9 price of this item is \$1.95 and required that merchant
- 10 to honor -- and that was all the merchant said, didn't
- 11 say anything about surcharges at all, and the law simply
- 12 required the merchant to honor that price when the
- 13 consumer gets to the cash register, that's an economic
- 14 regulation. That's just a regulation that is regulating
- 15 pricing or contract offers, but the -- the law here, I
- 16 think everyone agrees, does something a little bit more.
- In Options B and C that I was just
- 18 discussing with Justice Sotomayor, you can have a price
- 19 tag that does reveal a -- the existence of a surcharge
- 20 expressed as a mathematical formula and the law would
- 21 say that's not good enough, you have to actually list it
- 22 as a price.
- JUSTICE KENNEDY: Well, but --
- MR. FEIGIN: If I could, I'd like to address
- 25 what's constitutionally permissible --

- 1 JUSTICE KENNEDY: -- what is your position
- 2 as to the constitutionality of prohibiting Options B and
- 3 C in the pastrami sandwich example on --
- 4 MR. FEIGIN: Well, Your Honor, first of all,
- 5 I wouldn't characterize it as prohibiting Options B and
- 6 C, but simply requiring an additional disclosure. It
- 7 has to finish off the math problem for the consumers and
- 8 tell them that the credit card price is \$10.20.
- 9 The reason that's permissible
- 10 constitutionally under Zauderer is that -- I think it's
- 11 important to keep in mind the legislatures are
- 12 legislating against a backdrop, whether there isn't
- 13 necessarily any specific requirement at all to even
- 14 disclose the existence of the surcharge. And I think
- 15 the two --
- 16 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: That's a very --
- 17 that's a very patronizing approach. I mean, you're
- 18 saying in B when it says it's \$10 cash, it's 20 cents
- 19 surcharge, that they've got to do the math and say, by
- 20 the way, that's \$10.20?
- MR. FEIGIN: And let me explain why, Your
- 22 Honor. I think there are two good reasons why that has
- 23 to be done.
- 24 First, if you're -- or why it's reasonable
- 25 for --

- 1 JUSTICE KENNEDY: I thought it was \$10 and 2
- 2 cents, but I'll think about that while --
- 3 (Laughter.)
- 4 MR. FEIGIN: I think there are two reasons
- 5 why it's reasonable for a legislature to decide that if
- 6 it's requiring --
- JUSTICE KENNEDY: Yeah, right.
- 8 MR. FEIGIN: -- a disclosure of the facts
- 9 that the credit card price is going to be higher, it can
- 10 require that disclosure to be made in dollars-and-cents
- 11 form rather than a mathematical formula.
- 12 First, the price --
- 13 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Oh, no, I thought
- 14 you were telling me that they -- that it's not enough.
- 15 Even if it's in cash, if they say that's a 20 -- 20-cent
- 16 surcharge, that violates the statute.
- 17 MR. FEIGIN: Your Honor, if all they said
- 18 was \$10 price and 20-cent surcharge --
- 19 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Right.
- 20 MR. FEIGIN: -- and they don't say \$10.20
- 21 credit card price, that, as we understand it, would be a
- 22 violation of the Federal statute.
- But let me please explain why.
- JUSTICE KENNEDY: Now, if -- if that --
- 25 if -- if B or C as stated are a violation of the New

- 1 York statute, in your view, is that a violation of the
- 2 First Amendment?
- 3 MR. FEIGIN: It is not, and I think for two
- 4 reasons.
- 5 JUSTICE KENNEDY: Even though this is
- 6 truthful information.
- 7 MR. FEIGIN: All that's required -- Your
- 8 Honor, it's not prohibiting them from saying what's in
- 9 Options B and C. It's requiring a further disclosure in
- 10 dollars-and-cents form. I think there are two reasons
- 11 why Congress or the New York legislature could
- 12 permissibly require the disclosure to be made in
- 13 dollars-and-cents form.
- 14 First, that's the most easily digestible
- 15 form in which people receive prices. It allows for easy
- 16 comparison of prices and doesn't require the consumer to
- 17 complete a math problem.
- 18 Second, I think this directly --
- 19 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Hold on -- now, hold
- 20 on. You're saying that the -- the American people are
- 21 too dumb to understand that if you say \$10 plus a
- 22 20-cent surcharge, they can't figure out that that's
- 23 \$10.20.
- MR. FEIGIN: And the second reason, Your
- 25 Honor, I think addresses that concern directly.

- 1 (Laughter.) 2 MR. FEIGIN: Which is that there is -- which 3 4 5 6 7
- is that there is an administrability concern here.
- CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: There's an --
- MR. FEIGIN: An administrability concern.
- Once you start allowing mathematical
- formulas, you can get into a debate about when the
- 8 formula becomes too complicated for your average
- 9 consumer. You can imagine --
- 10 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: It's too much to say
- \$10 plus 20 -- I -- I suppose it's a mathematical 11
- 12 formula, but it's for second graders.
- 13 MR. FEIGIN: Well, Your Honor, let me see if
- 14 I can -- first of all --
- 15 JUSTICE KAGAN: Well, isn't the idea,
- 16 Mr. Feigin, that if you said 32.46 plus 2 percent, then
- you really are requiring people to do some work and 17
- you'd rather just have them know that it's -- see, I 18
- can't do it that fast. 19
- 20 (Laughter.)
- 21 MR. FEIGIN: Well, Your Honor, you might
- 22 also -- you can see that --
- 23 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: I agree that
- percent -- that -- that's Point C, that's not B. I 24
- 25 agree that a percentage is more complicated.

- 1 MR. FEIGIN: Well, you --
- 2 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: But 20 cents and
- 3 \$10, that's not too complicated unless you're taking a
- 4 very patronizing and condescending view of the
- 5 capabilities of the American consumer.
- 6 MR. FEIGIN: I think, Your Honor, under
- 7 Zauderer, Congress -- or the New York legislature is
- 8 entitled to draw clear lines. I think it becomes more
- 9 complicated if you show up at the store and you want to
- 10 buy 17 things than if you're just buying the one thing,
- 11 that increases the complexity of the math problem, and
- 12 it would be much harder to write a law that allows
- 13 certain formulas, but not certain other formulas.
- 14 You could imagine a store that says, if you
- 15 buy an -- here are our prices in cash. If you buy an
- 16 item in credit, we're going to charge you a surcharge
- 17 equal to the -- a percentage that is the fifth digit of
- 18 pi.
- 19 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Yes, yes. I -- I'll
- 20 give you that --
- 21 MR. FEIGIN: There's a subset of the
- 22 population --
- 23 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: -- that takes a
- 24 little longer to figure out. But you're saying that it
- violates the law if it says \$10 plus 20 cents.

- 1 MR. FEIGIN: I think, Your Honor, they're
- 2 entitled to have a bright-line rule. You could have a
- 3 price that's a little bit -- that creates a harder math
- 4 problem of the sort that Justice Kagan supposed.
- 5 And again, you could also be buying many
- 6 items at once. You could have only a certain amount of
- 7 money that you want to spend and have trouble figuring
- 8 out what you're going to be able to fit under that
- 9 budget --
- 10 JUSTICE KAGAN: Could I -- I feel it -- I'm
- 11 sorry.
- 12 MR. FEIGIN: -- and it makes for comparison
- 13 pricing much easier.
- 14 JUSTICE KAGAN: Can I ask you a different
- 15 question? It -- it does -- this does not look like a
- 16 disclosure requirement. It just -- I mean, one way to
- 17 understand this is exactly what you said. It -- it
- 18 requires disclosure. Whether everybody needs that
- 19 disclosure, whether only a few people need that
- 20 disclosure in the \$10.20 case, but it requires
- 21 disclosure to make sure that everybody is on the same
- 22 page in terms of knowing prices.
- 23 But if you look at the language of the
- 24 statute, it just doesn't look like that. And -- and if
- 25 we're going to say that something is a disclosure

- 1 requirement and so subject to a lesser forum of First
- 2 Amendment review, shouldn't the State be making clear
- 3 that that's what this is?
- 4 MR. FEIGIN: You're -- may -- may I
- 5 answer --
- 6 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Sure.
- 7 MR. FEIGIN: -- Mr. Chief Justice?
- 8 Your Honor, I think the best thing for the
- 9 Court to do here is, the Federal law was clear. I think
- 10 you can use the Federal law as kind of a baseline for
- 11 discussing the issue, remand to the Second Circuit and
- 12 allow for the New York court of appeals to have a
- 13 definitive interpretation of the law, because there's
- 14 clearly some dispute about what the New York law does.
- 15 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Thank you, Counsel.
- 16 Mr. Wu?
- 17 ORAL ARGUMENT OF STEVEN C. WU
- 18 ON BEHALF OF THE RESPONDENTS
- 19 MR. WU: Mr. Chief Justice, and may it
- 20 please the Court:
- 21 The plain text of New York's statute refers
- 22 only to a pricing practice and not to any speech. The
- 23 statute prohibits a seller from imposing a surcharge on
- 24 a customer who elects to use a credit card.
- 25 For sellers that list a single price as

- 1 nearly all sellers do, the application of the statute is
- 2 straightforward. The seller may not add to its listed
- 3 prices and instead must adhere to those prices if a
- 4 customer decides to pay by using a credit card.
- 5 JUSTICE ALITO: Could I just ask you a
- 6 preliminary question about the division of litigation
- 7 authority in New York State? Does the attorney general
- 8 or the solicitor general have the authority under New
- 9 York law to bind all of the district attorneys in the
- 10 State to an interpretation of this statute? And has the
- 11 attorney general issued a -- an official interpretation
- 12 so that all of the district attorneys will be required
- 13 to -- to enforce this in the same way?
- MR. WU: So the attorney general and the
- 15 district attorneys are separate authorities under New
- 16 York law. In this case, however, the relevant district
- 17 attorneys for the counties where these Petitioners are
- 18 located are parties to this case --
- 19 JUSTICE ALITO: Yeah. But, see, that's a --
- 20 MR. WU: -- and have expressed their
- 21 endorsement.
- JUSTICE ALITO: That's a problem for me.
- 23 How many district attorneys are there in New York State?
- MR. WU: There -- there are -- there are
- 25 many.

- 1 JUSTICE ALITO: There are many.
- 2 So you tell us how you interpret this, but
- 3 how do we know how all of these other district attorneys
- 4 are going to interpret the statute? They may interpret
- 5 it differently.
- 6 MR. WU: Well, I don't think fundamentally
- 7 there should be a debate about the -- the statute here.
- 8 And -- and it's because a plain reading of the text here
- 9 means reading what it means to impose a surcharge.
- 10 JUSTICE KAGAN: But, you know, there does
- 11 seem to have been a debate about what this statute
- 12 means. Because I look at some of this enforcement
- 13 history and I think -- I don't really understand why
- 14 this violates that law. And, in fact, you've walked
- 15 away from some of that enforcement history in your
- 16 briefing and said, look, the cashier can call it
- 17 whatever she wants to call it as long as the listed
- 18 price is the credit card price. But that is
- 19 contradicting some of this enforcement history where a
- 20 different understanding of this law was used.
- 21 So how do we deal with that?
- MR. WU: Justice Kagan, I disagree that we
- 23 are walking away from the enforcement history here.
- 24 See, I think if you actually look at what the
- 25 enforcement history looks like, especially from the

- 1 attorney general's office, that it confirms sort of the
- 2 plain reading of this statute in a single-price scheme.
- And the heating oil company example, I
- 4 think, is the clearest one. In each of those cases,
- 5 when the investigator from our office called up and
- 6 asked, what is your price, they were given a single
- 7 dollars-and-cents answer. And on page 106 of the Joint
- 8 Appendix they asked Parkside Oil, how much is a gallon
- 9 of oil? And they said, \$3.45.
- 10 And it was only when the investigator said,
- 11 I'd like to pay by a credit card, that at that point the
- 12 oil company representative said, I'm going to impose a
- 13 surcharge of an extra 5 cents per gallon set on top of
- 14 the previous price.
- 15 And I think that pricing practice reflects
- the commonsense understanding of the word "surcharge,"
- 17 which is an additional fee or charge on top of a
- 18 baseline that the seller itself has -- has established.
- 19 JUSTICE KENNEDY: But under your view, if
- 20 the heating oil people had said, it's \$103 if you pay by
- 21 credit card; if you do not pay by credit card, pay by
- 22 cash, it's \$100, that is lawful?
- 23 MR. WU: That's -- that's correct. I mean,
- 24 if the heating oil representative --
- 25 JUSTICE KENNEDY: Then it's a matter of how

- 1 the pricing structure is communicated --
- 2 MR. WU: Well --
- JUSTICE KENNEDY: -- in the speech.
- 4 MR. WU: Well, I mean, let me respond in
- 5 this way, which is, of course the definition or the
- 6 determination of whether there's a surcharge will look
- 7 back to the seller's original pricing practices, because
- 8 that's the meaning of a surcharge, is a difference from
- 9 some previously conveyed price.
- 10 But the First Amendment doesn't prohibit the
- 11 State from using a previously conveyed price as a
- 12 baseline for a price regulation. As -- as the United
- 13 States has acknowledged, a regulation that just said you
- 14 shall adhere to your previously conveyed prices or even
- 15 previously advertised prices is a perfectly
- 16 understandable economic regulation that would be
- 17 conduct.
- JUSTICE KENNEDY: But suppose -- suppose
- 19 in -- in the heating oil example they said, it's \$103,
- 20 but cash is \$100, and that's because we impose a
- 21 surcharge. Would that be lawful?
- MR. WU: That -- that would be fine. I take
- 23 that to be similar to Justice Kagan's example about the
- 24 \$1 charge for a cup of coffee with -- with a -- with a
- 25 description of it as a surcharge. And the statute does

- 1 not prohibit that scheme because, at the end of the day,
- 2 the listed price, which is in that case conveyed over
- 3 the phone, is the same as the price charged to a credit
- 4 card customer. But --
- 5 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: Is your answer to the
- 6 reply brief examples the same as the solicitor general's
- 7 office? And do you have a concern the way it does that
- 8 the statute could be read more broadly?
- 9 MR. WU: So we -- our answers are the same
- 10 as to the four examples there, and we do not think it is
- 11 read more broadly. I mean, one thing that is crystal
- 12 clear from the lighter side of history here is that New
- 13 York intended to carry out the same policies and same
- 14 purpose as the Federal statute that had just lapsed, and
- 15 the same history is present in all of the other States
- 16 that have adopted a similar surcharge issue.
- 17 JUSTICE ALITO: Then why didn't New York --
- 18 I mean, New York adopted this against the backdrop of a
- 19 lot of consideration at the Federal level. Why did it
- 20 not adopt the Federal definitions?
- 21 MR. WU: I can't answer that question
- 22 because nothing in the legislative history explains why
- 23 they did not.
- JUSTICE GINSBURG: What did the other --
- 25 MR. WU: But --

- 1 JUSTICE GINSBURG: -- the other States that
- 2 picked up after the Feds didn't renew the statute, what
- 3 did the other States do?
- 4 MR. WU: At --
- 5 JUSTICE GINSBURG: Did they do what New York
- 6 did or did they copy the Federal statute?
- 7 MR. WU: Well, the vast majority of them did
- 8 not adopt the Federal definition. As far as I'm aware,
- 9 only Massachusetts adopted the Federal definitions. And
- 10 there are some exceptions where some of the statutes
- 11 actually have a separate definition of a surcharge,
- 12 which is just the plain meaning definition that we have
- 13 adopted here, which is in addition to a previously
- 14 disclosed or regular price. And so all of these
- 15 statutes are really -- should be, we think, read
- 16 similarly here.
- 17 JUSTICE ALITO: Well, if I had the authority
- 18 to interpret the New York statute, which I really don't,
- 19 and I saw that they copied part of a prior statute, but
- 20 they deliberately omitted other parts of the prior
- 21 statute, I would be tempted to infer that they had a
- 22 reason for omitting the definitions. And that was that
- 23 they didn't want to be bound by that, so they wanted
- 24 something different.
- 25 MR. GUPTA: I don't think there's anything

- 1 in the history that would support that interpretation,
- 2 Justice Alito. And I would just say part of the reason
- 3 that they may not have felt it necessary was because
- 4 just as the Federal statute originally did not have
- 5 these definitions for a period of many years, the
- 6 legislature may have believed that the ordinary meaning
- of a surcharge is obvious enough that they didn't need
- 8 the clarifying definitions of the -- of the Federal
- 9 statute.
- 10 JUSTICE BREYER: Go ahead. Are you
- 11 finished?
- MR. WU: Yes, sir.
- JUSTICE BREYER: All right. Help me. I may
- 14 be the only one that needs this help, but I do have this
- 15 Lockner problem.
- One, if this -- if I were a legislature --
- 17 legislator, I would have voted against this statute. I
- 18 think it does hide the cost. That has nothing to do
- 19 with this.
- Two, I think that the reason we're having so
- 21 much trouble is because it's so difficult, but not
- 22 impossible, to distinguish between surcharge and
- 23 discount. And if you want to distinguish -- and they
- 24 are different -- words are very helpful. They're
- 25 evidentiary. But what we're after is not the words.

- 1 They're evidentiary of something. But that's all almost
- 2 we have.
- 3 Three, the fact that you have the questions
- 4 you've had and both sides of the bench have had such
- 5 trouble with this, to me, is strong evidence that the
- 6 Court should stay out of this under normal First
- 7 Amendment standards. Because if we don't, we are going
- 8 to discover all kinds of price regulation all over the
- 9 place that suffers to greater or lesser degrees from
- 10 this kind of problem, and you'll have judges all over
- 11 the country substituting for regulators and others in
- 12 trying to regulate. That's where I'm coming from.
- Now, you tell me how to do it.
- MR. WU: Well --
- JUSTICE BREYER: That is, you tell me, given
- 16 precedent, et cetera, what should we overrule? Or what
- 17 should we narrow? If, as I believe is true, these
- 18 regulatory areas are areas that not normal First
- 19 Amendment, "tough, you can't do it" principles apply --
- 20 weakened forms might because it applies everywhere in a
- 21 sense. But it used to be rational basis. It used to be
- 22 rational basis. But water has flowed over that dam or
- 23 under that bridge or whatever, and so I want to know
- 24 your best thinking on what you would do in terms of
- 25 trying to write a rule of law that would favor you.

- 1 MR. WU: I'm going to give two responses to
- 2 that. I mean, the first goes back to the text of the
- 3 statute and recognizes that this statute is not phrased
- 4 in any way that touches on what we would ordinarily
- 5 think of as a speech. In contrast to, for example, the
- 6 statute in the Milavetz case, which talked about
- 7 regulating the advice that a -- that relief agency would
- 8 give to a potential client.
- 9 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: We're talking --
- 10 MR. WU: This talks about the imposition of
- 11 a surcharge.
- 12 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: I can't look at this
- 13 statute and rely on its words or make a judgment on its
- 14 words because nothing of what you're saying it applies
- 15 to is said on the face of this statute.
- MR. WU: Well --
- 17 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: You're asking me to take
- 18 a lot of steps, which is start with the language of the
- 19 statute, ignore it, and go to a Federal statute and
- 20 apply its definitions. How many of them, you haven't
- 21 quite told me. How you differ, you haven't quite told
- 22 me. And -- but I'm going to assume the Federal
- 23 definitions apply, even though none of them are used
- 24 here.
- 25 So I'm -- I'm very confused why you're

- 1 starting your answer to Justice Breyer by saying, look
- 2 at the statute and see what the words of the statute are
- 3 doing.
- 4 MR. WU: Well, if I could get to that in
- 5 just one second and finish the answer to Justice
- 6 Breyer's, because I think given the way the statute is
- 7 phrased, the easiest way to dispose of this case is to
- 8 recognize this as a direct price regulation that this
- 9 Court in 44 Liquormart and other cases have held is not
- 10 subject to First Amendment scrutiny.
- 11 JUSTICE GINSBURG: But it doesn't set a
- 12 standing price. It doesn't set any price at all. It
- 13 lets the merchant set the price. And the question is
- 14 how that price is described. So I think it's quite
- 15 different from OPA ceiling prices, which says you cannot
- 16 charge more than the ceiling price. Here, the sky is
- 17 the limit as to what the -- the merchants can charge.
- 18 New York is not regulating what the price of the goods
- 19 are.
- 20 MR. WU: But the way to understand the
- 21 statute -- and I think this answers Justice Sotomayor's
- 22 question as well -- is that once the seller has chosen
- 23 that price, which I agree they have a free choice about,
- 24 then its ability to change that price for someone who
- 25 uses a credit card is constrained. And I think this is

- 1 easiest to understand in the scope of a single
- 2 transaction. You walk into a store, they give you a
- 3 menu with a list of pries for their food. Those prices
- 4 are in large part unadorned by any conditions about when
- 5 those prices apply. And you know, in the course of that
- 6 transaction, between when you sit down and when you pay
- 7 the bill that those prices will be the prices charged to
- 8 you even if at the end of the transaction you take a
- 9 credit card and pay for it.
- 10 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: No, I don't, because I
- 11 know I have to pay sales tax.
- MR. WU: Well, you might have to pay sales
- 13 tax.
- 14 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: And every -- and every
- 15 State I have to figure out what that sales tax is and
- 16 I've got to do the math in my own head.
- 17 MR. WU: That's -- that's correct. And --
- 18 and there are a lot of price adjustments that sellers
- 19 could impose. You could have coupons, member discounts,
- 20 et cetera. But I think those actually support our point
- 21 here, because what do those price adjustments apply to?
- 22 And at the end of the day, New York's position under the
- 23 ordinary definition of a surcharge, is all of those
- 24 adjustments apply to the regular or starting price --
- 25 price of a good or product.

- 1 JUSTICE KAGAN: I mean, here's the narrow 2 way in which this seems to affect communication, speech. I'm a seller. I set my prices. I say I want to charge 3 4 cash customers a dollar and I want to charge credit card 5 customers \$1.05. All right? Now, if I put my list price as \$1.05 and then the cash customers get a happy 6 7 surprise, that seems fine. But if I put my list price 8 as a dollar and then the credit card companies get a 9 not-so-happy surprise, that can't be done. So it does 10 affect the way a seller communicates which price he's going to say is the regular price, is the list price. 11 12 So why isn't that a speech regulation? Now, 13 you might say, as the solicitor general does, it is a 14 speech regulation, but it's only a disclosure regulation and subject to a lower standard. But you're saying it's 15 16 not a speech regulation at all. And I want to know why, 17 given that it is affecting which price you choose to say 18 is your list price. 19 MR. WU: So even if it does affect what a 20 seller does in that case, it's only because the list price is being used as evidence to support whether an 21 22 imposition -- whether a surcharge has been imposed later. And it's perfectly permissible under the First 23
- 24 Amendment for conduct to be defined in relation to
- 25 previous acts of speech. You know, conduct can be

- 1 initiated evidence or carried out through speech and the
- 2 First Amendment doesn't bar a State from regulating it
- 3 in that way.
- And I'll just use a couple of examples that
- 5 I think make this clear. Under a statute that says the
- 6 seller shall adhere to a previously advertised price,
- 7 that regulation, which the United States says is an
- 8 economic regulation, would be susceptible to the same
- 9 analysis. If somebody wants to charge \$100, they know
- 10 that what they have to do is list \$100 in their
- 11 advertisements or in their stores. They can't list \$98
- 12 or \$95 or \$90.
- And a similar example comes from this
- 14 Court's decision in Rumsfeld v. Fare, which recognized
- 15 that part of determining whether law schools had
- 16 improperly excluded military recruiters from campus
- 17 might be looking at the contents of emails or notices or
- 18 other evidence of the underlying conduct of exclusion.
- 19 And that's the only way that a seller's prices are being
- 20 used here. It's being used as the benchmark to
- 21 determine whether the seller has engaged in the unlawful
- 22 conduct of increasing a previously disclosed price.
- Now, why this is clear under the statute,
- 24 getting back to Justice Sotomayor's question, is in part
- 25 because of the posture of this case. We have a set of

- 1 Petitioners here who are bringing, as their counsel has
- 2 acknowledged, an as-applied challenge. And if you look
- 3 at the conduct that they want to engage in here, there
- 4 is no ambiguity about what they think is the baseline or
- 5 regular price. All of them want to --
- JUSTICE KENNEDY: But suppose that a
- 7 business makes a point of its reputation is -- is
- 8 meeting all prices. We meet prices. And there is a
- 9 business that's very close to another State and the
- 10 other State allows cash, has -- has an option where all
- 11 surcharges are permitted and surcharges are -- are
- 12 disclosed. Then the State -- the seller in this State
- 13 says, you know, we will charge the lowest price, we will
- 14 meet the price, but we add 3 cents for credit cards.
- 15 And because that's difficult to enforce, all of our
- 16 prices are increased by 3 percent for everybody because
- 17 of the difficulty of applying surcharges in some cases.
- 18 Is that valid?
- 19 MR. WU: I think it probably would be deemed
- 20 to be a credit card surcharge in that case. Obviously,
- 21 no court has addressed that specific question. It's not
- 22 presented by any of the Petitioners here. And I don't
- 23 mean to be evasive about it. I think that's an
- 24 important point because in an as-applied challenge, the
- 25 relevant question is whether the statute can be applied

- 1 to what the Petitioners want to do. And none of them
- 2 want to engage in these complicated pricing schemes.
- 3 All of them say --
- 4 JUSTICE KENNEDY: The question of Justice
- 5 Breyer says that -- that this is so complicated, doesn't
- 6 that indicate the statute is vague?
- 7 MR. WU: It -- it does not, because under
- 8 the vagueness doctrine under the Due Process Clause, as
- 9 long as there are a core set of cases that people can
- 10 understand, that's enough to sustain it. And especially
- 11 when it is clear how it would apply in the -- in the
- 12 context of the plaintiffs' own allegations.
- 13 And here again -- and this is clearest from
- 14 page 101 and 102 of the Joint Appendix. What the
- 15 Petitioners here want to do and what they will do the
- 16 moment the statute is invalidated is to list a single
- 17 set of prices, a single set of prices for each of their
- 18 goods and services and then collect an additional man on
- 19 top for -- for a surcharge.
- Now, it might be the case that other
- 21 Petitioners or other plaintiffs would engage in more
- 22 complicated pricing schemes. But the proper way to
- 23 resolve those questions is in future as-applied cases if
- 24 and when they arise. And -- and one of the things that
- 25 we can say from the enforcement history is it's deeply

- 1 unclear whether those cases will arrive. Sellers first
- 2 have to engage in those pricing schemes --
- JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: So they hold this in an
- 4 as-applied a challenge -- I hope your adversary will
- 5 confirm this -- that they want to do these four things
- 6 that's in the reply brief, one or the other. If we say
- 7 these are okay, whatever else the law means we're not
- 8 reaching because this is an as-applied challenge. If --
- 9 if we say they're okay or the New York State court of
- 10 appeals say it's okay, it's okay; right?
- MR. WU: Yes. I think that's --
- JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: But you're saying more
- 13 than this. You're saying this is how they advertise it,
- 14 but that there's a further disclosure law that when a
- 15 customer calls up the gas station, the gas station can't
- 16 do any one of these four things and potentially other
- 17 things, too; right?
- MR. WU: I don't think that's our argument.
- 19 And I should clarify I do think some of these schemes
- 20 are not okay in the sense that you couldn't impose a
- 21 credit card surcharge under some of these boxes. But if
- 22 I'm understanding your question correctly, we are not
- 23 saying --
- JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: I'm saying if we say
- 25 it's okay. I know you're not claiming it is.

- 1 MR. WU: But -- but one point I want to
- 2 respond to is the idea that what somebody says over the
- 3 phone here can affect the underlying price structure. I
- 4 mean, we treat the phone calls, including the phone
- 5 calls in the enforcement history here, as just evidence
- of what the underlying prices are in the same way that a
- 7 printed placard itself, although an active
- 8 communication, would itself be evidence of the
- 9 underlying prices. And there's no dispute here that
- 10 when the heating oil representatives were describing
- 11 their company's prices, they were describing a price
- 12 scheme that they had settled upon --
- JUSTICE ALITO: Does this apply --
- JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: I'm sorry.
- 15 JUSTICE ALITO: Does this apply to all
- 16 merchants? Anybody who sells anything?
- 17 MR. WU: It -- it does. There are limited
- 18 exception for government entities who are not deemed to
- 19 be sellers.
- 20 JUSTICE ALITO: I mean, suppose some kids
- 21 have a lemonade stand or they're washing cars and they
- 22 say a glass of lemonade, \$1 and then somebody comes up
- 23 to them and says I'd like to buy that with a credit
- 24 card. It might happen today. I have -- I have never
- seen anybody younger than me buy anything with cash.

- 1 But that would be a violation if they put the \$1 there
- 2 on the assumption that everybody is going to pay cash
- 3 for their lemonade. These are tech savvy kids so they
- 4 can -- could process a credit card purchase if they
- 5 wanted to?
- 6 MR. WU: The statue has no exemption for
- 7 kids selling lemonade.
- 8 (Laughter.)
- 9 MR. WU: I think -- I think prosecutorial
- 10 discretion would almost certainly be exercised in
- 11 that -- in that situation.
- 12 JUSTICE BREYER: You can think of examples
- 13 which I can't. In areas like energy, people who make
- 14 their own energy who use time-of-day metering, there
- 15 could be lots of regulatory rules that affect how an
- 16 energy company presents the pricing of this element or
- 17 that element included. Now, if I think that in all
- 18 these areas the correct First Amendment standard is
- 19 rational basis, nothing stronger, how then do I
- 20 distinguish the cases which you've talked about how
- 21 you -- what you say in respect to price because after
- 22 all, even if it's just evidentiary, this statute does
- 23 affect what people say as to price. So if in fact I
- 24 need a legal distinction here to get at what I think the
- 25 First Amendment is driving at, what's your best effort?

- 1 MR. WU: Well, they affect only what you say
- 2 about price as an incident to preventing you from
- 3 engaging a certain pricing practice in the first
- 4 instance, and I think this is the distinction this Court
- 5 has drawn in cases like Virginia State Board of
- 6 Pharmacy. I mean, that's a case about price
- 7 advertisements, but the understanding there is that the
- 8 advertisements are describing an underlying price that
- 9 would be applied. For instance, if a consumer walked
- into a pharmacy and wanted to buy a prescription drug.
- 11 And -- and this case is about that consumer transaction.
- The descriptions of the prices are
- incidental to the regulation of the underlying consumer
- 14 transaction and the price that the seller may impose
- 15 here.
- And -- and I think the point about the other
- 17 regulations that may apply is also an important one in
- 18 a -- in a couple of respects. I think the most
- 19 important point of these other regulations is that they
- 20 demonstrate that there are multiple ways in which the
- 21 legislature or Congress can address what happens to a
- 22 default or regular price, and they all operate in
- 23 tandem. The legislature could, for instance, say, you
- 24 can't do a credit card surcharge as here. They could
- 25 also say, you can increase your prices at a car rental

- 1 agency if you add an additional driver, or if you have a
- 2 car seat. And all of these would operate on the same
- 3 underlying price structure. The starting point for all
- 4 of these, as we've argued in our brief, would be the
- 5 seller's regular or baseline price.
- 6 If we --
- JUSTICE GINSBURG: If we -- if we agree with
- 8 the government that this is because it affects how the
- 9 merchant characterizes his price, would you also take
- 10 the position that the government takes that it's
- 11 justified as a disclosure law?
- MR. WU: We -- we think that it can be,
- 13 and -- and -- and in part that's because we agree with
- 14 the government, with the Federal Government, about the
- 15 compliance options under this statute.
- 16 It is true under both the New York law and
- 17 the Federal law that the way a seller complies with the
- 18 statute is to display a dollars-and-cents price that it
- 19 later charges the credit card customers.
- 20 JUSTICE GINSBURG: Can you explain to me how
- 21 it's a disclosure requirement to suppress the actual
- 22 cost of the credit card purchase?
- 23 MR. WU: Well, it's not suppressing the
- 24 actual cost of the credit card purchase. It's only
- 25 preventing -- well, I'll -- I'll say two things.

- 1 At most it is preventing one way of
- 2 conveying a credit card price, but the better way to
- 3 look at it, as the government explains, is that it's
- 4 just requiring a different price -- the higher
- 5 dollars-and-cents price for credit card customers to be
- 6 displayed.
- JUSTICE KAGAN: Mr. Wu, you think, is this
- 8 not true, that the dual pricing scheme is legal; is that
- 9 right?
- MR. WU: That's correct.
- 11 JUSTICE KAGAN: That was something that the
- 12 Second Circuit did not decide, said it was abstaining
- on. It seems to me that that's quite relevant to this
- 14 question of whether this is a disclosure requirement.
- 15 Because if the dual pricing scheme is not legal, it is
- 16 really hard to characterize this as a disclosure
- 17 requirement.
- 18 Would you agree with that?
- MR. WU: I think that it would be. But --
- 20 but I think it's important to recognize also why the
- 21 Second Circuit abstained on this question. It didn't so
- 22 because it rejected our interpretation of the law which
- 23 would allow dual pricing. It did so because it found
- 24 that the statute was readily susceptible to an
- 25 interpretation that would allow dual pricing because of

- 1 the clear indications that New York intended to follow
- 2 the Federal statute, and so it wouldn't adopt an
- 3 interpretation that would raise constitutional problems.
- 4 And although -- although we think this Court could adopt
- 5 our interpretation of the -- of the State law, it would
- 6 also be fair to recognize that there is no reason to
- 7 deviate from the Federal statute on this front.
- 8 But -- but I also want to respond to one
- 9 other point that Justice Ginsburg had raised, which is
- 10 whether this suppresses information about credit card
- 11 costs, and -- and it does not in this important sense:
- 12 Nothing about the statute prevents a seller from
- 13 educating consumers about credit card costs, informing
- 14 them about it, talking about it. Many of the
- 15 Petitioners here do do so. Brooklyn Pharmacy, for
- 16 instance, has told its customers not to use credit cards
- 17 because of the additional costs that they impose, and
- 18 they remain free to do so under this statute.
- 19 And in an important sense, that speech is
- 20 actually a better and more direct way of advocating
- 21 about credit card costs than the mere imposition of a
- 22 surcharge.
- 23 Your Honor, Expressions Hair Design, for
- 24 instance, wants to impose a flat 3 percent surcharge
- 25 without apparently any further speech here. And the

- 1 difficulty with that as a message about credit card
- 2 costs is, one, it doesn't explain why the surcharge is
- 3 being imposed; two, it doesn't say that it's being
- 4 imposed because of a specific thing, there's a merchant
- 5 interchange fee that credit card issuers charge; and,
- 6 three, it says nothing about the amount of the
- 7 interchange fee. A flat 3 percent fee actually that
- 8 bears no relationship whatsoever to the actual costs,
- 9 which range from 1.1 to 2.7 percent, that sellers
- 10 actually infer when they pay.
- 11 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: There is nothing about
- 12 the scheme that addresses that. The scheme has no
- 13 disclosure requirement of what was your actual credit
- 14 card charge versus what you're charging. The scheme
- does nothing to help that situation.
- 16 MR. WU: If I could answer just this
- 17 question.
- 18 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Sure.
- 19 MR. WU: That's correct, but I think this
- 20 supports our point. The scheme does not affect anything
- 21 that sellers may say about their credit card costs. The
- 22 very narrow thing that it does is to put an imposition
- 23 of a surcharge in the consumer transaction, and that's
- 24 what's the classic economic conduct regulation.
- 25 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Thank you, Counsel.

1	Mr. Gupta, a minute.
2	REBUTTAL ARGUMENT OF DEEPAK GUPTA
3	ON BEHALF OF THE PETITIONERS
4	MR. GUPTA: Thank you, Mr. Chief Justice.
5	The solicitor general agrees with us that
6	this is a restriction of speech, but posits that the
7	only thing that's left on the table is a disclosure
8	rationale that New York abandoned in the courts below
9	and is barely pressing here, and the problem with that
10	is that this is a criminal speech restriction. And so
11	if your merchant is faced with compliance, they've got
12	to know, if if you think this is a disclosure regime,
13	what are we supposed to say? And typically a disclosure
14	regime doesn't leave you in the dark about what you have
15	to say. The government tells you precisely what to say.
16	And Zauderer recognized this problem. It
17	said that there are serious constitutional problems if
18	you have a disclosure regime that does not tell the
19	merchant precisely what to say.
20	Zauderer isn't a free pass. The government
21	has hypothesized a regime that could exist, but if it
22	did exist, it would still be subject to some First
23	Amendment scrutiny. And you would have to ask of that
24	regime the question that Chief Justice Roberts asked,
25	which is, do we think people are too dumb to do math and

Τ	why in this one context do we think that? Could it be
2	that it had something to do with suppressing the cost of
3	credit cards.
4	Thank you.
5	CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Thank you, counsel.
6	The case is submitted.
7	(Whereupon, at 11:07 a.m., the case in the
8	above-entitled matter was submitted.)
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