| 1 | IN THE SUPREME COURT OF THE UNITED STATES | | | | | |
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| 3 | 3 JOHN L. YATES, : | | | | | |
| 4 | 4 Petitioner : | | | | | |
| 5 | 5 v. : No. | 13-7451 | | | | |
| 6 | 6 UNITED STATES. : | | | | | |
| 7 | 7x | | | | | |
| 8 | Washington, D.C. | Washington, D.C. | | | | |
| 9 | 9 Wednesday, November 5, 2014 | Wednesday, November 5, 2014 | | | | |
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| 11 | 1 The above-entitled matter came on | The above-entitled matter came on for oral | | | | |
| 12 | argument before the Supreme Court of the United States | | | | | |
| 13 | at 10:04 a.m. | | | | | |
| 14 | APPEARANCES: | | | | | |
| 15 | 5 JOHN L. BADALAMENTI, ESQ., Assistant Fed | JOHN L. BADALAMENTI, ESQ., Assistant Federal Defender, | | | | |
| 16 | Tampa, Fla.; on behalf of Petitioner. | | | | | |
| 17 | 7 ROMAN MARTINEZ, ESQ., Assistant to the S | ROMAN MARTINEZ, ESQ., Assistant to the Solicitor | | | | |
| 18 | 8 General, Department of Justice, Washin | gton, D.C.; on | | | | |
| 19 | 9 behalf of Respondent. | | | | | |
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| 1 | PROCEEDINGS |
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| 2 | (10:04 a.m.) |
| 3 | CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: We will hear |
| 4 | argument first this morning in Case 13-7451, Yates v. |
| 5 | United States. |
| 6 | Mr. Badalamenti. |
| 7 | ORAL ARGUMENT OF JOHN L. BADALAMENTI |
| 8 | ON BEHALF OF PETITIONER |
| 9 | MR. BADALAMENTI: Mr. Chief Justice, and may |
| 10 | it please the Court: |
| 11 | The natural, sensible and contextual reading |
| 12 | of Section 1519 is that the phrase "record document or |
| 13 | tangible object" is confined to records, documents and |
| 14 | devices designed to preserve information, the very |
| 15 | matters involved in the Enron debacle. Given the |
| 16 | expansive Federal nexus of this statute, which is the |
| 17 | intent to influence the proper administration of any |
| 18 | matter within the jurisdiction of the United States, it |
| 19 | is implausible that Congress would have passed sub |
| 20 | silentio, an all-encompassing obstruction statute buried |
| 21 | within the altering documents provision of the |
| 22 | Sarbanes-Oxley Act. |
| 23 | A strong textual indicator that Section 1519 |
| 24 | is confined to record-related offenses is the inclusion |
| 25 | of the unique term "makes false entry in," which |

- 1 Congress only uses in record-related statutes. The
- 2 canons of ejusdem generis and noscitur a sociis confirm
- 3 that tangible object is related to the common thread
- 4 between record and document which are information
- 5 devices -- information mediums.
- 6 JUSTICE GINSBURG: Why should -- why should
- 7 the expression "tangible object," which stands alone,
- 8 it's not falsifying documents, why should the word
- 9 "object" in 1519 be treated differently than the word
- 10 "other object" in 1512 -- 1512(c)?
- MR. BADALAMENTI: Justice Ginsburg, in
- 12 Section 1519 -- it was passed at the same time as
- 13 1512(c) as part of the Sarbanes-Oxley Act. And as this
- 14 Court held in Russello, when Congress includes different
- 15 terms in different statutes passed in the same act, it
- 16 is intended to mean something different.
- 17 JUSTICE GINSBURG: So you think there's a
- 18 difference between "tangible object" and "other object"?
- 19 MR. BADALAMENTI: Yes, there is. The first
- 20 reason is that the inclusion of "makes false entry in"
- 21 indicates that the phrase "record document and tangible
- 22 objects" refers to recordkeeping. Another difference is
- 23 that -- a common sense standpoint -- is that records can
- 24 only be maintained on tangible mediums. And it's a
- 25 distinguishing factor between "record document" and

- 1 "other objects" in 1512(c). It's also limited --
- 2 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: But how does the
- 3 Internet -- you could falsify Internet entries, or
- 4 things that are in the cloud, those are intangible
- 5 items.
- 6 MR. BADALAMENTI: No, those are tangible
- 7 items, Your Honor, because they are stored on a hard
- 8 drive somewhere. The cloud is not existing above. It's
- 9 merely being housed somewhere else that's accessed
- 10 through the Internet on a tangible device that's
- 11 designed to preserve that very type of information.
- 12 JUSTICE KENNEDY: Suppose a typewriter
- 13 were used to prepare an incriminating document. The
- 14 document and the typewriter were destroyed, would that
- 15 be covered?
- 16 MR. BADALAMENTI: The typewriter would not
- 17 be. The piece of paper that the typewriter is
- 18 inscribing on is a device that's designed to preserve
- 19 information. It's simply making the information.
- 20 JUSTICE KENNEDY: I -- I understand the
- 21 argument and the argument that you make has considerable
- 22 force about over criminalizing, but it seems to me that
- 23 the test you suggest has almost more problems with
- 24 vagueness, more problems with determining what its
- 25 boundaries are than the government's test.

- 1 MR. BADALAMENTI: No, the government's test
- 2 renders 1512(c) wholly superfluous. 1519 -- first of
- 3 all, the words "record document" and "tangible object"
- 4 are definitions providing meaning to all of them. The
- 5 government is saying admittedly, "record" and "document"
- 6 didn't need to be there and Congress had no reason to
- 7 put them there because it's everything, it's all
- 8 physical evidence. A record -- a tangible object is a
- 9 discrete device. It is a device that is designed to
- 10 preserve the information.
- 11 JUSTICE ALITO: Well, if that's the -- if
- 12 that is the case, then why is it not surplusage? Why --
- what would be a tangible object designed to contain
- 14 information that would not fall into the category of
- 15 record or document?
- 16 MR. BADALAMENTI: An iPad, a laptop
- 17 computer, a desktop computer, an iPhone. Those --
- 18 JUSTICE ALITO: Those things in themselves
- 19 don't -- they have documents, they have something that
- 20 could be called a document or a record stored in them.
- 21 MR. BADALAMENTI: That is --
- 22 JUSTICE ALITO: If you -- if you have an
- 23 iPad that's straight from the store, has nothing -- has
- 24 no information stored in that, do you think that would
- 25 fall within the statute?

| Τ | MR. BADALAMEN'I'I: It would fall within the |
|----|--|
| 2 | statute because what Congress was trying to intend to do |
| 3 | and given the backdrop of the Enron situation where |
| 4 | massive servers were destroyed or deleted or otherwise |
| 5 | they were trying to to capture the devices that |
| 6 | held information. And you cannot determine what's on |
| 7 | the device unless you have the device, regardless of |
| 8 | whether or not there's information on it or not. |
| 9 | JUSTICE ALITO: What about destroying a |
| 10 | brand new empty filing cabinet? |
| 11 | MR. BADALAMENTI: That is not a device |
| 12 | that's used to preserve information. That's a contained |
| 13 | of something. It's not specifically designed to |
| 14 | preserve information. You could put bowling balls in |
| 15 | a in a filing cabinet or otherwise. The information, |
| 16 | the distinguishing factor, Your Honor, between a |
| 17 | tangible object is that the information is being |
| 18 | preserved within it, embedded within it, like a computer |
| 19 | or otherwise. And Congress needed to use the general |
| 20 | phrase "tangible object" for a reason, because in 2002, |
| 21 | an iPad, an iPhone, and many other electronic devices |
| 22 | that preserve information didn't exist, and they |
| 23 | JUSTICE GINSBURG: But then the Congress |
| 24 | could have said used tangible object used to preserve |
| 25 | information, and then your case would be solid. But it |

- 1 just said "tangible object."
- 2 MR. BADALAMENTI: It said "tangible object,"
- 3 that is true, Justice Ginsburg, that it said "tangible
- 4 object." But it did so using that general phrase
- 5 following two specific terms, "record" and "document,"
- 6 which is a classic methodology in which the legislature
- 7 uses --
- 8 JUSTICE KAGAN: But could I go back to
- 9 Justice Ginsburg's first question, because, my fault I'm
- 10 sure, but I wasn't sure I understood your answer. Not
- only in 1512(c)(1), but there are, you know, I think
- 12 five times in 1512 from a prior enactment this same kind
- of phrase is used, which is "record document and other
- 14 object." And you say that we should treat that phrase
- 15 as it exists many times in 1512 differently from this
- 16 phrase in 1519 because of the difference between
- 17 tangible object and other object. And to me, it seems
- 18 like other object is, if anything, a more classic case
- of that canon that I can't pronounce the name of,
- 20 ejusdem whatever.
- 21 (Laughter.)
- JUSTICE SCALIA: Generis.
- 23 JUSTICE KAGAN: Good. That's what I count
- 24 on my colleague for.
- 25 (Laughter.)

- 1 JUSTICE KAGAN: I -- I deserved that.
- 2 But to me, it seems like a more -- even a
- 3 more classic case. So I guess I just don't understand
- 4 why you're treating the two differently.
- 5 MR. BADALAMENTI: It is, to answer your
- 6 question, they're being treated differently not simply
- 7 because of the inclusion of the word "tangible," but
- 8 because of the other words surrounding "tangible
- 9 object," like the unique phrase "makes faltering entry
- 10 in," which is not included in any other obstruction of
- 11 justice statute.
- 12 JUSTICE KAGAN: But just because Congress
- includes more verbs -- I mean, the reason Congress
- includes 20 verbs instead of 4 is presumably because
- 15 Congress really wants to sweep in a very wide variety of
- 16 conduct. And not every verb has to apply to every
- 17 situation. In fact, we rather presume that they won't.
- 18 MR. BADALAMENTI: Although this Court has
- 19 never held that all the verbs, you know, applied to all
- 20 the nouns, it would make sense that they would apply.
- 21 The only instance that the United States points out is
- 22 in an amended statute. This statute was written from
- 23 "Whoever" to the last word of this statute at the same
- 24 time. It makes sense that they all apply. And "makes
- 25 false entry in" is a phrase that can be used only to

- 1 apply to all of the nouns under our particular
- 2 construction. And it's unique. It is only used by
- 3 Congress in record-related statutes.
- 4 JUSTICE KAGAN: So your whole argument here
- 5 really comes down to the fact that Congress put some
- 6 record-related verbs in there?
- 7 MR. BADALAMENTI: It does not, Your Honor.
- 8 There's additional things. We have a limited subject
- 9 matter under our definition, which makes sense because
- 10 you have a tremendously broad nexus to any matter within
- 11 the proper administration of the United States. That's
- 12 unlike traditional classic statutes. It makes sense
- 13 that Congress wanted to narrow the subject matter of
- 14 this particular statute when you're dealing with such a
- 15 broad nexus to any Federal matter.
- 16 JUSTICE KAGAN: But I would think -- I'm
- 17 sorry. I would think that that cuts against you, that
- 18 the fact that this is about any matter within the
- 19 jurisdiction of any agency in the United States shows
- 20 that it's really not just about corporate fraud, that
- 21 Congress had a broader set of things in mind. So I
- 22 would think that that's -- that's quite the opposite,
- 23 that everything about this statute, the "any matter,"
- 24 the "any record," suggests breadth.
- 25 MR. BADALAMENTI: It -- it does not, Your

- 1 Honor, because if you take the lens and you zoom it out
- 2 a little bit further, if we look at Section 802 of Title
- 3 VIII of the Sarbanes-Oxley Act, it's entitled "Criminal
- 4 Penalties For Altering Documents." Two new criminal
- 5 statutes were created: 1519, entitled "Destruction,
- 6 alteration, and falsification of records; " and 1520,
- 7 which is a 5-year record retention requirement on
- 8 auditors. They were -- or else they get a 10-year
- 9 penalty for that.
- 10 Congress was referring, passing these, 1519
- and 1520 within Section 802 of Title VIII, as a tandem,
- 12 as another contextual indicator that this is intended to
- 13 apply to record-related matters.
- 14 JUSTICE GINSBURG: Then how do you -- how do
- 15 you respond to the illustration that the government gave
- 16 in its brief? That is, what sense does it make to say
- 17 you can be indicted under 1519 if you destroy a letter
- 18 that the victim that you have murdered has sent you, but
- 19 you can't be indicted under 1519 if you destroy the
- 20 murder weapon?
- 21 MR. BADALAMENTI: Congress did not intend
- 22 1519 to be applied in that situation. And as you state
- 23 the question, Justice Ginsburg, it is remarkable that
- the government would use 1519 in a murder situation.
- 25 JUSTICE GINSBURG: But you think it could --

- 1 would -- let me back up and ask what I assume was -- you
- 2 would say yes to. A letter is shredded. It's a letter
- 3 from the victim to the later-turned-out-to-be murderer.
- 4 That letter is shredded. Does that come under 1519?
- 5 MR. BADALAMENTI: That does, because that is
- 6 record related. But the knife does not. That falls
- 7 into the sweep -- that particular subject matter,
- 8 because it indeed is a record, so that would be covered
- 9 under 1519, but that -- not the knife. Congress didn't
- 10 intend to sweep the knife into 1519, but --
- 11 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: Where did the -- I'm
- 12 sorry.
- 13 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: What if the knife
- 14 had the defendant's name on it? Is that, destroying the
- 15 knife, is that altering, destroying a record?
- 16 MR. BADALAMENTI: It is not. One would not,
- 17 Mr. Chief Justice, refer to an inscription of one's name
- 18 as a permanent account of an event. It's just an
- 19 identification. It's an identification on the knife.
- 20 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Well, but presumably
- 21 the same would be true of a lot of documents or records
- 22 that are destroyed.
- 23 MR. BADALAMENTI: But in ordinary parlance,
- 24 one would not consider an inscription on a knife to be
- 25 it. It's evidence, but it's not a -- it's not a

- 1 document, it's not a record or otherwise, and it doesn't
- 2 fall within the very limited subject matter that
- 3 Congress wrote into this particular statute, which is
- 4 records.
- 5 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: Now, what do you say
- 6 about 1512(c)? Would the knife fall under that?
- 7 MR. BADALAMENTI: 1519 and '12(c), it would
- 8 make more sense that the knife fall in, and here's why.
- 9 It's a more classic --
- 10 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: Even if the knife was
- 11 used in the murder, but it was destroyed before anybody
- 12 was caught?
- 13 MR. BADALAMENTI: It would -- if
- 14 it was destroyed with the intent to impair that object's
- 15 availability in an official proceeding, which is a
- 16 classic, classic obstruction statute --
- 17 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: So did the government
- 18 mischarge here? Could they have charged your client
- 19 with violating 1512(c)?
- 20 MR. BADALAMENTI: It's possible the
- 21 government could have charged that particular thing,
- 22 but --
- JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR:
 I love those words,
- 24 "possible."
- MR. BADALAMENTI: It is possible.

- 1 (Laughter).
- 2 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: What would -- what would
- 3 have been your defense if they did?
- 4 MR. BADALAMENTI: My defense would have been
- 5 something very significant, difference between 1512(c)
- 6 and 1519. 1519 only requires that --
- 7 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: I know you were charged
- 8 with. What would have been your defense to 15 --
- 9 MR. BADALAMENTI: He didn't corruptly do it.
- 10 And corruptly is wrongful, immoral, depraved or evil,
- 11 not simply knowingly, which is required under 1519,
- 12 which is voluntarily and intentionally done. See,
- "corruptly" is used in 1512(c) purposefully in that
- 14 particular information because it is, perhaps, a broader
- 15 class, and it is --
- 16 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: Destroying and
- 17 substituting fish is not a corrupt act.
- 18 MR. BADALAMENTI: It would have been my
- 19 defense.
- 20 (Laughter.)
- JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: Touche.
- MR. BADALAMENTI: Which was the question,
- 23 Your Honor. Okay?
- 24 So what we -- what we have in 1519 -- what
- 25 we have in 1519 is a remarkable situation when you're

- 1 looking at Chapter 73 in total, is that you have this
- 2 incredibly broad nexus to any Federal matter within the
- 3 jurisdiction of the United States. What can the matter
- 4 be? As the amicus briefs point out, any of 300,000
- 5 Federal regulations that the Federal Government has
- 6 placed down upon the American people.
- 7 JUSTICE BREYER: And what is your view,
- 8 given what you've just said, of the best way to narrow
- 9 this statute?
- 10 MR. BADALAMENTI: The best way to narrow
- 11 this statute, Justice Breyer, is to interpret "tangible
- 12 object" in the company it keeps, and that is a device
- 13 that is designed to preserve information such that if
- 14 that device is destroyed, the information contained on
- 15 that device is destroyed.
- 16 JUSTICE BREYER: You still have the problem
- 17 of the language of the statute covering the destruction
- 18 of a document such as an EPA questionnaire that comes to
- 19 the door asking about recycling, where you know that the
- 20 EPA would like to have that back to help them do their
- 21 official work of finding out how the program works.
- 22 You, believing that that's their business, not yours,
- 23 tear it up and throw it in the wastebasket.
- Now, does that fall within the statute?
- MR. BADALAMENTI: Well, it --

- 1 JUSTICE BREYER: It surely does within the
- 2 language.
- 3 MR. BADALAMENTI: It falls within --
- 4 JUSTICE BREYER: And your effort to narrow
- 5 the statute has nothing to do with that.
- 6 MR. BADALAMENTI: The narrowing is the
- 7 document itself. This statute's exceedingly broad.
- 8 Our --
- 9 JUSTICE BREYER: But my problem, of course,
- 10 is reading the statute and taking your argument in the
- 11 context that you mean it, which is we must look for a
- 12 way to narrow this statute, which at first blush seems
- 13 far broader than any witness-tampering statute, any
- 14 obstruction of justice statute, any not lying to an FBI
- 15 agent statute that I've ever seen, let alone those
- 16 within Section 15. So what I'd like you to focus on is
- 17 not your problem, though they're connected, but my
- 18 problem.
- 19 MR. BADALAMENTI: Focusing on your problem,
- 20 Justice Breyer, I would say that it is not an onerous
- 21 situation for individuals to retain documents. It is
- 22 not an onerous situation on the American people to --
- 23 with particularly what we have on flash drives attached to a
- 24 key chain that can hold thousands and thousands --
- 25 JUSTICE BREYER: Right. I see where you're

- 1 going.
- 2 MR. BADALAMENTI: -- of documents.
- 3 JUSTICE BREYER: I see where you're going.
- 4 Let's follow you down that road: That you say in many
- 5 situations it should not be a crime to retain a
- 6 document, even though you know that the Census Bureau
- 7 would like it back or perhaps the EPA.
- 8 MR. BADALAMENTI: Uh-huh.
- 9 JUSTICE BREYER: And perhaps it's nothing
- 10 more than trying to find out information. But where you
- 11 end up at the end of the road is that this is void for
- 12 vagueness, but not for any reason you have yet told us.
- 13 So what am I to do with the fact, if that is a serious
- 14 problem, that it has never been argued in this case?
- 15 MR. BADALAMENTI: Well, I would accept the
- 16 invitation that it would be void for vagueness, Your
- 17 Honor.
- 18 JUSTICE SCALIA: Why is it vaque? It's --
- 19 it's just incredibly expansive.
- 20 MR. BADALAMENTI: It -- it --
- 21 JUSTICE SCALIA: What is vague about the
- 22 fact that if you destroy a questionnaire, you destroy a
- 23 document with the intent of, what is it, to impede,
- 24 obstruct or influence the investigation or proper
- 25 administration. What's vague about it?

- 1 JUSTICE BREYER: The answer to that, if you
- 2 want to pose it as a question to me --
- 3 (Laughter).
- 4 JUSTICE BREYER: -- would be that the void
- 5 for vagueness, if you look at Skilling, has two
- 6 branches. From Kolender v. Lawson -- Justice Ginsburg
- 7 wrote it -- a penal statute defining the criminal
- 8 offense, one, with sufficient definiteness that ordinary
- 9 people can understand. That's what Justice Scalia has
- 10 just talked about. You can understand what is
- 11 prohibited.
- But then there is two: In a manner that
- does not encourage arbitrary and discriminatory
- 14 enforcement. It's that second part, that the doctrine
- 15 extends the doctrine to statutes that, while they may be
- 16 clear, are far too broad, well beyond what any sensible
- 17 prosecutor would even want to prosecute.
- 18 MR. BADALAMENTI: Well, I agree with that.
- 19 JUSTICE BREYER: All right. Then back to
- 20 the question.
- 21 MR. BADALAMENTI: The answer -- the answer
- 22 would be that perhaps a way to reconcile this statute
- 23 would be not only to accept our position that it relates
- 24 to recordkeeping generally, but that it requires
- 25 specifically, relates to business recordkeeping, where

- 1 businesses are on notice such as is he filing quarterly
- 2 requirements or otherwise, that they are to do specific
- 3 things. And if you look against the backdrop of the
- 4 Sarbanes-Oxley Act, there is plenty of support that
- 5 Congress was targeting businesses, corporations, and
- 6 publicly traded companies.
- 7 JUSTICE GINSBURG: Isn't -- isn't running a
- 8 fishing vessel a business?
- 9 MR. BADALAMENTI: It would be running a
- 10 business, Your Honor, it would be. And a possible way
- 11 to limit this particular circumstance would be to limit
- 12 it to -- to businesses. It doesn't change the fact that
- 13 "tangible object" doesn't mean everything.
- 14 JUSTICE GINSBURG: Can you -- can you tell
- 15 me the exact consequences for your client? Because as I
- 16 understand it, he was also charged under 22 -- what is
- 17 it -- 2232?
- MR. BADALAMENTI: Yes, Your Honor.
- 19 JUSTICE GINSBURG: And he could have gotten
- 20 the same sentence?
- 21 MR. BADALAMENTI: No. No, Your Honor. 2232
- 22 is destroying a piece of property subject to seizure.
- 23 That's a 5-year statutory maximum. 1519 has a 20-year
- 24 statutory maximum.
- JUSTICE GINSBURG: But he in fact got what?

- 1 30 days.
- 2 MR. BADALAMENTI: 30 -- he ended up getting
- 3 30 days by a judge that made that individualized
- 4 decision under the Booker factors. But we can't count
- 5 on judges being like those -- that judge around the
- 6 United States. The fact remains is that --
- 7 JUSTICE GINSBURG: But you're only arguing
- 8 for your client. This is not some kind of class action.
- 9 MR. BADALAMENTI: No, Your Honor, this is
- 10 just related to Mr. Yates. But the idea is that -- my
- 11 understanding is that when the courts are writing the
- 12 opinions, they're thinking about all the judges in the
- 13 United States and providing guidance to all the judges,
- 14 providing guidance to the prosecutors when to use
- 15 particular statutes.
- And if this Court permits that this statute
- 17 be applied for the disposal of all physical evidence
- 18 that would contravene the textual and contextual terms
- 19 and indicators that I brought through throughout this
- 20 argument, it is basically the overreaching broad thing
- 21 that Congress has never passed, despite the government's
- 22 attempt to inject in the Model Penal Code into this
- 23 case, which 1519 looks nothing like the Model Penal
- 24 Code.
- 25 JUSTICE KENNEDY: Suppose the fisherman took

- 1 pictures of the fish, and then he destroyed both the
- 2 pictures and the fish. Liability?
- 3 MR. BADALAMENTI: A picture? Although
- 4 Congress didn't intend this in this circumstance, and we
- 5 would hope the prosecutor wouldn't prosecute for this,
- 6 it is a permanent account of an event that is preserving
- 7 the information as to what the pictures -- what the fish
- 8 looked like. So the fish thrown overboard indeed would
- 9 be a record and would be covered under this statute.
- 10 But it wouldn't be a tangible object because it's not a
- 11 device designed to preserve the information.
- 12 JUSTICE KENNEDY: The photograph isn't?
- 13 MR. BADALAMENTI: The photo -- I'm sorry,
- 14 the photograph is not a tangible object under our
- 15 definition. If it were a digital camera and it's stored
- on a memory card on it, that would be a tangible object.
- 17 JUSTICE KENNEDY: Is a piece of paper a
- 18 physical object?
- 19 MR. BADALAMENTI: A piece of paper is a
- 20 piece of paper, a physical object.
- 21 JUSTICE KENNEDY: Is it an object?
- 22 MR. BADALAMENTI: It's an object as well.
- 23 JUSTICE KENNEDY: But why isn't a film if
- 24 it's on it -- I'm talking not about a film on one of
- 25 these screens, but an old-time film that you can pick

- 1 up. A picture, a picture.
- 2 MR. BADALAMENTI: Well, they -- it is -- the
- 3 film itself is a record. The film itself is a record.
- 4 It's not --
- 5 JUSTICE KENNEDY: Would its destruction be a
- 6 violation of this Act?
- 7 MR. BADALAMENTI: Yes, it would be.
- 8 JUSTICE KENNEDY: It seems very odd that you
- 9 can throw away the fish without violating the Act, but
- 10 you can't throw away the picture.
- 11 MR. BADALAMENTI: Although it's not what
- 12 Congress intended, it's what requires that this statute
- 13 read even under our interpretation, which brings up the
- 14 absurdity of this particular case. This underscores
- 15 everything about this case that's absurd, is that the
- 16 prosecutor used this statute in this way. And had he
- 17 thrown a piece of paper overboard that had the day's
- 18 catch logs on it, that would have been covered, and we
- 19 concede that that would have been covered.
- 20 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: Well, then why is that
- 21 absurd? If you concede that that would have been
- 22 covered, the catch logs, and the prosecutor is trying to
- 23 do the exact same thing, it's just that he's thrown over
- 24 a different piece of evidence, why is that such a crazy
- 25 outcome?

- 1 MR. BADALAMENTI: The -- the absurdity
- 2 aspect comes down to the -- perhaps the prosecution in
- 3 this case, and I didn't mean to overstate that, Justice
- 4 Kagan. The fact is, is that throwing it overboard, the
- 5 log, the picture that memorializes what that fish looked
- 6 like at the time is a record, and it would fall within
- 7 it.
- 8 And taking a step back to Justice Breyer's
- 9 question earlier --
- 10 JUSTICE SCALIA: Wouldn't it be just as
- 11 absurd to give him 20 years, though, wouldn't it?
- 12 MR. BADALAMENTI: It would be extremely
- 13 absurd, Justice Scalia.
- 14 JUSTICE SCALIA: Yes. I don't understand.
- 15 JUSTICE KAGAN: But that clearly falls
- 16 within the statute. I mean, you can't argue that it
- 17 doesn't. So --
- MR. BADALAMENTI: The only -- the only way
- 19 we could argue --
- 20 JUSTICE KAGAN: You know, it seems as though
- 21 this is -- Congress gives very strict penalties to lots
- 22 of minor things, and -- but that's, you know, that's
- 23 what it does.
- 24 MR. BADALAMENTI: Congress did something
- 25 that was very, very strong language to the American

- 1 people in the Sarbanes-Oxley Act. It added 1519 to
- 2 cover record-related matters, 20 years. 1512(c) is
- 3 related to official proceedings -- we've discussed that
- 4 earlier -- 20 years. It upped wire fraud, mail fraud,
- 5 from 5 years all the way up to 20 years. Why did
- 6 Congress do that? It did that because it recognized the
- 7 harm that Enron/Arthur Andersen type of situations did
- 8 to the financial well-being of this country and the
- 9 investors in public markets, and it wanted to send a
- 10 message to the public to not engage in record
- 11 destruction that could impede or influence the proper
- 12 administration of any matter. That's why it's important
- 13 to limit the subject matter of this particular statute
- 14 to just record-related matters.
- 15 If there are no more questions, I would like
- 16 to reserve the remainder of my time for rebuttal,
- 17 Mr. Chief.
- 18 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Thank you, counsel.
- 19 Mr. Martinez.
- 20 ORAL ARGUMENT OF ROMAN MARTINEZ
- ON BEHALF OF THE RESPONDENT
- MR. MARTINEZ: Mr. Chief Justice, and may it
- 23 please the Court:
- 24 Section 1519's key phrase, "any record,
- 25 document, or tangible object," unambiguously encompasses

- 1 all types of physical evidence. That's clear from the
- 2 standard meaning of those words in ordinary speech and
- 3 from the broader statutory and historical context in
- 4 which those words appear.
- 5 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Why are those -- why
- 6 are those the key words? Why don't you start earlier?
- 7 "Knowingly alter, destroy, mutilate, conceal, cover up,
- 8 falsify, "those are certainly pertinent in analyzing the
- 9 reach of "tangible object," aren't they?
- 10 MR. MARTINEZ: I think they show that --
- 11 that Congress was intending to essentially figure out
- 12 every way that -- that someone might imagine tampering
- 13 with or destroying or -- or obstructing justice by
- 14 getting rid of evidence, and so they might shed light on
- 15 it. But the issue in this case is the meaning of -- of
- 16 the phrase "any tangible object."
- 17 I would like to --
- 18 JUSTICE GINSBURG: Are you -- are you then
- 19 saying that this is, indeed, a general statute against
- 20 destroying anything that would impede a Federal --
- 21 MR. MARTINEZ: We think this is a general
- 22 statute that would cover destroying any record,
- 23 document, or tangible object, which we think, as a
- 24 manner of plain meaning and history covers all types
- 25 of -- of physical evidence.

| 1 | JUSTICE | KENNEDY: | Assume | t.hat. | Congress |
|---|---------|----------|--------|--------|----------|
| | | | | | |

- 2 intended and wanted, to cure a void in the criminal
- 3 statutes, to have a general prohibition against
- 4 destruction of evidence and that it put it in
- 5 Sarbanes-Oxley, and you make that argument. Are there
- 6 any other laws of general application that were also
- 7 included in the Sarbanes Act -- Oxley, or is this the
- 8 only one?
- 9 MR. MARTINEZ: No, there -- there were a
- 10 number. First of all, Petitioner has conceded that
- 11 1512(c)(1) itself is of general application. The other
- 12 one that I think is the clearest to point to would be
- 13 1513(e), which was a new provision also added as part of
- 14 Sarbanes-Oxley that was the antiretaliation provision.
- 15 And --
- 16 JUSTICE SCALIA: Is there any other
- 17 provision of Federal law that has a lesser penalty than
- 18 20 years that could have been applied to this -- this
- 19 captain throwing a fish overboard?
- 20 MR. MARTINEZ: Well, Your Honor, he was
- 21 convicted of violating 2232. The statute that
- 22 Petitioner agreed he could have been charged with,
- 23 1512(c)(1), also applies a 20-year penalty.
- 24 But I'd like to address --
- 25 JUSTICE SCALIA: And that's it?

1 JUSTICE BREYER: They never meant to --2 JUSTICE SCALIA: There is nothing lesser 3 than that? 4 MR. MARTINEZ: I -- I'm sure there -- there 5 may have been other --6 JUSTICE SCALIA: You know, frankly, you come 7 here, and, yeah, he only got -- what did he get, 30 days 8 or something? 9 MR. MARTINEZ: Yes, Your Honor. JUSTICE SCALIA: But he could have gotten 10 11 20 years. What kind of a sensible prosecution is that? 12 MR. MARTINEZ: Your Honor --13 JUSTICE SCALIA: Is there nothing else 14 you -- who -- who do you have out there that -- that 15 exercises prosecutorial discretion? Is this the same 16 guy that -- that brought the prosecution in Bond last 17 term? 18 MR. MARTINEZ: Your Honor, I think a couple points on that. First of all, Congress passed a broad 19 20 statute. The statute as originally drafted and reported out of the Senate Judiciary Committee had a 5-year 21 22 penalty. Congress looked very closely at that penalty. 23 It was -- sorry, it was drafted with 5 years. It was 24 reported out of committee with 10 years, and it was

ultimately at -- at the suggestion of the House of

25

- 1 Representatives, upped to 20 years.
- 2 JUSTICE SCALIA: No, I'm not talking about
- 3 Congress. I'm talking about the prosecutor. What kind
- 4 of a mad prosecutor would try to send this guy up for
- 5 20 years or risk sending him up for 20 years?
- 6 MR. MARTINEZ: Your Honor, we did not ask
- 7 for 20 years in this prosecution. And let me try to
- 8 explain --
- 9 JUSTICE GINSBURG: But you did -- you did --
- 10 you did charge --
- 11 JUSTICE KENNEDY: What did you ask for?
- 12 JUSTICE GINSBURG: You charged two offenses:
- 13 2232, and Yates is not questioning the applicability of
- 14 that. Is there any guidance that comes from Justice to
- 15 prosecutors? I mean, the code is filled with
- 16 overlapping offenses. So here's a case where the one
- 17 statute has a 5-year maximum, the other 20. The one
- 18 that has the 5-year clearly covers the situation.
- 19 Is there anything in any kind of manual in
- 20 the Department of Justice that instructs U.S. attorneys
- 21 what to do when there are these overlapping statutes?
- 22 MR. MARTINEZ: Your Honor, the -- my
- 23 understanding of the U.S. Attorney's Manual is that the
- 24 general guidance that's given is that the prosecutor
- 25 should charge -- once the decision is made to bring a

- 1 criminal prosecution, the prosecutor should charge
- 2 the -- the offense that's the most severe under the law.
- 3 That's not a hard and fast rule, but that's kind of the
- 4 default principle. In this case that was Section 1519.
- 5 JUSTICE SCALIA: Well, if that's going to be
- 6 the Justice Department's position, then we're going to
- 7 have to be much more careful about how extensive
- 8 statutes are. I mean, if you're saying we're always
- 9 going to prosecute the most severe, I'm going to be very
- 10 careful about how severe I make statutes.
- 11 MR. MARTINEZ: Your Honor, that's --
- 12 JUSTICE SCALIA: Or -- or how much coverage
- 13 I give to severe statutes.
- 14 MR. MARTINEZ: That's -- that's not what we
- 15 were saying. I think we're not always going to
- 16 prosecute every case, and obviously we're going to
- 17 exercise our discretion. In this case, what the
- 18 prosecutors did was they looked at the circumstances of
- 19 the offense. And just to emphasize what happened here,
- 20 Mr. Yates was given an explicit instruction by a law
- 21 enforcement officer to preserve evidence of his
- 22 violation of Federal law. He directly disobeyed that.
- 23 He then launched a -- a convoluted cover-up scheme to --
- 24 to cover up the fact that he had destroyed the evidence.
- 25 He enlisted other people, including his crew members, in

- 1 executing that scheme and in lying to the law
- 2 enforcement officers about it. And then --
- 3 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: You make him sound
- 4 like a mob boss or something. I mean, he was caught --
- 5 (Laughter.)
- 6 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: The fish were -- how
- 7 many inches short of permitted were the fish?
- 8 MR. MARTINEZ: The fish were -- it varied
- 9 fish by fish, Your Honor.
- 10 (Laughter.)
- 11 MR. MARTINEZ: But we did not -- the
- 12 prosecution in this case was not about the size of the
- 13 fish. The prosecution was about the destruction of the
- 14 evidence, and I think it would be a very strange thing
- if this Court were to say that the obstruction of
- 16 justice law is somehow applied differently when the
- 17 offense is trivial.
- 18 JUSTICE KENNEDY: Did you ask -- did you ask
- 19 for or recommend a particular sentence?
- 20 MR. MARTINEZ: We asked for a sentence
- 21 within the quidelines range which was -- which was
- 22 calculated by the judge at I think 21 to 27 months. The
- 23 judge ended up giving 30 days. We did not appeal that.
- 24 We think, you know, that was a reasonable exercise of
- 25 the judge's discretion, which I think is a very

- 1 important check on the fact that this is, of course, a
- 2 very broad statute, and I think a 20-year penalty, of
- 3 course, would -- would have been too -- too much in this
- 4 circumstance.
- 5 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: But according --
- 6 JUSTICE KENNEDY: Go ahead.
- 7 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: But according -- if
- 8 I understand your answer to Justice Scalia, according to
- 9 the Justice Department manual, any case in which someone
- 10 destroys a tangible object, you -- you should prosecute
- 11 them under this statute, because I assume 20 years is
- 12 the maximum available penalty?
- MR. MARTINEZ: Your Honor, we would not --
- 14 we do not prosecute every fish disposal case, and -- we
- 15 do not. So I think if you --
- 16 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: But the point is
- 17 that you could, and the point is that once you can,
- 18 every time you get somebody who is throwing fish
- 19 overboard, you can go to him and say: Look, if we
- 20 prosecute you you're facing 20 years, so why don't you
- 21 plead to a year, or something like that. It's an
- 22 extraordinary leverage that the broadest interpretation
- of this statute would give Federal prosecutors.
- 24 MR. MARTINEZ: Your Honor, we're operating
- 25 with the -- with the statute that Congress passed, and

- 1 Congress decided that this statute was going to carry a
- 2 20-year penalty. And I think the issue in this case,
- 3 though, is whether Mr. Yates' conduct comes within the
- 4 terms of that statute and specifically whether a fish
- 5 counts as a tangible object.
- 6 JUSTICE BREYER: Isn't -- isn't there a
- 7 normal obstruction of justice statute that existed
- 8 before this?
- 9 MR. MARTINEZ: I -- there are several, and I
- 10 think what Congress --
- 11 JUSTICE BREYER: Suppose, in other words,
- 12 it -- wasn't this going to a criminal -- isn't a
- 13 criminal matter?
- MR. MARTINEZ: I'm sorry, can you --
- JUSTICE BREYER: Wasn't what the official,
- 16 the government official was investigating a minor crime,
- 17 catching fish that are too small? Am I right?
- 18 MR. MARTINEZ: It was a civil offense, Your
- 19 Honor, that the --
- 20 JUSTICE BREYER: It's a civil offense.
- 21 MR. MARTINEZ: Yes.
- JUSTICE BREYER: Fine. Then isn't there a
- 23 statute that says that you cannot destroy evidence
- 24 useful for a civil offense when you know that it's going
- 25 to be?

- 1 MR. MARTINEZ: Yes, and it's 1519 and only
- 2 1519.
- JUSTICE BREYER: In other words, for many,
- 4 many years before Sarbanes-Oxley, the Federal Government
- 5 could not prosecute obstruction of justice.
- 6 MR. MARTINEZ: Your Honor, the --
- 7 JUSTICE BREYER: Where there was a civil
- 8 offense involved?
- 9 MR. MARTINEZ: When there was a -- in the
- 10 absence of a pending judicial proceeding, the government
- 11 could not have prosecuted him under 1503.
- 12 JUSTICE BREYER: No, I'm not asking specific
- 13 things. I want to know the general criminal law, which
- 14 I do not know all of it. I had always thought there is
- 15 a crime called obstruction of justice, and I always
- 16 thought that a person who destroys evidence, where he
- 17 knows it's evidence, he's been asked to bring it to the
- 18 proceeding which may not yet have taken place, he
- 19 purposely destroys it, I had thought that that was a
- 20 crime.
- 21 MR. MARTINEZ: It would make perfect sense
- 22 for that to be a crime --
- 23 JUSTICE BREYER: But it was never was in the
- 24 criminal system? No one was ever prosecuted for it?
- 25 MR. MARTINEZ: Under these -- under these

- 1 circumstances it was not a -- it was not a crime, and
- 2 that's exactly what Congress realized.
- JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: I'm sorry --
- 4 MR. MARTINEZ: -- in the wake of Enron.
- 5 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: I'm sorry, but --
- 6 JUSTICE BREYER: What statute did you used
- 7 to use?
- 8 MR. MARTINEZ: Well, in the Arthur Andersen
- 9 prosecution they used 1512(b)(2). But the problem with
- 10 1512(b)(2) was that it had a huge loophole in it.
- 11 1512(b)(2) prohibited person A from persuading person B
- 12 to destroy evidence, but it didn't prohibit person A
- 13 from destroying that exact same evidence himself. And
- 14 so Congress decided --
- 15 JUSTICE BREYER: Okay, okay. I quess I can
- 16 look that up later. But in any case, this is a -- what
- 17 will you do with the problem that I put together? That
- 18 is my problem.
- 19 MR. MARTINEZ: The vague -- the potential
- 20 vagueness problem? Is that what --
- 21 JUSTICE BREYER: Yeah.
- 22 MR. MARTINEZ: I think there are certain
- 23 questions that come into play with this statute, which
- 24 are arguably vague, and they don't have to do with the
- 25 meaning of tangible object. They have to do with the --

- 1 the various intent-related elements of the statute. For
- 2 example, what does it mean to impede, obstruct or
- 3 influence justice? What does it mean to be acting in
- 4 contemplation of a proceeding, and do you need to know
- 5 that the proceeding is -- is under Federal jurisdiction?
- 6 Those are the kinds of questions that the lower courts
- 7 are currently dealing with. They're not presented in
- 8 this case.
- 9 JUSTICE BREYER: No, I know. It's not just
- 10 influence a proceeding. It is, for example -- and here
- it's obscure, but it means to destroy something in
- 12 relation to any such matter or case. What matter? In
- 13 relation to any matter within the jurisdiction of any
- 14 department or agency within the United States. What?
- 15 (Laughter.)
- JUSTICE BREYER: I mean, somebody comes to
- 17 the door and says -- I've been through this. He passes
- 18 a piece of paper through the door. It's the postal --
- 19 it's a postman. He says, please send this back. It's
- 20 our proper duty to deliver the mail. I say, I hate
- 21 postmen and I rip it up. 20 years.
- 22 (Laughter.)
- 23 MR. MARTINEZ: Your Honor, that would not be
- 24 covered.
- 25 (Laughter.)

- 1 JUSTICE BREYER: And why wouldn't it happen?
- 2 It wouldn't happen because you'd never prosecute it,
- 3 though I've had my doubts recently.
- 4 (Laughter.)
- 5 MR. MARTINEZ: Your Honor, it wouldn't
- 6 happen because the statute requires bad intent. It
- 7 requires the intent to impede, obstruct --
- 8 JUSTICE BREYER: Yes, I do. I say, I hate
- 9 postmen. I don't want them to find out. And I tell
- 10 four people, I finally got even with the postman. I
- 11 have -- I have the intent.
- 12 And I'm using a ridiculous example purposely
- 13 because, by using an example purposely, I'm trying to
- 14 get you to focus on the question of how possibly to draw
- 15 a line. And if you can't draw a line, it seems to me
- 16 that the risk of arbitrary and discriminatory
- 17 enforcement is a real one. And if that's a real risk,
- 18 you fall within the vagueness doctrine. There is the
- 19 whole problem spelled out, and what I do not understand
- 20 is the relation of this case to that doctrine or how to
- 21 decide this case.
- 22 MR. MARTINEZ: Your Honor, this case is --
- 23 is not related to that doctrine because the Petitioner
- 24 has not made a vagueness argument.
- 25 JUSTICE BREYER: Yes.

- 1 MR. MARTINEZ: What this Court has said is
- 2 that when -- when vagueness challenge is represented,
- 3 they need to be presented in as-applied challenges.
- 4 That hasn't happened in this case, and so --
- 5 JUSTICE BREYER: How do I know since there
- 6 could be four ways of trying to limit it? And one way
- 7 to try to limit it might be what your opponent says.
- 8 MR. MARTINEZ: I think that his way is a
- 9 particularly bad way to address the problem that you --
- 10 the exact hypothetical that you gave me because in that
- 11 case, we're talking about a document, a letter, that the
- 12 postman hands over. And so the problem that -- that
- 13 your -- your hypothetical poses is not addressed by the
- 14 solution he gives.
- 15 JUSTICE BREYER: That's true.
- MR. MARTINEZ: So there's a total mismatch.
- 17 And I don't think there's any reason to think that
- 18 Congress, even if it had concerns about breadth, would
- 19 have wanted to solve those concerns by -- by narrowing,
- 20 in a very unnatural fashion, the word "tangible object,"
- 21 whereas, you know, leaving in place the terms "record
- 22 and document."
- JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: Mr. Martinez, can we go
- 24 back to what we started with -- with what Justice Breyer
- 25 started with? If I understood your brief right, up

- 1 until 1519, the general obstruction statute, 1503,
- 2 applied only to the destruction of evidence in a
- 3 judicial proceeding if you got someone else to destroy
- 4 it.
- 5 MR. MARTINEZ: 1503 applied only to pending
- 6 judicial proceedings. There was a different provision,
- 7 Section 1512(b)(2) that, as -- as the Court considered
- 8 and addressed in the Arthur Andersen prosecution, 1512
- 9 (b)(2) did not prohibit single act or destruction.
- 10 You had to persuade someone else.
- 11 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: Okay. So you needed
- 12 something to punish people who destroyed evidence and --
- 13 but I see two provisions, 1519 and 1512. Are they
- 14 superfluous?
- 15 MR. MARTINEZ: I think the way to understand
- 16 those provisions is to -- is to understand the fact
- 17 that, one, they are super -- they are redundant largely,
- 18 not entirely; and, two, why are they both in there?
- 19 It's a very reasonable question to ask. And the reason
- 20 is, these were rival -- essentially rival provisions,
- 21 they were drafted by different people at different times
- 22 and they both ended up in the statute by the way that
- 23 the --
- 24 JUSTICE SCALIA: Well, that makes it okay.
- 25 That's fine. I mean, you know, that explains how it

- 1 happens. It doesn't explain how it makes any sense.
- 2 (Laughter.)
- 3 MR. MARTINEZ: Well, Your Honor, I think to
- 4 address the -- the textual component of the superfluous
- 5 nature of those two provisions, I think it's unambiguous
- 6 that they are superfluous, and I think Petitioner would
- 7 agree with us that they're superfluous with respect to
- 8 records and documents. So we know here that Congress
- 9 was not intending to avoid surplusage. The only
- 10 question is whether they also -- they -- they thought it
- 11 would be superfluous with the third term in the list,
- 12 which is either "other objects" or "tangible objects."
- 13 JUSTICE SCALIA: Well, not only that,
- 14 1519 -- 1512 only applies for use in an official
- 15 proceeding; isn't -- isn't that right?
- 16 MR. MARTINEZ: That's right. It's narrower.
- 17 JUSTICE SCALIA: Yes. And this applies to
- 18 any matter within the jurisdiction of any department or
- 19 agency of the United States. Is the knowingly
- 20 requirement of 1519, does that apply to that portion of
- 21 the statute or does it only apply to altering,
- 22 destroying, mutilating, concealing, covering up, or
- 23 falsifying?
- Do you have to know that it is within the
- 25 jurisdiction of a -- of a Federal agency?

- 1 MR. MARTINEZ: No, you don't. It's a
- 2 jurisdictional element that typically that it -- as this
- 3 Court has read other statutes, the -- the knowledge
- 4 requirement does not extend to the jurisdictional
- 5 element.
- 6 JUSTICE SCALIA: Wow. Then it's really --
- 7 MR. MARTINEZ: Your Honor, but that's -- the
- 8 court of appeals have said that if this Court has
- 9 concerns with that -- that holding, I think there may be
- 10 a different case in which to bring that up. Here, of
- 11 course, Mr. Yates had perfect knowledge that there was a
- 12 Federal proceeding that was ongoing and so that concern
- 13 doesn't affect his case.
- 14 JUSTICE SCALIA: In this case, it's not a
- 15 problem.
- 16 MR. MARTINEZ: But -- can I --
- 17 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: 1512, could you have
- 18 charged it?
- 19 MR. MARTINEZ: 1512(c)(1), I think we could
- 20 have charged it, yes, Your Honor. And we didn't -- and
- 21 I think in the Eleventh Circuit there was some confusion
- 22 about how you deal with investigations and whether
- 23 investigations that are probably going to give rise to a
- 24 proceeding, whether that kind of is close enough to an
- official proceeding to charge 1512(c)(1), so they made

- 1 the decision to charge 1519 instead. It was -- it was a
- 2 reasonable decision based on the language of the
- 3 statute.
- But I want to emphasize, I think the most
- 5 important thing that Petitioner's counsel conceded here
- 6 today was that 1512(c)(1) is a general obstruction of
- 7 justice statute that was passed as part of
- 8 Sarbanes-Oxley and covers the destruction of fish. And
- 9 I think that --
- 10 JUSTICE GINSBURG: He said it has a stronger
- 11 state of mind element.
- 12 MR. MARTINEZ: It's -- the requirement is a
- 13 little bit more rigorous with respect to 1512(c)(1).
- 14 But I think the key point is Sarbanes-Oxley prohibits
- 15 the destruction of fish. You said that, that's been our
- 16 position, and I think that undermines the whole theme of
- 17 his brief and certainly the theme of all the amicus --
- 18 amicus briefs that's been -- that have been filed here.
- 19 Their whole point has been it's impossible
- 20 to imagine that -- that Sarbanes -- that Congress could
- 21 have wanted Sarbanes-Oxley, an Enron-related statute, to
- 22 prohibit the destruction of fish, and yet that's the
- 23 point on which we all agree here today.
- I'd like to say a few words about the
- 25 various textual arguments that -- that Petitioner has

- 1 put forward, the nouns, the verbs and the headings.
- 2 First of all, with respect to -- with respect to the
- 3 nouns, I think the historical evidence that we've put
- 4 forward, I think, show conclusively that the term
- 5 "record," "document," and "tangible things" is very,
- 6 very similar to the standard formulation that
- 7 essentially everyone has used to cover all physical
- 8 evidence in the obstruction of justice context for over
- 9 five decades.
- 10 Secondly, 1512(c)(1) confirms that the --
- 11 the --
- 12 JUSTICE KAGAN: Could -- could you tell me,
- 13 Mr. Martinez, where are those other provisions? I -- I
- 14 think that there are about five of them in 1512. I take
- 15 it there are many State statutes, are there? Are there
- 16 other Federal statutes?
- 17 MR. MARTINEZ: We -- the -- the key
- 18 provisions that we've pointed to in our brief, there's
- 19 six different provisions of Section 1512. 1512
- 20 (a) (1) (b), (a) (2) (b) (1).
- 21 JUSTICE KAGAN: That's okay.
- 22 MR. MARTINEZ: Okay. So there's six in
- 23 1512. There's 16 different State provisions that have
- 24 essentially the same language. I think most of them say
- 25 "record," "document" or "thing." Some of them say

- "record," "document" or "other object."
- 2 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Well, but -- when
- 3 you say this -- I understood your friend to say
- 4 "tangible object" is only used in record statutes. In
- 5 1512 --
- 6 MR. MARTINEZ: No.
- 7 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: -- it's -- it's
- 8 "object," I mean tangible -- yeah, "tangible thing." In
- 9 1512 it's "object," right?
- 10 MR. MARTINEZ: In 1512 it's "other object."
- 11 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Well, see, the
- 12 reason -- I mean, maybe that makes a difference if you
- 13 have records, documents, and then a tangible object
- 14 suggests that the tangible nature of it is what's
- 15 significant, which suggests that it may be one of the --
- 16 you know, whatever the drive thing is as opposed to a
- 17 record. And that's a point that's not present in the
- 18 statutes that you were citing.
- 19 MR. MARTINEZ: I think -- I think it's true
- 20 that the term "tangible" is different. I think that the
- 21 way to understand the term "tangible" is the way in
- 22 which Congress and -- and the rules always use the term
- 23 "tangible" in connection with things or objects, which
- 24 is as a way to refer to all types of -- of objects, all
- 25 types of evidence.

- 1 We've cited 35 different provisions of the
- 2 U.S. Code and of the -- the discovery rules in the
- 3 criminal context and in the civil context. Those are at
- 4 Footnote 3 of our brief. In all of those instances,
- 5 they use the phrase "tangible things" or "tangible
- 6 object" to refer to everything. And so there's no
- 7 reason to think that the addition of the word "tangible"
- 8 somehow shrunk the scope of the statute. And even if it
- 9 did shrink --
- 10 JUSTICE SCALIA: Is there such a thing as an
- 11 intangible object? I'm trying to imagine one.
- 12 MR. MARTINEZ: I -- I think the -- you could
- 13 say that the object of the game of Monopoly is to win
- 14 all the money, but that's not really what Congress was
- 15 looking at here.
- 16 (Laughter.)
- 17 JUSTICE SCALIA: Object not meaning purpose.
- 18 MR. MARTINEZ: I -- I don't think that the
- 19 word -- I agree with what Petitioner said in his opening
- 20 brief, which is that -- that the word "tangible" here
- 21 doesn't really do much. He said that at page 13 of his
- 22 opening brief. When you get to his reply brief,
- 23 suddenly the word "tangible" is doing all this amazing
- 24 work that -- and it's the key difference between this
- 25 statute and all the other statutes. So that's with

- 1 respect --
- 2 JUSTICE GINSBURG: You, in your brief, point
- 3 to the Model Penal Code as the model for 1519. But the
- 4 Model Penal Code describes a misdemeanor, and this is a
- 5 20-year felony. That seems kind of a mismatch.
- 6 MR. MARTINEZ: You know, if -- the tradition
- 7 of -- of the degree of penalty to attach to this offense
- 8 has changed over time. As you point out, the Model
- 9 Penal Code did identify this as a misdemeanor. The
- 10 Brown Commission, which built on the Model Penal Code,
- 11 treated it as a misdemeanor or as a felony, depending on
- 12 the severity of the underlying offense.
- When Congress sat down in the '70s and '80s
- 14 and was trying to incorporate, essentially, that
- 15 provision into Federal law unsuccessfully, over a dozen
- 16 times it treated it as a felony. And then, or course,
- 17 Congress in Sarbanes-Oxley Act in both 1512(c)(1) and in
- 18 1519 also treated it as a felony with a 20-year penalty.
- 19 And -- and with respect to that penalty, again, I think
- 20 it's important to emphasize that the text that's at
- 21 issue here, any tangible object, that was fixed and that
- 22 was drafted -- it was in the bill that was introduced by
- 23 Senator Leahy at the time when it was only a 5-year
- 24 penalty. And there's no reason to think that when
- 25 Congress tinkered with that penalty, it meant to kind

- of, by implication, shrink the scope of tangible objects
- 2 that's at issue here.
- 3 And I think just to emphasize the -- the
- 4 textual point, it's -- it's a very unusual and I think
- 5 it's -- it's highly implausible to believe that Congress
- 6 chose this broad and expansive phrase, "any tangible
- 7 object," when really what it really wanted to do was
- 8 refer only to a very narrow and specific category of
- 9 information storage devices.
- 10 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Well, isn't that
- 11 like the Bond decision? I mean, you had text that could
- 12 be read broadly, and yet we suggested, well, Congress
- 13 could not have meant the Chemical Weapons Treaty to
- 14 cover a minor dusting of -- with toxic, irritating
- 15 chemicals.
- 16 MR. MARTINEZ: I think Bond it's -- I think
- 17 Bond is actually in some ways helpful to the government
- 18 in this case. Because as I understand the -- the Bond
- 19 decision, it turned essentially on the everyday meaning
- 20 of -- of the phrase and of -- and Federalism concerns as
- 21 well. And the everyday meaning of the phrase -- I think
- 22 it was "chemical weapon" in that case -- didn't apply
- 23 to -- to the chemicals at issue that Miss Bond used.
- 24 But in this case, the everyday meaning of
- 25 the phrase "tangible object" applies to all tangible

- 1 objects. Everyone -- and if you stop someone on the
- 2 street and ask them is a fish a tangible object, the
- 3 answer would almost certainly be -- would be yes. And
- 4 so, you don't have as well what you had in Bond, which
- 5 was the concern about -- about Federalism and the
- 6 application of that canon.
- 7 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Well, what if you
- 8 stopped them on the street and said is a fish record
- 9 document or tangible object?
- 10 MR. MARTINEZ: I think if you -- if you
- 11 asked them that question and you -- you pointed them to
- 12 the fact that --
- 13 JUSTICE SCALIA: I don't think you would get
- 14 a polite answer to either of those questions.
- 15 (Laughter).
- 16 MR. MARTINEZ: Your Honor, maybe I could say
- 17 a word -- having talked about the nouns, maybe I could
- 18 say a word about the verbs in this statute because they
- 19 make a -- they place a lot of emphasis on the "makes a
- 20 false entry" language. Petitioner's argument rests on
- 21 this premise that each of the verbs has to work with --
- 22 with each of the nouns, but that premise is -- is
- 23 flawed. It's not consistent with how Congress drafts
- 24 statutes, it's not consistent with Petitioner's own
- interpretation, and I think there's significant tension

- 1 with this Court's decision last year in Roberts. Let me
- 2 say a word about each.
- 3 With respect to how Congress drafts
- 4 statutes, I think you only have to look to Section 1505
- 5 of the statute to see that that's yet another example of
- 6 where Congress has used -- had a bunch of verbs and a
- 7 bunch of nouns and some of the nouns don't work with
- 8 some of the verbs. You can't mutilate oral testimony.
- 9 With respect to Petitioner, the inconsistency with
- 10 Petitioner's own theory, Petitioner agrees that 1519
- 11 covers the destruction of an e-mail in electronic form.
- 12 You can't mutilate an e-mail. No one would ever talk
- 13 like that.
- 14 Similarly, he says that it would apply to a
- 15 blank hard drive. But no one -- I've never heard anyone
- 16 talk about falsifying a blank hard drive. So the
- 17 implications of his argument are inconsistent with --
- 18 with where he wants the Court to go. And then finally,
- 19 the Roberts case. Roberts dealt with a circumstance, it
- 20 wasn't perfectly analogous, but it was -- it raised a
- 21 similar problem, which is that there was a broad
- 22 statute, it had many different applications, and there
- 23 was some language in the statute that was a little bit
- 24 awkward and a little bit superfluous with regard to some
- of the applications of the statute.

| 1 And the response that the Court had to | that |
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- 2 problem was not to say, well, the statute doesn't apply
- 3 to those circumstances. The response was to say that
- 4 that's the linguistic price to be paid, linguistic price
- 5 to be paid for having a broad statute. And then the
- 6 Court said Congress does not need to write extra
- 7 language specifically exempting, phrase by phrase,
- 8 applications with respect to which a portion of a phrase
- 9 is not needed. I think that was right in Roberts and I
- 10 think the same principle applies here.
- 11 Finally, Your Honor, with respect to the
- 12 headings, a couple points. First, I think the headings
- in this case as in -- as in the Lawson case that this
- 14 Court also dealt with last term also involving
- 15 Sarbanes-Oxley, the headings here are just obviously and
- 16 unambiguously under inclusive. The heading is a
- 17 shorthand reference to the general subject matter. It's
- 18 not intended to spell out what the operative provisions
- 19 say or to mirror those operative provisions. It's
- 20 obviously under inclusive. It omits a whole bunch of
- 21 the verbs. It omits two of the nouns. The heading
- 22 argument, I think, is especially unreliable in this
- 23 context where if you look at what Congress did with
- 24 Sarbanes-Oxley generally, it was not paying very close
- 25 attention to the headings under which it put various

- 1 provisions.
- 2 That's true with respect to 1519, that's
- 3 true with respect to 1514, the statute that was at issue
- 4 in the Lawson case, and it's also true with respect to
- 5 Section 1512(c)(1). Section 1512(c)(1) prohibits me
- 6 from -- prohibits any person from destroying evidence.
- 7 But they put that -- that provision inside the
- 8 witness-tampering statute. It doesn't make sense; it
- 9 doesn't fit there. And that just shows that Congress
- 10 was not paying close attention to the headings and that
- 11 that shouldn't drive the outcome of this case.
- 12 JUSTICE ALITO: Well, Mr. Martinez, you are
- 13 really -- I mean, you have arguments on all of these
- 14 points, but you are really asking the Court to swallow
- 15 something that is pretty hard to swallow. Do you deny
- 16 that this statute, as you read it, is capable of being
- 17 applied to really trivial matters, and yet each of those
- 18 would carry a potential penalty of 20 years, and then
- 19 you go further and say that it is the policy of the
- 20 Justice Department that this has to be applied in every
- 21 one of those crazy little cases. And this involved a
- 22 business and a number of fish. What if it was one fish?
- 23 What if it was one undersized fish that was caught by a
- 24 fisherman in a national -- on Federal land? This would
- 25 be -- would it apply here?

- 1 MR. MARTINEZ: Your Honor, I want to answer
- 2 that question, but I just want to clarify what I said
- 3 about our policy. Our policy is not that we prosecute
- 4 every trivial matter. That is not our policy. I want
- 5 to be very clear about that.
- 6 JUSTICE ALITO: No, I understand that. But
- 7 if you choose to -- if you want to find the guy who
- 8 caught one trout that was undersized on Federal -- on a
- 9 Federal -- on Federal land, you want to charge him with
- 10 whatever regulatory offense that would be, you have to
- 11 charge this, too, because this is the more severe
- 12 penalty.
- MR. MARTINEZ: We only have to charge this
- 14 if -- if the person with knowledge and the intent to
- 15 obstruct the administration of Federal law deliberately
- 16 takes that one fish and throws it overboard or destroys
- it so as to escape liability.
- 18 JUSTICE BREYER: What about every camper --
- 19 MR. MARTINEZ: That's what the statute says.
- 20 JUSTICE ALITO: He catches the fish and now
- 21 he sees the inspector coming toward him, throws it in
- 22 the lake.
- 23 MR. MARTINEZ: That's what the statute says,
- 24 Your Honor. Now, I -- I appreciate the force of the
- 25 hypothetical and I understand it, but I think I want

- 1 to -- the point I want to emphasize, because maybe
- 2 there's -- I understand why the Court might have
- 3 concerns about that. The problem -- there's a mismatch,
- 4 though, between Petitioner's argument and the
- 5 hypothetical.
- 6 The problem with the hypothetical is that
- 7 this statute might be harsh in certain particular
- 8 outlier applications. But Petitioner is not arguing for
- 9 some sort of de minimis rule, he's not saying that this
- 10 statute can't be applied in trivial cases. He's arguing
- 11 that an entire class of evidence is entirely outside the
- 12 scope of the statute --
- 13 JUSTICE KENNEDY: But he has no -- he has no
- 14 doctrinal basis to make that argument other than to say
- 15 that there is such a doctrine as prosecutorial
- 16 discretion and, A, that it's enforceable and, B, that it
- 17 has some substance, and you've indicated that it has
- 18 neither.
- 19 MR. MARTINEZ: I -- I think, Your Honor, I
- 20 don't think that -- I think prosecutorial discretion is
- 21 not an issue that he's raised. I don't think that it's
- 22 an issue in light of this Court -- what this Court has
- 23 said about prosecutorial discretion. I don't think that
- 24 would be a basis --
- JUSTICE KENNEDY: Well, it seems to me that

- 1 we should just not use the concept or refer to the
- 2 concept at all anymore.
- 3 MR. MARTINEZ: Well, Your Honor, I think
- 4 that -- that -- again, to go back to some of the answers
- 5 I was -- I was giving earlier, I think that the concerns
- 6 that the Court has flagged about the potential breadth
- of this statute, they're serious and they're the kinds
- 8 of concerns that courts and juries and judges are going
- 9 to take into consideration when they're dealing with any
- 10 of these crimes. But the issue in this case is not --
- 11 is not that. The issue in this case is what is -- what
- 12 did Congress intend with the term "any tangible object."
- 13 JUSTICE BREYER: All right. So if that's
- 14 so, then that's the dilemma. Suppose I worry about
- 15 Justice Alito's single fish in the case of a camper who
- 16 kicks an ember away, knowing you shouldn't have built
- 17 the campfire or picks a flower, knowing you're supposed
- 18 to let wildflowers blossom. What about that 20 years,
- 19 and you could multiply those beyond belief. So if
- 20 that's the problem, does his client go to prison because
- 21 we've just assumed that problem away from the case?
- MR. MARTINEZ: No, we do not --
- 23 JUSTICE BREYER: How -- how do we handle it
- 24 if, as you say, there is a genuine concern in that
- 25 respect, but it wasn't argued here?

| 1 | MR. | MARTINEZ: | I | think | that | vou | write | а | verv |
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| | | | | | | | | | |

- 2 narrow decision that says this case is about the meaning
- 3 of the term "any tangible object." And if the case --
- 4 the ember case comes up or the postman case comes up,
- 5 then -- and if the arguments are made, then I think
- 6 those arguments can be fleshed out, they can be briefed,
- 7 they can be thought through by the parties, and I think
- 8 they'll be properly presented to the Court in that case.
- 9 In this case, though, this case presents
- 10 just a common sense, straightforward question of
- 11 statutory interpretation. Does the phrase "any tangible
- 12 object" actually mean what Congress said? Does it refer
- 13 to all tangible objects? We think that the unambiguous
- 14 answer based on the text of the statute, based on the
- 15 history of the statute, is -- is clearly yes, and we ask
- 16 this Court to affirm.
- 17 JUSTICE KENNEDY: Perhaps Congress should
- 18 have called this the Sarbanes-Oxley Grouper Act.
- 19 (Laughter.)
- 20 MR. MARTINEZ: Perhaps, Your Honor.
- 21 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Thank you, counsel.
- 22 Mr. Badalamenti, you have four minutes
- 23 remaining.
- 24 REBUTTAL ARGUMENT OF MR. BADALAMENTI
- ON BEHALF OF THE PETITIONER

- 1 MR. BADALAMENTI: I'll be brief. Regarding
- 2 Justice Breyer's question regarding the void for
- 3 vagueness, the government stated that we had not stated
- 4 that in our brief. It's on pages 25 and 26, as well as
- 5 squarely raised in Footnote 7.
- 6 JUSTICE BREYER: Yes, but it wasn't raised
- 7 below. And these are very difficult issues and it's
- 8 sort of flying blind not to have lower court opinions
- 9 and the thing fully argued out before we get it.
- 10 MR. BADALAMENTI: Yes, Your Honor. We just
- 11 wanted to point out where it was in the briefing in
- 12 this -- in this Court.
- 13 The "tangible object" notion is extremely
- important, which the justices have pointed out under
- 15 Russello. You have the fact that you have two statutes
- 16 passed in the same act. One includes different language
- 17 than the other. To presume that that language is
- included in there intentionally and that major
- 19 significance makes false entry in all of the statutes
- 20 that are -- we've cited in our brief in Footnote 4, that
- 21 reference of the reply brief -- all of them are
- 22 record-related statutes. Every single one of them has a
- 23 textural indication of what Congress had meant.
- 24 The breadth of the statute regarding any
- 25 Federal matter is -- is an extraordinary thing that the

- 1 American people will be walking on eggshells for if this
- 2 Court were to not limit, at least, the subject matter of
- 3 this. And the last point --
- 4 JUSTICE SCALIA: Of course, it doesn't
- 5 entirely solve that problem, simply to narrow --
- 6 MR. BADALAMENTI: It does not -- it doesn't,
- 7 Your Honor. And Mr. Yates would open up any other
- 8 constitutional issues as well. But no, certainly the
- 9 last comment is directed -- is that for more than 200
- 10 years, the United States has existed without this mega,
- 11 all-inclusive obstruction of justice statute with the
- 12 intent to impede anything, any matter, that the
- 13 possibility of the United States could or may or may
- 14 never be interested in. It didn't create it buried
- 15 within the Sarbanes-Oxley Act and this Court shouldn't
- 16 put it in there now.
- 17 For these reasons, Mr. Yates requests that
- 18 this Court vacate the conviction under Section 1519,
- 19 reverse, remand the decision to the Eleventh Circuit.
- Thank you.
- 21 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Thank you, counsel.
- 22 The case is submitted.
- 23 (Whereupon, at 11:03 a.m., the case in the
- 24 above-entitled matter was submitted.)

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