Τ	IN THE SUPREME COURT OF THE C	INT.T.F	id Si	'A'I'ES
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3	KATHLEEN SEBELIUS,	:		
4	SECRETARY OF HEALTH AND	:	No.	13-354
5	HUMAN SERVICES, ET AL.	:		
6	Petitioners	:		
7	V.	:		
8	HOBBY LOBBY STORES, INC.,	:		
9	ET AL.;	:		
10	:			
11	and	:		
12	:			
13	CONESTOGA WOOD	:		
14	SPECIALTIES CORPORATION,	:		
15	ET AL.,	:		
16	Petitioners	:	No.	13-356
17	V.	:		
18	KATHLEEN SEBELIUS,	:		
19	SECRETARY OF HEALTH AND	:		
20	HUMAN SERVICES, ET AL.	:		
21		- x		
22	Washington, D.C.			
23	Tuesday, March 25, 201	4		
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25	The above-entitled matter	came	on a	for ora

1	argument before the Supreme Court of the United States				
2	at 10:11 a.m.				
3	APPEARANCES:				
4	PAUL D. CLEMENT, ESQ., Washington, D.C.; on behalf				
5	of the Private Parties.				
6	DONALD B. VERRILLI, JR., ESQ., Solicitor General,				
7	Department of Justice, Washington, D.C.; on behalf of				
8	the Federal Government.				
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- 1 PROCEEDINGS 2 (10:11 a.m.) 3 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: We'll hear argument 4 this morning in consolidated cases Number 13-354, 5 Sebelius, Secretary of Health and Human Services v. 6 Hobby Lobby Stores; and 13-356, Conestoga Wood 7 Specialties Corporation v. Sebelius. 8 Mr. Clement. 9 ORAL ARGUMENT OF PAUL D. CLEMENT 10 ON BEHALF OF THE PRIVATE PARTIES 11 MR. CLEMENT: Mr. Chief Justice, and may it 12 please the Court: 13 When a Federal Government agency compelled 14 employers to provide something as religiously sensitive
- 17 In particular, the agency itself provided

claims would soon follow.

18 exemptions and accommodations for the religious exercise

as contraception, it knew that free exercise in RFRA

19 of a subset --

15

16

- JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: Is your claim limited to
- 21 sensitive materials like contraceptives or does it
- 22 include items like blood transfusion, vaccines? For
- 23 some religions, products made of pork? Is any claim
- 24 under your theory that has a religious basis, could an
- 25 employer preclude the use of those items as well?

- 1 MR. CLEMENT: Well, Justice Sotomayor, the
- 2 first step in the analysis would be to ask whether or
- 3 not there's a substantial burden on religious exercise.
- 4 I do think this case is, in a sense, easier than most of
- 5 the examples that you've brought up because here's one
- 6 where it's so religiously sensitive, so fraught with
- 7 religious controversy, that the agency itself provides a
- 8 certain number of exemptions and accommodations. So
- 9 that's one way, I think, that you'd address the first
- 10 step of the question here.
- JUSTICE KAGAN: Well, I mean, just take one
- 12 of the things that Justice Sotomayor asked about, which
- is vaccinations, because there are many people who have
- 14 religious objections to vaccinations. So suppose an
- 15 employer does and -- and refuses to fund or wants not to
- 16 fund vaccinations for her employees, what -- what
- 17 happens then?
- MR. CLEMENT: Well, if we assume we get past
- 19 the substantial burden step of the analysis, then the
- 20 next step of the analysis is the compelling interest and
- 21 least restrictive alternatives analysis. And every case
- 22 would have to be analyzed on its own. I do think in the
- 23 context of vaccinations, the government may have a
- 24 stronger compelling interest than it does in this
- 25 context because there are notions of herd immunity and

- 1 the like that give the government a particularly
- 2 compelling interest in trying to maximize the number --
- 3 JUSTICE KAGAN: Blood transfusions?
- 4 MR. CLEMENT: Blood transfusions. Again,
- 5 each one of these cases, I think would have to be
- 6 evaluated on its own and apply the compelling
- 7 interest-least restrictive alternative test and the
- 8 substantial burdens part of the test.
- 9 JUSTICE KAGAN: So really, every medical
- 10 treatment. And Justice Sotomayor is quite right that
- 11 there are quite a number of medical treatments that
- 12 difference religious groups object to. So one religious
- 13 group could opt out of this and another religious group
- 14 could opt out of that and everything would be piecemeal
- 15 and nothing would be uniform.
- 16 MR. CLEMENT: Well -- well, Justice Kagan,
- 17 nothing could be clearer than when Congress passed RFRA
- 18 Congress made a judgment that RFRA was going to apply to
- 19 all manner of Federal statutes. And I think what the
- 20 Congress --
- JUSTICE GINSBURG: Mr. Clement, maybe it
- 22 seemed clear then, but since RFRA, just as before RFRA,
- 23 Congress has continued to write into Federal legislation
- 24 specific religious exemptions for some, but not
- 25 everybody, for individuals, sometimes religious

- 1 institutions. So if it was all that clear that RFRA
- 2 took care of it all, why did Congress continue after
- 3 RFRA to pass these laws focusing the exemption on an
- 4 individual, religious institution? Those, as I take
- 5 your argument, all of those laws -- and there are more
- 6 than half a dozen -- were unnecessary. Once RFRA was on
- 7 the books, Congress didn't have to do that any more.
- 8 MR. CLEMENT: Well, Justice Ginsburg, I'm
- 9 not sure that they were all unnecessary. And of course,
- in a variety of contexts, Congress may proceed on a belt
- 11 and suspenders matters. So I think there's really two
- 12 different questions. One is when Congress passed RFRA,
- 13 was RFRA just done with creating other exemptions. And
- 14 I think the answer to that is no. But I think the
- 15 question that Justice Kagan's question brought up is,
- 16 was Congress evident and did Congress specifically
- 17 consider whether RFRA would apply across the board to
- 18 all the provisions of 18 U.S.C., or rather all the
- 19 provisions of the United States Code. And Congress
- 20 could not have been clearer that it was passing a
- 21 statute that it wanted to apply to all preexisting
- 22 statutes and to all subsequent statutes unless Congress
- 23 specifically provided otherwise.
- JUSTICE KENNEDY: You were beginning by
- 25 giving us a framework for your argument. Do I think of

- 1 this as a statutory case? Of course, the First
- 2 Amendment is on the stage at some point here, but I take
- 3 it you can prevail just on the question of statutory
- 4 interpretation, and if that is so, are there any
- 5 statutory rules that work in your favor, that is to say,
- 6 avoiding a constitutional question or how do we think
- 7 about this case, primarily as a statutory case?
- 8 MR. CLEMENT: Obviously, one of my clients
- 9 has before you right now a free exercise claim and my
- 10 other client has a free exercise claim that's live in
- 11 the lower courts. So those issues are preserved. But
- 12 I, think, as your question points out, this Court
- 13 really, first and foremost, can decide this on the basis
- 14 of the Federal statute, and the Ashwander principles of
- 15 constitutional avoidance seem like they would be sort of
- 16 fully applicable to the Court's consideration of that
- 17 question. And then, of course, the normal principles of
- 18 statutory construction would certainly point you to the
- 19 answer to the first objection the government raises,
- 20 which is do persons include for-profit corporations
- 21 because --
- 22 JUSTICE KAGAN: Mr. Clement, isn't this a
- 23 special kind of statute? Because this is a statute that
- 24 specifically refers back to a body of constitutional
- 25 law. It basically says we want to get right back to the

- 1 place that we were with respect to religious claims
- 2 before Employment Division v. Smith. And so we have --
- 3 it's not -- you know, it's a statute that directs us to
- 4 a body of constitutional law.
- 5 That body of constitutional law is, I think,
- 6 very different from the one you portray in your brief.
- 7 It suggests that accommodations should be made
- 8 sometimes, but rarely, and subject to a -- to a
- 9 balancing analysis, not to a compelling interest
- 10 standard in the way we would use it for, say, race
- 11 discrimination. So, you know, what's -- what's the
- 12 response to that?
- 13 MR. CLEMENT: Well, first, Justice Kagan,
- 14 let me take a little bit of an issue with your premise
- and let me try to responsive to your question anyways
- 16 after I do that. How I'd like to take issue with your
- 17 premise is that when Congress first passed the statute
- 18 RFRA, it talked about free exercise as defined in the
- 19 Court's cases. And then at the time that it passed
- 20 RLUIPA, which is a later statute, it actually confronted
- 21 some lower court cases that had limited RFRA and tried
- 22 to impose a centrality requirement. And Congress didn't
- 23 want that. It didn't want to take all the baggage of
- 24 the pre-Smith free exercise cases. So it actually
- amended the statute to broaden it so it now protects any

- 1 exercise of religion. So I would take issue with your
- 2 premise that RFRA simply picks up everything that ever
- 3 happened pre-Smith.
- 4 JUSTICE SCALIA: Well, there -- there's
- 5 another respect in which this, even as originally
- 6 enacted, does not track the -- the preemployment
- 7 Division v. Smith law. That is to say, the -- the
- 8 compelling State interest test in the prior cases was
- 9 never accompanied by a least restrictive alternative
- 10 requirement. That was an invention of this -- of this
- 11 law.
- 12 MR. CLEMENT: I think that's fair, Justice
- 13 Scalia. One of the things that you run into if you try
- 14 to sort of get at this statute the way that Justice
- 15 Kagan is suggesting is that not everybody exactly agreed
- 16 as to what the pre-Smith case law was. You described
- 17 the pre-Smith case law in your opinion in a certain way.
- 18 Justice O'Connor described the pre-Smith case law in
- 19 another way. So it's a little bit difficult to try to
- 20 say, as Justice Kagan's question would suggest, that
- 21 rather than just apply the statute as written, we should
- 22 really sort of just go back and apply pre-Smith laws if
- 23 this were --
- JUSTICE KAGAN: Well, it is applying the
- 25 statute as written. The statute as written -- this is

- 1 not a question of legislative history -- the statute as
- 2 written points back to pre-Smith law. It says: That's
- 3 what we mean.
- 4 MR. CLEMENT: Well, you're right, Justice
- 5 Kagan, in the purpose part of the statute it says: What
- 6 we mean to do here is basically restore the pre-Smith
- 7 law. But it also accompanies that purpose statute with
- 8 operative language. And the operative language, which I
- 9 think this Court should apply, as Justice Scalia
- 10 suggests, applies broadly to any exercise of religion by
- 11 any person and then suggests that the relevant test is
- 12 substantial burden with the burden on my client as to
- 13 the substantial burden part of the test. And then
- 14 it's --
- 15 JUSTICE GINSBURG: Mr. Clement, this -- this
- 16 was a law that was passed overwhelmingly, both houses of
- 17 Congress. People from all sides of the political
- 18 spectrum voted for it. It seems strange that there
- 19 would have been that tremendous uniformity if it means
- 20 what you said it means, to take -- to cover profit
- 21 corporations, especially in light of -- there was an
- 22 effort to adopt a conscience amendment, a specific
- 23 conscience amendment in 2012, and the Senate rejected
- 24 that. That -- that amendment would have enabled secular
- 25 employers and insurance providers to deny coverage on

- 1 the basis of religious beliefs or moral convictions. It
- 2 was specifically geared to secular employers and
- 3 insurance providers. And that -- that was rejected.
- 4 MR. CLEMENT: Well, Justice Ginsburg, I
- 5 would suggest to the contrary. The reason that there
- 6 was such unanimity behind RFRA in the first place is
- 7 that efforts to limit it to just certain subclasses,
- 8 subsets of religious freedom claims, were rejected and
- 9 sort of everybody in Congress got together and said, all
- 10 right, you have some claims you actually want to be
- 11 vindicated, you have some claims you want to be
- 12 vindicated, we'll vindicate all of them. And if we're
- 13 going to look at any legislative history as shedding
- 14 light on this, then I would suggest you look at
- 15 Professor Laycock's brief, which goes into great detail
- 16 about the legislative debates involved in -- that led up
- 17 ultimately to the passage of RLUIPA. And when Congress
- 18 was trying to pass a broader statute, the RLPA, the
- 19 Religious Liberty Protection Act, the issue of the
- 20 statute's application and RFRA's application to
- 21 for-profit corporations was squarely put at issue by the
- 22 Nadler Amendment. And that amendment was rejected and
- 23 the House report that demonstrates the rejection of that
- 24 amendment could not be clearer that they understood that
- 25 for-profit corporations would be covered.

- 1 Now, in fairness, what they understood is
- 2 that we were probably talking about in the real world a
- 3 relatively small set of corporations like an
- 4 incorporated kosher market or kosher deli of the kind
- 5 that this Court had before it in the Crown Kosher case.
- 6 And so I think it's -- you know, we can talk about the
- 7 extent and how you'd apply these principles to Exxon,
- 8 but I think that's just something that's not going to
- 9 happen in the real world. It is no accident that the
- 10 claims that you have before you in these cases are
- 11 brought by small closely-held corporations that have
- 12 firmly held religious beliefs.
- 13 JUSTICE KAGAN: But, again, Mr. Clement as
- 14 Justice Ginsburg said, this was a very uncontroversial
- 15 law. Your understanding of this law, your
- 16 interpretation of it, would essentially subject the
- 17 entire U.S. Code to the highest test in constitutional
- 18 law, to a compelling interest standard. So another
- 19 employer comes in and that employer says, I have a
- 20 religious objection to sex discrimination laws; and then
- 21 another employer comes in, I have a religious objection
- 22 to minimum wage laws; and then another, family leave;
- 23 and then another, child labor laws. And all of that is
- 24 subject to the exact same test which you say is this
- 25 unbelievably high test, the compelling interest standard

- 1 with the least restrictive alternative.
- 2 MR. CLEMENT: Well, I don't say that. I
- 3 think Congress said that. But to be as responsive as I
- 4 can to your question, the parade of horribles that the
- 5 government offers you ought to sound familiar, because
- 6 if you look at that parade of horribles -- Social
- 7 Security, minimum wage, discrimination laws, compelled
- 8 vaccination -- every item on that list was included in
- 9 Justice Scalia's opinion for the Court in Smith. And
- 10 Justice O'Connor responded to that in her separate
- 11 opinion and she said, look, you've got to trust the
- 12 courts; just because free exercise claims are being
- 13 brought doesn't mean that the courts can't separate the
- 14 sheep from the goats. Now, whatever --
- 15 JUSTICE KAGAN: Well, she had an
- 16 understanding of how the Court worked pre-Smith that was
- 17 a kind of Sherbert v. Verner-Yoder understanding, which
- 18 was we did a balancing, we looked at the government's
- 19 interests, we took those very seriously, especially to
- 20 the extent that there was harm to identifiable third
- 21 parties and that it fell on an identifiable third party.
- 22 That was basically -- you could not get an accommodation
- 23 for that kind of harm.
- MR. CLEMENT: Well, what she said and
- 25 whatever the merits of it as a matter of constitutional

- 1 debate isn't relevant. What -- what I think is relevant
- 2 is that Congress clearly preferred one side of that
- 3 debate and thought courts could handle this.
- 4 So then the question becomes: How do courts
- 5 actually apply this test? And I don't think applying
- 6 the test to recognize this case, where I think the
- 7 government has an incredibly weak case on compelling
- 8 interest and least restrictive alternatives, which they
- 9 almost don't want to talk about at all, is going to
- 10 endanger any other statutes. And if I could talk about
- 11 specific --
- 12 JUSTICE ALITO: Well, could I ask you this,
- 13 Mr. Clement. In -- in all the years since RFRA has been
- on the books, has any of these claims involving minimum
- 15 wage, for example, been brought and have they succeeded?
- 16 MR. CLEMENT: Justice Alito, very few of
- 17 these claims have been brought. Very few of them have
- 18 succeeded, and that's notwithstanding the fact that all
- 19 of these statutes we're talking about apply to employers
- 20 generally. And it -- and none of those claims have been
- 21 brought or they haven't succeeded notwithstanding the
- 22 fact that the government concedes that sole
- 23 proprietorships and partnerships and nonprofit
- 24 corporations are all protected by RFRA.
- Now, millions of Americans are employed by

- 1 proprietorships, partnerships, and nonprofits. So if
- 2 these statutes really were on a collision course, I
- 3 think we would have seen the collision already.
- 4 JUSTICE KAGAN: Well, with respect,
- 5 Mr. Clement, I think that that's probably because the
- 6 Court has had a different understanding of what RFRA
- 7 does and the kind of analysis that it requires courts to
- 8 perform than you're arguing for in this case. That if
- 9 your argument were adopted and there was a strict
- 10 scrutiny standard of the kind that usually applies and a
- 11 least restrictive alternative requirement, then you
- would see religious objectors come out of the woodwork
- 13 with respect to all of these laws. And because you say
- 14 that there -- and I think this is absolutely right when
- 15 you say it -- that you -- you cannot test the centrality
- of a belief to a religion, you cannot test the sincerity
- 17 of religion. I think a court would be, you know --
- 18 their hands would be bound when faced with all these
- 19 challenges if your standard applies.
- 20 MR. CLEMENT: Well, Justice Kagan, a couple
- 21 of thoughts. First of all, I mean, it's not like this
- 22 Court has never had a RFRA case that it applied the
- 23 standard on the merits. And in the O Centro case, this
- 24 Court applied something that very much felt to the
- 25 government at the time as being strict scrutiny. But if

- 1 this Court --
- 2 JUSTICE GINSBURG: Well, It was a religious
- 3 organization.
- 4 MR. CLEMENT: It certainly was a religious
- 5 organization and it's a separate question as --
- 6 JUSTICE GINSBURG: This is -- this is what's
- 7 different. I mean, all along the earlier cases dealt
- 8 with individuals and they dealt with religious
- 9 institutions.
- 10 MR. CLEMENT: Well, if I may, Justice
- 11 Ginsburg, there's two separate questions. There's a
- 12 question about how to apply the test if it's applicable
- in a particular case, and I think O Centro is the
- 14 starting place for guidance on that.
- 15 Your question also brings up the separate
- 16 question about the coverage of the statute. And as to
- 17 that, I think the place to start is the statute itself,
- 18 which broadly provides coverages to persons. That is
- 19 not an incidental term. It's a term that picks up
- 20 additional context through the Dictionary Act and
- 21 specifically applies to all corporations, to joint
- 22 partnerships, to societies.
- 23 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: How does a corporation
- 24 exercise religion? I mean, I know how it speaks and we
- 25 have, according to our jurisprudence, 200 years of

- 1 corporations speaking in its own interests. But where
- 2 are the cases that show that a corporation exercises
- 3 religion?
- 4 MR. CLEMENT: Well, Justice Sotomayor,
- 5 those -- those cases -- I mean, I'd start with cases
- 6 like Lukumi or O Centro, which all involved
- 7 corporations, and nobody thought it was particularly
- 8 problematic there that the plaintiffs before the court
- 9 were artificial entities. And I suppose you could
- 10 take --
- 11 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: Well, but they were
- 12 really arguing about things that affected their
- 13 membership, not them as a corporate entity.
- MR. CLEMENT: Well, I'm not sure that you
- 15 can so easily divide the two, and we can talk about how
- 16 it is with corporations generally. You understand how
- 17 the corporation has certain beliefs or certain intent, a
- 18 scienter requirement. The courts every day deal with
- 19 issues of trying to figure out what kind of intent or
- 20 motivation a corporate entity has.
- 21 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: So the dissent in this
- 22 case, in the Tenth Circuit case, said how do we
- 23 determine when a corporation has that belief? Who says
- 24 it? The majority of shareholders? The corporate
- 25 officers? The -- is it 51 percent? What happens to the

- 1 minority? And how much of the business has to be
- 2 dedicated to religion? 5 percent? 10 percent? 90
- 3 percent? Just assume not a business like yours -- you
- 4 picked great plaintiffs, but let's assume --
- 5 (Laughter.)
- 6 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: Let's assume just a
- 7 business that sells 5 percent of religious books,
- 8 doesn't play Christmas music, doesn't give off -- works
- 9 on Sunday, you know, does nothing else religiously.
- 10 MR. CLEMENT: Right. And, Justice
- 11 Sotomayor, I think the way to approach those cases would
- 12 be the same basic way you approach other questions of
- 13 corporate intent or corporate motivation. You look to
- 14 the governance doctrines, if any of this is put at
- 15 issue. And I think that's really a critical question,
- 16 which is ultimately, I think this line of questioning
- 17 goes to a question of sincerity, and if some large
- 18 corporation asserts some claim that's going to save them
- 19 lots of money, I would think that the government in
- 20 those kind of cases is really going to resist the
- 21 sincerity piece of the analysis. In this kind of
- 22 case --
- 23 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: That's the most
- 24 dangerous piece. That's the one we've resisted in all
- 25 our exercise jurisprudence, to measure the depth of

- 1 someone's religious beliefs.
- 2 MR. CLEMENT: To be clear, this Court's
- 3 cases have always distinguished between the sincerity
- 4 inquiry, which the Court has allowed, and the centrality
- 5 inquiry, which it suggested is inappropriate. But
- 6 sincerity has always been a part of this Court's cases.
- 7 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: I thought more
- 8 importantly was whether a burden was substantial or not.
- 9 That we've never acceded to the person claiming a
- 10 religious exemption, a belief in how substantial the
- 11 burden might be.
- 12 MR. CLEMENT: Right. This Court has not
- 13 questioned that. The Thomas case, I think, puts as
- 14 common ground the idea that you don't really
- 15 second-guess the person's -- the person's belief, but
- 16 you can contest sincerity. It is -- there is case law
- 17 in this. You know, you have people who are arrested in
- 18 possession of large quantities of marijuana and they
- 19 assert that they belong to the church of marijuana, and
- 20 those cases do get litigated and they get rejected. And
- 21 there's a lot of different ways to --
- 22 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: Is there -- is there a
- 23 different way of looking at it, the leeway? In U.S. v.
- Lee, we said, "When followers of a particular sect enter
- 25 into a commercial activity as a matter of choice, the

- 1 limits they accept on their own conduct as a matter of
- 2 conscience and faith are not to be superimposed on the
- 3 statutory schemes which are binding on others in that
- 4 activity."
- 5 So isn't that really the answer, that we've
- 6 never considered a for-profit corporation as exercising
- 7 religion?
- 8 MR. CLEMENT: Well, let me -- let me take on
- 9 Lee first. And I mean, that's obviously the two lines
- 10 of Lee that are the government's favorite two lines in
- 11 Lee. But Lee starts with a substantial burden inquiry,
- 12 which is where most of these sincerity questions go.
- 13 And Lee definitely says that there is a sincere
- 14 religious belief and a substantial burden on religious
- 15 exercise.
- So the two sentences that you're quoting
- 17 come in the compelling interest analysis of the case.
- 18 And I think Lee does stand for the proposition that in
- 19 the tax context, it's going to be very hard for somebody
- 20 to bring a claim that satisfies even the demanding
- 21 compelling interest, least restrictive alternative test.
- 22 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: Well, that's an
- 23 interesting question, because the briefs on both sides
- 24 here are written as if the penalty for not having a
- 25 health insurance policy that covers contraceptives is at

- 1 issue. But isn't there another choice nobody talks
- 2 about, which is paying the tax, which is a lot less than
- 3 a penalty and a lot less than -- than the cost of health
- 4 insurance at all? These employers could choose not to
- 5 give health insurance and pay not that high a penalty --
- 6 not that high a tax.
- 7 MR. CLEMENT: Well, just to put this in
- 8 concrete terms, for Hobby Lobby, for example, the choice
- 9 is between paying a 500 -- a \$475 million per year
- 10 penalty and paying a \$26 million per year coverage.
- 11 JUSTICE KAGAN: No, I don't think that
- 12 that's the same thing, Mr. Clement. There's one penalty
- 13 that is if the employer continues to provide health
- insurance without this part of the coverage, but Hobby
- 15 Lobby could choose not to provide health insurance at
- 16 all. And in that case Hobby Lobby would pay \$2,000 per
- 17 employee, which is less than Hobby Lobby probably pays
- 18 to provide insurance to its employees.
- 19 So there is a choice here. It's not even a
- 20 penalty by -- in the language of the statute. It's a
- 21 payment or a tax. There's a choice. And so the
- 22 question is, why is there a substantial burden at all?
- 23 MR. CLEMENT: Well, just to be clear, we
- 24 were talking about the same thing. So the option, the
- 25 choice, is between paying a \$475 million a year penalty

- 1 and a \$26 million a year penalty. That's what Hobby
- 2 Lobby faces. So \$2,000 per person --
- 3 JUSTICE KAGAN: No, between paying \$2,000
- 4 per employee per year if Hobby Lobby does not provide --
- 5 MR. CLEMENT: That's \$26 million.
- 6 JUSTICE KAGAN: You know, Hobby Lobby is
- 7 paying something right now for the -- for the coverage.
- 8 It's less than what Hobby Lobby is paying for the
- 9 coverage. There are employers all over the United
- 10 States that are doing this voluntarily because they
- 11 think that it's less.
- 12 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: I thought -- I
- 13 thought that part of the religious commitment of the
- 14 owners was to provide health care for its employees.
- 15 MR. CLEMENT: That is true, Mr. Chief
- 16 Justice. It is also true that this --
- JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: Well, if they want to do
- 18 that, they can just pay a greater salary and let the
- 19 employees go in on the exchange.
- 20 MR. CLEMENT: Exactly, which is, by the way,
- 21 why comparing the \$2,000 penalty to the cost of the
- 22 health care is a false -- it's a false comparison.
- 23 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: It's not called a
- 24 penalty. It's called a tax. And it's calibrated -- and
- 25 it's calibrated --

- 1 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: She's right about
- 2 that.
- 3 (Laughter.)
- 4 MR. CLEMENT: And it has been treated for
- 5 some purposes as a penalty. And I think for this
- 6 purposes, it certainly feels punitive.
- 7 And if I could finish the thought about why it's
- 8 a false comparison, the 2,000 penalty to the cost of the
- 9 health insurance, is that it's going to very much hurt
- 10 Hobby Lobby if all of the sudden it doesn't provide
- 11 health care to its employees. And in order to
- 12 compensate for that, it would have to increase the
- 13 wages. And I think it would be worse off as a result of
- 14 this. But if I could also --
- JUSTICE KAGAN: Well, let's say that that's
- 16 right. Let's say that they have to increase the wages a
- 17 little bit. I mean, still we are talking about pretty
- 18 equivalent numbers. Maybe it's a little bit less; maybe
- 19 it's a little bit more. But this is not the kind of
- 20 thing that's going to drive a person out of business.
- 21 It's not prohibitive.
- 22 It's like the thing that we talked about in
- 23 Braunfeld where we said, you know, maybe if the store
- 24 can't stay open 7 days a week, it makes a little bit
- 25 less money. But so be it, is what we said.

- 1 MR. CLEMENT: No, I actually think what it's
- 2 like, Your Honor, with all due respect, it's like the
- 3 five dollar penalty enforcing the prohibition in Yoder.
- 4 And what this Court says, it's one thing if you don't
- 5 have a direct government prohibition on a religious
- 6 exercise or a mandate that somebody do something that
- 7 violates their religion. In those cases, which is like
- 8 Sherbert and is like Braunfeld, then you have to look at
- 9 the substantial pressure, and it becomes a little bit
- 10 more of a loosey-goosey analysis. But when you have a
- 11 government law that specifically says you must do
- 12 something that violates your religion -- and it's
- 13 enforced with a penalty, and with all due respect I
- think \$2,000 per employee is a penalty.
- 15 JUSTICE KAGAN: But Mr. Clement, it's not
- 16 saying you must do something that violates your
- 17 religion. It's giving you a choice. You can do this
- 18 thing or if this thing violates your religion you can do
- 19 another thing. And that other thing is approximately
- 20 the same price as the thing that you don't want to do.
- 21 MR. CLEMENT: I don't think it would be the
- 22 same price at the end of the day. I'd also like to
- 23 point out how this --
- JUSTICE SCALIA: Well, of course it wouldn't
- 25 be the same price at the end of the day. If they deny

- 1 health insurance, they're going to have to raise wages
- 2 if they are going to get employees.
- 3 MR. CLEMENT: Absolutely.
- 4 JUSTICE SCALIA: It's absurd to say that,
- 5 you know, it comes out of nowhere.
- 6 MR. CLEMENT: Absolutely, Your Honor. And
- 7 by the way, this \$2,000 penalty is very much a
- 8 double-edged sword for the government, because you're
- 9 trying to --
- 10 JUSTICE KENNEDY: But why -- why is that a
- 11 problem? Let's assume that the cost of providing
- insurance is roughly equivalent to the \$2,000 penalty.
- 13 How -- how is the employer hurt? He can just raise the
- 14 wages.
- 15 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: May I just put a
- 16 footnote on this. I thought the average price of
- 17 providing insurance for a single person is \$4,000, and
- 18 it's \$12,000 for a family -- for a family. So the 2,000
- 19 tax -- that's what it's called -- is to help the
- 20 government provide subsidies to people on the exchange
- 21 that don't have employer insurance. So it's a tax
- 22 because it's -- it is to do exactly what your client
- 23 wants, to get the government to supply the
- 24 contraceptives, not the insurance companies.
- 25 MR. CLEMENT: Here's the problem with this

- 1 way of looking at it, which is to say whatever it costs
- 2 per employee to get this, this health care, that's
- 3 something that right now Hobby Lobby is paying whatever
- 4 it's paying them, plus it's -- it's -- you know, imputed
- 5 into that is the idea that they're getting their wage
- 6 and they're getting health care insurance.
- 7 If they take away the health care insurance,
- 8 they are going to have to increase the wages to make up
- 9 for that. And they're going to have to pay the \$2,000
- 10 penalty on top of it, plus they're going to have to
- 11 violate their -- their own interest which is, we
- 12 actually -- we believe it's important to provide our
- 13 employees with qualified health care.
- 14 JUSTICE KENNEDY: Okav, the last is
- 15 important. But just assume hypothetically that it's a
- 16 wash, that the employer would be in about the same
- 17 position if he paid the penalty and the employer --
- 18 pardon me, an employee went out and got the insurance
- 19 and that the employee's wages were raised slightly and
- 20 then it's -- and that it's a wash so far as the employer
- 21 are concerned, other than the employer's religious
- 22 objection, but just on the financial standpoint. Can we
- 23 assume that as a hypothetical. Then what would your
- 24 case be?
- 25 MR. CLEMENT: I think my case would be that

- 1 in that case the government might be able to sort of
- 2 support itself on the compelling interest. I think
- 3 there would still be a substantial burden on their
- 4 exercise. But again, this all turns on issues that the
- 5 government hasn't put in issue. This case hasn't been
- 6 litigated on this particular theory, so I think -- I'd
- 7 love to have the opportunity to show how by not
- 8 providing health insurance it would have a huge burden
- 9 on my client and their ability to attract workers, and
- 10 that in fact would cost them much more out of pocket.
- 11 But that's not been the nature of the government's
- 12 theory.
- 13 JUSTICE KAGAN: Can I ask --
- 14 JUSTICE GINSBURG: There was a point made
- 15 earlier, and I think you didn't mean to say this, that
- 16 provision of health care is not part of their religious
- 17 belief. Covering their employees for health care, that
- 18 is not a religious tenet, right?
- 19 MR. CLEMENT: No, it actually is. Again, it
- 20 hasn't been the principal theory on which this case has
- 21 been litigated. But see, if you go back to the
- 22 complaints and you go back to our briefs, you know, it's
- 23 part of the religious beliefs that both the Hahns and
- 24 the Greens have. They think it's actually important --
- 25 JUSTICE KAGAN: But, Mr. Clement, you're not

- 1 saying, are you, that their religious beliefs mandate
- 2 them to provide health care? I thought that you were
- 3 never making that claim.
- 4 MR. CLEMENT: I didn't have to make that
- 5 claim in the course of this litigation. What I'm
- 6 pointing out, though, is for purposes of the substantial
- 7 burden analysis, it is perfectly appropriate to take
- 8 into account that the 2,000 -- the \$26 million in fines
- 9 they would pay would not be the only thing that they
- 10 would lose out if they are on that horn of the dilemma.
- 11 They would also lose out all the additional wages they
- 12 would have to pay, and they would be in this position of
- 13 not offering health care, which is something they
- 14 believe is important for their religion as well.
- JUSTICE KAGAN: You know, I'm sure they seem
- 16 like very good employers. And I'm sure they want to be
- 17 good employers. But again, that's a different thing
- 18 than saying that their religious beliefs mandate them to
- 19 provide health insurance, because here Congress has said
- 20 that the health insurance that they're providing is not
- 21 adequate, it's not the full package.
- 22 MR. CLEMENT: Well, with respect, what
- 23 Congress has said is that this kind of plan is not
- 24 appropriate for a non-grandfathered plan. But if we're
- 25 going to talk about the government's compelling

- 1 interests here, which I think has got to be part of the
- 2 analysis, then I think the grandfathered provisions of
- 3 this statute really are devastating for the government's
- 4 argument that it has a compelling interest.
- 5 When the government pursues compelling
- 6 interest, it demands immediate compliance. It doesn't
- 7 say, "Get around to it whenever it's convenient." I
- 8 can't imagine Congress passing Title VII and saying,
- 9 "Stop discriminating on the basis of race, unless of
- 10 course you have a preexisting policy that discriminates
- on the basis of race, and then you can keep it as long
- 12 as you'd like."
- 13 It is fundamentally inconsistent with a
- 14 compelling interest --
- 15 JUSTICE KAGAN: Well, but I think even --
- 16 MR. CLEMENT: -- analysis to have this kind
- 17 of grandfathering.
- 18 JUSTICE KAGAN: -- that example, you know,
- 19 initially Title VII did not apply to any employers with
- 20 fewer than 25 employees. And then gradually, Congress
- 21 brought the number down because Congress realized that
- 22 there were going to be transition issues and that some
- 23 time was needed to make sure that the compelling
- interest, you know, should be applied uniformly across
- 25 all employers.

- 1 MR. CLEMENT: Here's, respectfully, why I
- 2 don't think that that works, which is I think the
- 3 question whenever there are exemptions in the statute is
- 4 to ask yourself, do the exemptions undermine the
- 5 compelling interest that the government asserts.
- 6 There's nothing inconsistent with an
- 7 interest in prohibiting employment discrimination to say
- 8 we're going to focus on the people who actually employ
- 9 the most people and therefore can engage in the most
- 10 discrimination.
- It's quite a different matter, and I don't
- 12 think anybody would think that Congress would pass a
- 13 Title VII that said, "Hey, as long as you have a
- 14 preexisting discriminatory policy, you're allowed to
- 15 keep it." That doesn't seem like it would be
- 16 consistent.
- 17 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: Counsel, your
- 18 attorney -- one of the attorneys below on behalf of your
- 19 clients admitted that the grandfathered policies weren't
- 20 going to be around very long because any change to an
- 21 existing policy -- and he said these changes happen on a
- 22 yearly basis. And we already know from the government's
- 23 statistics that it's up to 40 percent now have
- 24 grandfathered out. Your own client changed its policy,
- and that's why it's not grandfathered.

- 1 And he changed it to drop contraceptives it
- 2 was covering.
- 3 MR. CLEMENT: Well --
- 4 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: And so my point is,
- 5 since when does a transitioned grandfathered exemption
- 6 and one that everybody knows will have to change,
- 7 because premiums by definition will change or co-pays
- 8 will change, something is going to change -- it's a very
- 9 short transition period. Since when does that prove
- 10 that the need is not compelling?
- 11 MR. CLEMENT: With all due respect, it's not
- 12 necessarily a very short transition period. And your --
- 13 your references to co-pays and premiums is precisely on
- 14 point, because the government, through its regulations,
- 15 has allowed grandfathered plans to make changes to the
- 16 co-pays as long as they're indexed to medical inflation.
- Now, if you have a transition period that's
- 18 just there for a nanosecond, you don't bother indexing
- 19 it to medical inflation. So this is a grandfather
- 20 provision that's going to be around for multiple years.
- 21 And by the government's own numbers, tens of millions of
- 22 employees are not getting this mandated coverage as a
- 23 result of the grandfather provision. And even if we can
- 24 project forward ten years to when maybe there would only
- 25 be a handful of grandfathered plans, even at that point,

- 1 you would still have the same problem that the
- 2 government would have, which is it has to make an
- 3 argument for a compelling interest.
- 4 JUSTICE KENNEDY: Just before your time
- 5 starts to go too fast, how would you suggest that we
- 6 think about the position and the rights of the -- of the
- 7 employees? And you can have hypotheticals about the
- 8 employer makes them -- wants to make them wear burkas
- 9 and so forth. That's not in this case.
- 10 But in -- in a way, the employees are in a
- 11 position where the government, through its healthcare
- 12 plans, is -- is, under your view, is -- is allowing the
- 13 employer to put the employee in a disadvantageous
- 14 position. The employee may not agree with these
- 15 religious -- religious beliefs of the employer. Does
- 16 the religious beliefs just trump? Is that the way it
- 17 works?
- 18 MR. CLEMENT: Well, no, it's not just the
- 19 way it works, Justice Kennedy. And I actually have four
- 20 things I'd like to say about that, if it's possible.
- One is, I think the first thing about
- 22 third-party burdens is you have to ask where are they
- 23 coming from. And if the third-party burdens are coming
- 24 from an employer -- I mean, an employer right now can
- 25 put some burden on their rights because they have to

- 1 listen to religious music or whatever. That's not as
- 2 serious as a burden that's coming directly from the
- 3 government. So that's one principle to think about.
- 4 Another principle, and this is more of a
- 5 detail, but I think it's important, is that to the
- 6 extent you take into account third-party burdens, you
- 7 take those into account in the compelling interest part
- 8 of the analysis. The government has an argument that
- 9 somehow third-party interests go into the substantial
- 10 burden part of the analysis, where we bear the burden.
- 11 And we don't think that's right at all.
- 12 The third-party --
- 13 JUSTICE GINSBURG: But, Mr. Clement, you
- 14 made the analogy to RLUIPA. And the one thing that has
- 15 not been mentioned up till now is the Establishment
- 16 Clause. The Court was very clear when it came to
- 17 RLUIPA, which you said is similar to RFRA, that the
- 18 accommodation must be measured so it doesn't override
- 19 other significant interests. And that was true of
- 20 Sherbert and that was true of Yoder. The -- and the
- 21 Cutter case, and this Court made it very clear, that the
- 22 accommodation has to be balanced and you have to take
- 23 into account other significant interests.
- 24 MR. CLEMENT: Right. But that actually
- 25 brings me to my third point, which is those other

- 1 significant interests that carry the most weight have to
- 2 be independent of the very statute that's at issue in
- 3 the case and that the party seeks an exemption from.
- 4 So if you think about the Caldor case, there
- 5 the Court was concerned with the third-party burdens on,
- 6 say, an employee who had a seniority right to take the
- 7 weekends off. So he or she had an independent right to
- 8 take the weekend off, and the government policy was
- 9 coming in and displacing this.
- 10 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: I'm not sure that --
- 11 that squares with Lee. The -- the statute created the
- 12 right to Social Security, and there the Court said you
- 13 can't deprive employees of a statutory right because of
- 14 your religious beliefs. So Lee is contrary to the point
- 15 you're making.
- 16 MR. CLEMENT: There, too, I have to
- 17 respectfully disagree, because if you remember the facts
- 18 of Lee, Lee is brought not just by the employer, but by
- 19 the employee. So the particular employees there don't
- 20 have a beef with what he's doing at all. And I think
- 21 when they're talking about third-party burdens there,
- 22 what the Court is really talking about is the -- the
- 23 burdens of everybody else who contributes into a system
- 24 where uniformity, to use the Court's words, was
- 25 indispensable.

- 1 And so if I could, though, I think, just to
- 2 illustrate why it's sort of double counting to count the
- 3 mandated issue here as being what gives the burden to
- 4 the third party or the benefit on the third party.
- 5 Imagine two hypotheticals. One is Congress passes a
- 6 statute and says I have to destroy all of my books,
- 7 including my Bibles. Another statute, Congress comes in
- 8 and says I have to give all of my books, including all
- 9 of my Bibles, to you.
- 10 Now, in the second case, I suppose you could
- 11 say that a RFRA claim somehow gets rid of your statutory
- 12 entitlement to my Bibles, but I don't think, since it's
- 13 the very benefit that we're talking about that's at
- 14 issue there, I don't think -- I think that really is
- double counting and I don't think those two hypothetical
- 16 statutes should be analyzed any differently.
- 17 The other thing, though, about burdens, and
- 18 I think it should go -- this is the fourth point -- that
- 19 should go into the compelling interest test --
- JUSTICE KAGAN: I mean, Mr. Clement, isn't
- 21 that just a way of saying that you think that this isn't
- 22 a good statute, because it asks one person to subsidize
- 23 another person. But Congress has made a judgment and
- 24 Congress has given a statutory entitlement and that
- 25 entitlement is to women and includes contraceptive

- 1 coverage. And when the employer says, no, I don't want
- 2 to give that, that woman is quite directly, quite
- 3 tangibly harmed.
- 4 MR. CLEMENT: Well, Justice Kagan, I think
- 5 you could say the same thing about my Bible
- 6 hypothetical.
- 7 But I do have one last thing to say about
- 8 burdens. And I do think when you think about impacts on
- 9 third parties, not all of these burdens are created
- 10 equal. And that, too, I think is borne out in this
- 11 Court's cases. And the most relevant factor is, is
- 12 there some alternative way for the government to
- 13 ameliorate the burden.
- And I think about two types of, kind of
- 15 accommodations, if you will. You get sort of Title VII
- 16 with a very narrow accommodation. And then you have
- 17 conscience clauses that allow medical providers,
- 18 including for-profit medical providers, not to provide
- 19 abortions.
- Now, each of those has a burden on third
- 21 parties, but I would respectfully suggest they're
- 22 different. In the case of the employee who's been
- 23 subject to racial discrimination, even if they can get
- 24 another job, that racial discrimination is a unique
- 25 injury to them that you can't remedy unless you tell the

- 1 employer, don't discriminate on the basis of race.
- Now, in the context of the conscience
- 3 clause, if a woman can't get an abortion from her
- 4 preferred provider, that's surely a significant burden
- 5 on her. But we don't view that as trumping the
- 6 conscience clause, because she can get the abortion
- 7 through another mechanism.
- 8 Here, as your question rightfully
- 9 highlights, all we're really talking about is who's
- 10 going to pay for a subsidy that the government prefers.
- 11 This is not about access to the contraception. It's
- 12 about who's going to pay for the government's preferred
- 13 subsidy. And I think in that context, there are ample
- 14 alternative ways to address any burdens on third
- 15 parties. And that goes right to the least --
- 16 JUSTICE GINSBURG: It would make no
- 17 difference if it were -- there are 20 FDA-approved
- 18 contraceptives, all of them covered by the Healthcare
- 19 Act.
- 20 MR. CLEMENT: I think --
- 21 JUSTICE GINSBURG: You -- you picked out, in
- 22 one case what, three, and the other case four? Suppose
- 23 the employer says contraceptives all together are
- 24 against my religion, so I'm not going to give any
- 25 contraceptive coverage.

- 1 MR. CLEMENT: Well, obviously,
- 2 Justice Ginsburg, I didn't pick these out. I mean, my
- 3 clients and their religious beliefs identified these as
- 4 problematic. There are certainly --
- 5 JUSTICE GINSBURG: But your argument, it
- 6 seems to me, would apply just as well if the employer
- 7 said no contraceptives.
- 8 MR. CLEMENT: I think that's a fair point,
- 9 Justice Ginsburg, and the government's own
- 10 accommodations, where they offer them to religious
- 11 groups and religious employers like nonprofit hospitals,
- 12 also applies to whatever the religious beliefs of that
- 13 provider are. So if they extend to all 20, then the
- 14 exemption's applied to all 20. If they only extend to
- 15 four, then the exemption applies to all four.
- 16 JUSTICE ALITO: Are there ways of
- 17 accommodating the interests of the women who may want
- 18 these particular drugs or devices without imposing a
- 19 substantial burden on the employer who has the religious
- 20 objection to it?
- 21 MR. CLEMENT: There are ample less
- 22 restrictive alternatives, Your Honor.
- JUSTICE ALITO: What are they?
- 24 MR. CLEMENT: And I think they all flow from
- 25 this fact that this is ultimately about who's going to

- 1 pay for a substitute --
- 2 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: Those are alternatives
- 3 that you're asking the government to incur or the person
- 4 to incur. There isn't an alternative that doesn't put a
- 5 cost on someone else.
- 6 MR. CLEMENT: Well, it's -- it's
- 7 funny about this particular mandate because the
- 8 government's position is this is actually a cost-free
- 9 mandate; that whatever you pay out in contraceptions,
- 10 you're going to make up in not having to pay for other
- 11 coverages. And so one alternative, one less restrictive
- 12 alternative is what's done in the accommodation for
- 13 nonprofit employers like hospitals, where basically they
- 14 tell the insurance carrier or the plan administer that
- 15 you pick up the cost for this and then essentially it'll
- 16 be cost neutral from you.
- 17 But I don't think there's anything sort of
- 18 sacrosanct, if you will, about having the government pay
- 19 for its preferred subsidy as a less restrictive
- 20 alternative. And that's essentially what the government
- 21 does for those employees who have employers -- under 50
- 22 employers. If those employees -- if the employer
- 23 doesn't provide healthcare, those employees go on to the
- 24 exchanges with a subsidy from the government. Now, they
- 25 can do the same thing for objecting religious employers.

- 1 They just have chosen not to.
- 2 If I may reserve my time.
- 3 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Thank you,
- 4 Mr. Clement.
- 5 General Verrilli.
- 6 ORAL ARGUMENT OF DONALD B. VERRILLI, JR.
- 7 ON BEHALF OF THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT
- 8 GENERAL VERRILLI: Mr. Chief Justice, and
- 9 may it please the Court:
- 10 The touchstone for resolving this case is
- 11 the principle Justice Jackson articulated in Prince v.
- 12 Massachusetts. As he said, "Limitations which of
- 13 necessity bound religious freedom begin to operate
- 14 whenever activities begin to affect or collide with the
- 15 liberties of others or of the public. Adherence to that
- 16 principle is what makes possible the harmonious
- 17 functioning of a society like ours, in which people of
- 18 every faith live and work side by side."
- 19 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: That's a statement
- 20 that is inconsistent with RFRA, isn't it? The whole
- 21 point of RFRA is that Congress wanted to provide
- 22 exceptions for the religious views of particular --
- 23 including proprietors, individuals.
- 24 GENERAL VERRILLI: No, Mr. Chief Justice, I
- 25 don't think so at all. In fact, the -- although I

- 1 was -- of course, I was referring to Justice Jackson's
- 2 words for their wisdom because it wasn't the opinion of
- 3 the Court. But see, Jackson --
- 4 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Yeah. But the
- 5 wisdom you cited is the idea that you don't have
- 6 imposed, on the basis of religious beliefs, exemptions
- 7 or -- or limitations. And it seems to me that was the
- 8 whole point of RFRA, to tell the courts that that is
- 9 exactly what you should do unless the exception
- 10 satisfies the strict scrutiny test.
- 11 GENERAL VERRILLI: Well, but I think --
- 12 well, unless it satisfies the -- the pre-Smith standards
- 13 under -- under the Establishment Clause. But I do think
- 14 that the exact same point --
- 15 JUSTICE SCALIA: It's more than pre-Smith.
- 16 GENERAL VERRILLI: I take your point --
- 17 JUSTICE SCALIA: Plus --
- 18 GENERAL VERRILLI: -- I take your point
- 19 about less restrictive means, Your Honor.
- 20 JUSTICE SCALIA: Okay.
- 21 GENERAL VERRILLI: But the -- the exact same
- 22 point that Justice Jackson made in Prince, I submit, is
- 23 the point that this Court made unanimously in Cutter.
- 24 It's not -- it's that when you are analyzing what is
- 25 required under RFRA, the court must take account of the

- 1 way in which the requested accommodation will affect the
- 2 rights and interests of third parties.
- 3 JUSTICE ALITO: Well, is it your argument
- 4 that providing the accommodation that's requested here
- 5 would violate the Establishment Clause?
- 6 GENERAL VERRILLI: It's not our argument
- 7 that it would violate the Establishment Clause. But it
- 8 is our argument that you -- in any RFRA case, including
- 9 this one, you have to consider the impact on third
- 10 parties, because otherwise, you will be skating on thin
- 11 constitutional ice.
- 12 And so Justice Kennedy, you asked about
- 13 principles that -- that surround statutory construction.
- 14 Avoidance is one of them. And that was why the Court
- unanimously in Cutter said that in every RFRA case when
- 16 you're considering an accommodation, you have to weigh
- 17 the effect on third parties. And that --
- 18 JUSTICE SCALIA: Where -- where is that in
- 19 RFRA? I mean, what -- what factor of RFRA do you fold
- 20 that in under? Is -- is that part of the compelling
- 21 State interest requirement or -- or substantial burden
- 22 requirement? Where -- where is it in RFRA?
- 23 GENERAL VERRILLI: I'd like -- I think the
- 24 answer is that it could inform every operative provision
- 25 in RFRA. We have said that it should inform the court's

- 1 interpretation of who counts as a person.
- 2 JUSTICE SCALIA: If -- if they wanted you to
- 3 balance -- balance the interest of the religious
- 4 objector against the interest of other individuals,
- 5 they -- they made no reference to that in RFRA at all.
- 6 GENERAL VERRILLI: Well, I --
- 7 JUSTICE SCALIA: They said unless the
- 8 government has a compelling State interest.
- 9 GENERAL VERRILLI: And the compelling -- and
- 10 certainly compelling interest analysis certainly does
- 11 require consideration of the interests of third parties.
- 12 Of course, what the court -- what the Congress said in
- 13 RFRA, in explaining how the compelling interest test was
- 14 to work, was that it was to strike a sensible balance
- 15 between claims for religious liberty and governmental
- 16 interests.
- 17 And -- and, of course, Lee is one of the
- 18 pre-Smith cases that provides the governing law. And I
- 19 would submit it is really the only case from this Court
- 20 in which the request for an exemption under the Free
- 21 Exercise Clause had the effect of extinguishing a
- 22 statutorily-quaranteed benefit. Because in Lee, had the
- 23 employer gotten the exemption from providing Social
- 24 Security, the consequence would have been that the
- 25 employees would have been disqualified from receiving

- 1 Social Security benefits.
- 2 JUSTICE SCALIA: But that wasn't the basis
- 3 for -- for denying the claim. The basis was that the
- 4 government has to run a uniform system that applies to
- 5 everybody.
- 6 GENERAL VERRILLI: I disagree.
- 7 JUSTICE SCALIA: And you can't argue that
- 8 here because the government has made a lot of
- 9 exemptions.
- 10 GENERAL VERRILLI: I -- first of all, I
- 11 disagree with respect to Lee, that one of the points
- 12 that the Court made in Lee was that granting the
- 13 exemption from Social Security taxes to an employer
- 14 operates to impose the employer's religious faith on the
- 15 employees. It was one of the grounds of decision.
- Now -- but turning to -- I would like to
- 17 address these exemptions. I'm happy to talk about them.
- 18 I'm happy to talk about our compelling interest at
- 19 length. The -- now, the -- my --
- 20 JUSTICE ALITO: Well, if you could start
- 21 with the question of whether the -- the companies in
- this case have a right to bring RFRA claims because
- 23 they're for-profit corporations. You argue that they
- 24 can't.
- 25 GENERAL VERRILLI: That's correct.

1 JUSTICE ALITO: Now, why is that? Is it --2 is it your position that there's something about the 3 corporate form per se that is inconsistent with the free exercise claim? 4 5 GENERAL VERRILLI: No, because, obviously, 6 churches can bring claims. 7 JUSTICE ALITO: All right. But is it your argument that there's something about engaging in a 8 9 for-profit activity that is inconsistent with a free exercise claim? 10 11 GENERAL VERRILLI: Yes. And if I could walk 12 through the -- let me, if you don't mind, just walk 13 through the analysis on --14 JUSTICE ALITO: Well, were the merchants in 15 the Braunfeld case engaged in for-profit activity? 16 GENERAL VERRILLI: Yes. JUSTICE ALITO: So there isn't anything 17 inherent in --18 19 GENERAL VERRILLI: But I think --2.0 JUSTICE ALITO: -- in participating in a for-profit activity that's inconsistent with corporate 21 form, is there? I'm sorry, with a free exercise claim. 22 23 GENERAL VERRILLI: Yes. But I think the 24 relevant question is what did Congress think it was

doing when it enacted RFRA in 1993? What kinds of

25

- 1 claims did it think it was --2 JUSTICE ALITO: Well, what is it about --3 GENERAL VERRILLI: -- justifying? JUSTICE ALITO: -- a for-profit corporation 4 5 that is inconsistent with a free exercise claim? Do you 6 agree with the proposition that was endorsed by one of 7 the lower courts in this case, that for-profit corporations must do nothing but maximize profits, they 8 9 cannot have other aims --GENERAL VERRILLI: 10 No, not --11 JUSTICE ALITO: -- including religious aims? 12 GENERAL VERRILLI: No. But here's how we 1.3 look at it. At its core --14 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: I'm sorry, General. You answered yes to Braunfeld. It was Jewish merchants, but 15 it was the merchants themselves --16 17 GENERAL VERRILLI: Individuals. JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: -- the individuals --18 GENERAL VERRILLI: 19 Yes. 2.0 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: -- not the corporation that was going to be jailed. It was a --21 22 GENERAL VERRILLI: Yes, that's right.
- 25 Alito to be asking me not about the corporate form, but

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JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: -- criminal prosecution.

GENERAL VERRILLI: I understood Justice

- 1 about the -- the activity. And when you have an
- 2 individual, you have an individual. It's a person.
- 3 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: So whether it was a
- 4 merchant that was a corporation or not was irrelevant.
- 5 It was that the individual was --
- 6 GENERAL VERRILLI: That's --
- 7 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: -- going to be jailed.
- 8 GENERAL VERRILLI: That's correct.
- 9 JUSTICE SCALIA: It was an individual making
- 10 a profit, right?
- 11 GENERAL VERRILLI: Certainly.
- 12 JUSTICE SCALIA: He was running a business
- 13 for a profit, and that was the point of -- of Justice
- 14 Alito's question, right, which I think you understood.
- 15 GENERAL VERRILLI: And I did try to answer
- 16 it, yes. But I -- but let me say, I think the relevant
- 17 question here is what did Congress think it was doing in
- 18 1993? And I think the answer to that has to be in --
- 19 you know, we understand the Dictionary Act provides a
- 20 broad definition of person, but the Dictionary Act
- 21 doesn't define exercise religion. And the operative
- 22 statutory language is exercise -- person's exercise of
- 23 religion. And so you can't look to the Dictionary Act
- 24 to define that. But Congress told you where to look.
- 25 It told you to look to the pre-Smith case law --

- JUSTICE ALITO: And why did it tell -
  GENERAL VERRILLI: -- to define that.
- 3 JUSTICE ALITO: Why did it say that? It
- 4 changed the definition at the time when RLUIPA was
- 5 adopted, did it not, to eliminate the reference to the
- 6 First Amendment; isn't that right?
- 7 GENERAL VERRILLI: Yes. But it -- but the
- 8 difference there was to say it didn't want courts to get
- 9 involved in the entangling enterprise of deciding what
- 10 was a central belief versus what was --
- 11 JUSTICE ALITO: Well, it says free exercise.
- 12 And didn't it also adopt a provision in RLUIPA saying
- 13 that -- that the exercise of religion was to be
- 14 interpreted in the broadest possible way?
- 15 GENERAL VERRILLI: Well, I think it -- it
- 16 said something more precise than that, which was that it
- was to be interpreted not to be confined only to central
- 18 religious tenets.
- 19 JUSTICE ALITO: No. Didn't it say -- didn't
- 20 it say the term "religious exercise" includes any
- 21 exercise --
- 22 GENERAL VERRILLI: Yes, includes any
- 23 exercise of religion, but it doesn't define what that
- 24 is. It just says you don't draw a line between
- 25 centrality and something that may --

- 1 JUSTICE ALITO: No. But there is another
- 2 provision that says that, "This chapter shall be
- 3 construed in favor of a broad protection of religious
- 4 exercise to the maximum extent permitted by the terms of
- 5 this chapter and the Constitution."
- 6 GENERAL VERRILLI: Right. And it -- but
- 7 with respect to what exercise religion means, it said
- 8 don't draw lines between centrality and non-centrality.
- 9 It didn't go beyond that and tell you what it means.
- 10 And what RFRA tells you to look to is pre-Smith case
- 11 law. And in the entire history of this country, there
- is not a single case in which a for-profit corporation
- 13 was granted an exemption on --
- 14 JUSTICE SCALIA: Not a single case in which
- 15 it was denied exemption, either. All you're saying
- 16 is --
- 17 GENERAL VERRILLI: Well, Lee --
- 18 JUSTICE SCALIA: -- that there are no cases.
- 19 GENERAL VERRILLI: Well, Lee was certainly a
- 20 case in which a for-profit enterprise was denied an
- 21 exemption. Braunfeld was such a case. Gallagher was
- 22 such a case.
- 23 JUSTICE SCALIA: Not on the ground that it
- 24 was a for-profit enterprise. There is not a single case
- 25 which says that a for-profit enterprise cannot make a --

- 1 a freedom of religion claim, is there?
- 2 GENERAL VERRILLI: Right. There is not a
- 3 single case --
- 4 JUSTICE SCALIA: Right.
- 5 GENERAL VERRILLI: -- holding that. Except
- 6 that in Lee, it was critical to the Court's analysis
- 7 that the -- that the -- that Mr. Lee and his business
- 8 had chosen to enter the commercial sphere.
- 9 JUSTICE KAGAN: Isn't that a merits
- 10 question, General? I mean, I totally understand that
- 11 argument as a -- as an argument about the merits. I'm
- 12 not sure I understand it as a threshold claim that
- 13 this -- that the claim is not recognizable at all.
- 14 GENERAL VERRILLI: Right. Well, let me -- I
- do want to move to the compelling interest analysis, but
- 16 if I could make one point in response to Your Honor's
- 17 question, that the Court's got to decide what person --
- 18 a person's exercise of religion means. And that -- it
- 19 seems to me that it would be such a vast expansion of
- 20 what Congress must -- could have thought it was doing in
- 21 1993, when it enacted RFRA, to say that for-profit
- 22 corporations can make claims for religious exemptions to
- 23 any laws of general application that they want to
- 24 challenge.
- I do -- you know, Mr. Clement says, well,

- 1 you don't have to worry about anything other than small,
- 2 tightly-knit corporations like the one at issue here. I
- 3 take the point of the appeal of a situation like this
- 4 one. But the way in which he suggests that you will be
- 5 able to distinguish this case from a case in which a
- 6 large corporation comes in or a public company comes in,
- 7 is that you will have more grounds to question the
- 8 sincerity of the claim. But that raises exactly the
- 9 kinds of entanglement concerns that this Court has
- 10 always said you should try to avoid.
- 11 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Well, that's his
- 12 argument for distinguishing it. But there are others,
- 13 including the fact that it is more you avoid all of the
- 14 problems with what to do if it's a -- you know, there's
- 15 a 51 percent ownership of the shareholders, if you
- 16 simply say that it's in this type of Chapter S
- 17 Corporation that is closely held. Whether it applies in
- 18 the other situations is -- is a question that we'll have
- 19 to await another case when a large publicly-traded
- 20 corporation comes in and says, we have religious
- 21 principles, the sort of situation, I don't think, is
- 22 going to happen.
- 23 GENERAL VERRILLI: But even with respect to
- 24 these companies, Your Honor, what are you going to do if
- 25 there's a dispute between -- let's say there are three

- 1 shareholders -- a dispute between two in the majority
- 2 and one in the minority? You're going to have to get
- 3 yourself involved -- the courts will have to get
- 4 themselves involved in all kinds of --
- 5 JUSTICE SCALIA: Whoever controls the
- 6 corporation. Whoever controls the corporation
- 7 determines what the party --
- 8 GENERAL VERRILLI: And then -- and the
- 9 minority shareholder will say, well, this is -- under
- 10 state law, this is an act of oppression and this
- 11 is --
- 12 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Well, that's a
- 13 question of State corporate law. It's not a question of
- 14 who can bring an action under RFRA.
- 15 Could I just raise -- eight courts of
- 16 appeals, every court of appeal to have looked at the
- 17 situation have held that corporations can bring racial
- 18 discrimination claims as corporations.
- 19 Now, does the government have a position on
- 20 whether corporations have a race?
- 21 GENERAL VERRILLI: Yes. We think those are
- 22 correct and that this situation is different.
- 23 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: So that -- so that a
- 24 corporation does have a race for purposes of
- 25 discrimination laws.

- 1 GENERAL VERRILLI: No, not that the
- 2 corporation has a race, but that corporations can bring
- 3 those claims. But you're not interpreting -- in that
- 4 situation, all you're interpreting is the word "person"
- 5 in a statute, not exercise of religion, which is what
- 6 makes it different here.
- 7 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: So those -- those
- 8 cases involve construction of the term "person"?
- 9 GENERAL VERRILLI: Yes, but only "person."
- 10 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: So the person -- the
- 11 corporation can bring as a person a claim of racial
- 12 discrimination.
- 13 GENERAL VERRILLI: That's correct, but not
- 14 exercise of religion. That's the difference. But let
- 15 me, if I could, we think that part of the problem here
- 16 and the reason we make the argument we do at the
- 17 threshold about why you ought not recognize claims under
- 18 RFRA for for-profit corporations is that they are going
- 19 to predictively give rise to the kinds of issues you
- 20 have in this case in which the exemption is going to
- 21 impose a burden on third parties or extinguish rights of
- 22 third parties, employees or others, and that that --
- 23 that really can't be what Congress was thinking about.
- 24 But even if you --
- 25 JUSTICE ALITO: If you say they can't even

- 1 get their -- they can't even get their -- their day in
- 2 court, you're saying something pretty, pretty strong.
- 3 GENERAL VERRILLI: And I understand, but if
- 4 Your Honor disagrees with me -- if the Court doesn't
- 5 agree with this position at the threshold, the same
- 6 considerations with respect to the harms of third
- 7 parties definitely play into the compelling-interest
- 8 analysis.
- 9 In fact, under RFRA, the standard, the
- 10 precise standard of the statute says the government must
- 11 meet is that it must show that the application of the
- 12 law to the particular parties here, Conestoga and Hobby
- 13 Lobby, is in furtherance of the government's compelling
- 14 interest. That's the test. So the question here is
- 15 whether having Hobby Lobby and Conestoga provide this
- 16 coverage is in furtherance of the government's interests
- in ensuring that this kind of preventive service
- 18 coverage is available and, in particular, the
- 19 contraceptive coverage that's included within it.
- 20 JUSTICE KENNEDY: Is it your position that
- 21 part of the compelling interest here is that you have to
- 22 protect the integrity -- the operational integrity of
- 23 the whole Act?
- 24 GENERAL VERRILLI: It is part of our
- 25 argument, absolutely. And -- but it -- but there is in

- 1 addition to that, much more --
- 2 JUSTICE KENNEDY: Does that mean the
- 3 constitutionality of the whole Act has to be examined
- 4 before we accept your view?
- 5 GENERAL VERRILLI: Well, I think it has been
- 6 examined, Your Honor, is my recollection.
- 7 (Laughter.)
- 8 GENERAL VERRILLI: But -- but with respect
- 9 to -- but with respect to the -- there is a
- 10 particularized interest here in that what we are talking
- about is a question of whether 14,000 employees and
- 12 their families get access to this contraceptive
- 13 coverage.
- 14 JUSTICE KENNEDY: You -- you have exempted a
- 15 whole class of corporations and you've done so under
- 16 your view not because of RFRA.
- 17 GENERAL VERRILLI: So let me -- let me go to
- 18 that --
- 19 JUSTICE KENNEDY: Now, what -- what kind of
- 20 constitutional structure do we have if the Congress can
- 21 give an agency the power to grant or not grant a
- 22 religious exemption based on what the agency determined?
- 23 I recognize delegation of powers rules are somewhat
- 24 moribund insofar as their enforcement in this Court.
- 25 But when we have a First Amendment issue of -- of this

- 1 consequence, shouldn't we indicate that it's for the
- 2 Congress, not the agency to determine that this
- 3 corporation gets the exemption on that one, and not even
- 4 for RFRA purposes, for other purposes.
- 5 GENERAL VERRILLI: And, Your Honor, I do
- 6 think that it was appropriate for the agency, in
- 7 exercising its delegated authority here, to take into
- 8 account the special solicitude that under our
- 9 constitutional order churches receive. And it's
- 10 important to understand, and I want to walk through
- 11 the -- this question of exemptions very carefully
- 12 because I think there's a lot of confusion here that
- 13 needs to be cleared up, that all that the -- all that
- 14 the government has done is say that churches, because of
- 15 that special solicitude, which the Court recognized in
- 16 Hosanna-Tabor, churches get an exemption.
- 17 The nonprofit religious organizations don't
- 18 get an exemption. There's an accommodation there
- 19 provided, but that accommodation results in the
- 20 employees receiving access to this -- to the
- 21 contraceptive coverage, so that doesn't diminish the
- 22 government's compelling interest.
- The Tenth Circuit and my friends on the
- 24 other side have relied on this idea that employers with
- 25 fewer than 50 employees are somehow exempt.

- 1 JUSTICE KENNEDY: But you gave this
- 2 exemption, according to your brief, without reference to
- 3 the policies of RFRA. What -- what were the policies
- 4 that you were implementing?
- 5 GENERAL VERRILLI: Well, with respect to --
- 6 as I said, with respect to the churches, it was the
- 7 special solicitude that churches receive under our
- 8 Constitution under the First Amendment.
- 9 But with respect -- now with respect to the
- 10 employers 50 and under, it's just not right to say that
- 11 there's any kind of an exemption. If they offer health
- insurance, they're subject to exactly the same
- 13 per-employee, per-day penalty as larger corporations,
- 14 exactly the same risk of Labor Department enforcement,
- 15 exactly the same risk of an ERISA suit by the plan
- 16 beneficiaries. There is no possible way to look at the
- 17 statutory scheme and conclude there is an exemption
- 18 there.
- 19 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: What about the
- 20 grandfathered plans?
- 21 GENERAL VERRILLI: Yes. Let me talk about
- the grandfathered plans.
- 23 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Well, just before
- 24 you -- so one thing I'd like you to address, the dispute
- 25 arose with Mr. Clement about how long they were going to

- 1 be in effect. Can you make a representation to us about
- 2 how long the grandfathering is going to be in effect?
- 3 GENERAL VERRILLI: I -- I can't give you a
- 4 precise figure as to -- there's a clear downward
- 5 trajectory. There's significant movement downward every
- 6 year in the numbers. There's every reason to think
- 7 that's going to continue. I can't give you a precise
- 8 time when that is going to be --
- 9 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Can you give me an
- 10 approximate time, if not a precise one?
- 11 GENERAL VERRILLI: I -- I can't give you a
- 12 representation of exactly how low that number is going
- 13 to go and exactly how long it's going to take. But I
- 14 think what you're talking about is a period in which
- 15 that number is going to go to a very, very low level
- 16 over a several year period.
- 17 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Well, if you can't
- 18 tell us, and I don't fault you for not being able to
- 19 tell us, when the grandfathering is going to end,
- 20 shouldn't we assume in our analysis that it is current
- 21 and, as far as we can tell, not going to end?
- 22 GENERAL VERRILLI: No. I don't that's
- 23 right, Your Honor. And I think -- let's -- let's look
- 24 at this, if we could, in toto. That with respect to
- 25 grandfathering, it's to be expected that employers and

- 1 insurance companies are going to make decisions that
- 2 trigger the loss of that so-called grandfathered status
- 3 under the -- under the governing regulation.
- 4 JUSTICE ALITO: Isn't it true with respect
- 5 to the grandfathered plans that the regulations required
- 6 immediate compliance with certain requirements, but not
- 7 with preventive care requirements; isn't that right?
- 8 Let me read you what HHS said in the regulation: "With
- 9 certain particularly significant protections,
- 10 particularly significant protections, Congress required
- 11 grandfathered health plans to comply with a subset of
- 12 the Affordable Care Act's health reform provisions. On
- 13 the other hand, grandfathered health plans are not
- 14 required to comply with certain other requirements of
- 15 the Affordable Care Act; for example, the requirement
- 16 that preventive health services be covered without any
- 17 cost sharing."
- 18 So isn't HHS saying there, quite
- 19 specifically, these, in our view, are not within this
- 20 subset of particularly significant requirements as to
- 21 which there must be immediate compliance?
- 22 GENERAL VERRILLI: Well, the -- the question
- 23 would be whether there's a compelling interest in
- 24 compliance with these requirements. And I -- I'd like
- 25 to make two points in response to Your Honor's question.

- 1 First with respect to this issue of delay, which I
- 2 think, Mr. Chief Justice, your question raised, and my
- 3 friend on the other side has put a lot of weight on, I'd
- 4 refer the Court to the ADA. I don't think anybody would
- 5 doubt that the Americans with Disabilities Act advances
- 6 interest of the highest order. But when Congress
- 7 enacted that, it put a two-year delay on the
- 8 applicability of the discrimination provision.
- 9 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Well, isn't that
- 10 because you're talking about building ramps and things
- 11 like that?
- 12 GENERAL VERRILLI: No. No, Your Honor.
- 13 There's an even longer delay with respect to those kinds
- of provisions, but it's just a basic prohibition of
- 15 discrimination two-year delay, and no one would doubt
- 16 there's a compelling interest here. And with -- and
- 17 take -- take Title VII. My friends on the other side
- 18 have said, well, this is different because there's so
- 19 many more people who are going to not have this coverage
- 20 under the grandfathered plan. But with respect to Title
- 21 VII, of course, it's still the case that -- that
- 22 employers with 15 or fewer people are not subject to
- 23 that law, and that's 80 percent of the employers in the
- 24 country. And if you run the math, that's -- it's at
- 25 least 80 percent -- that's -- it's going to be somewhere

- 1 between 10 and 22 million people who are not within the
- 2 coverage. No one would say that because the coverage is
- 3 incomplete in that respect, that Title VII -- enforcing
- 4 Title VII doesn't advance --
- 5 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Those were
- 6 decisions -- those were decisions that Congress made,
- 7 right?
- 8 GENERAL VERRILLI: Yes.
- 9 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Well, the
- 10 grandfathering is not a decision that Congress made, is
- 11 it?
- 12 GENERAL VERRILLI: Well, the way in which
- 13 it's implemented is a decision that the agency has made,
- 14 that's true. But even with respect to the preventive
- 15 services, I don't think anyone would say that there's
- 16 not a compelling interest in advancing colorectal cancer
- 17 screening and immunizations and the things that the
- 18 preventive services provisions provide in addition to
- 19 contraceptive coverage. I just think this is a
- 20 compelling interest under any understanding of the term.
- 21 JUSTICE BREYER: I just want -- before you
- 22 get to this point, and my question reflects no point of
- 23 view at all on my behalf. I just -- but I took
- 24 Mr. Clement, one of his points, which I thought was an
- 25 important one. He says there are some people here who

- 1 strongly object to helping with abortions which include
- 2 abortifacient contraceptives. Everybody says, yes, they
- 3 do object to that and that's sincere. So he's not
- 4 saying this, but I might.
- 5 But there is a compelling interest in
- 6 women's health and in the health of the family, and
- 7 they're not having a religious objection to taking it.
- 8 And so the government has said provide it.
- 9 Then he says, but there is a less
- 10 restrictive way, and the less restrictive way is the
- 11 government pays for it. Says it wouldn't cost much.
- 12 You'd have to have another piece of paper that would go
- 13 to the insurance company that would say, insofar as your
- 14 employer has a sincere objection against paying this,
- 15 the government will pay for it.
- Now, what I want to hear, and this is not
- 17 coming from any point of view, I want to hear your
- 18 precise answer to that kind of argument.
- 19 GENERAL VERRILLI: Yes. They did arque -- I
- 20 will point out, for the first time at the podium this
- 21 morning -- that a less restrictive means would be to
- 22 extend the accommodation that currently exists --
- 23 JUSTICE BREYER: I'm not interested in
- 24 whether they made the argument sooner or later. What I
- 25 want to hear from you is I want to hear -- and it's

- 1 not -- you've thought about this. I want to hear your
- 2 answer to that kind of argument.
- 3 GENERAL VERRILLI: Well --
- 4 JUSTICE BREYER: I want to be sure you have
- 5 a chance to give it.
- 6 GENERAL VERRILLI: The answer -- I think
- 7 there are two answers to it. Assuming it's before the
- 8 Court -- and I'm going to answer your honest question
- 9 directly, but I do want to make a prefatory point here,
- 10 which is that under the law, under Ashcroft v. ACLU, for
- 11 example, the burden on the government is to show that
- 12 proposed less restrictive alternatives are not equally
- 13 effective. If they don't propose it, we don't have a
- 14 burden to refute it.
- 15 Having said that, we can refute it. Now,
- 16 there are two -- and there are two ways. The first is,
- 17 they claim that they don't think that the accommodation
- 18 is a less restrictive means, I take it, because -- or
- 19 they haven't raised it before today, because they
- 20 believe that RFRA would require exemptions to that too,
- 21 such that if you were -- if you were to provide the
- 22 accommodation in which the insurance company comes in
- 23 and provides the contraception if the employer signs the
- 24 form, they would say that that -- signing the form also
- 25 makes them complicit in the central activity, and that

- 1 therefore RFRA provides an exemption there, too.
- 2 And of course the test is whether the
- 3 proposed alternative advances the government's
- 4 interests as effectively. And if it is going to be
- 5 subject to exactly the same RFRA objections by exactly
- 6 the same class of people asking for it, it's not going
- 7 to serve the government's interest as effectively
- 8 because the RFRA exemption will result in no coverage
- 9 there.
- 10 The second point being that --
- 11 JUSTICE SCALIA: So don't make them sign a
- 12 piece of paper.
- 13 GENERAL VERRILLI: Well, whether they sign
- 14 the piece of paper or not, if they make the RFRA claim
- 15 there, which they have with respect to that
- 16 accommodation, it will result in it being less effective
- 17 in terms of accomplishing the compelling interest. In
- 18 addition --
- 19 JUSTICE ALITO: Well, we can ask Mr. Clement
- 20 what his position is on this. But you say they have
- 21 already asserted that it would be inconsistent with RFRA
- 22 as they understand it to provide for a for-profit
- 23 corporation, like the ones involved here, the sort of
- 24 accommodation that HHS has extended to so-called
- 25 religious nonprofits, perhaps with the modification that

- 1 was included in our stay order in the Little Sisters
- 2 case. Have they taken a position on that?
- 3 GENERAL VERRILLI: You'll have to ask them.
- 4 I don't think they have. But they have studiously
- 5 avoided arguing this as a less restrictive alternative,
- 6 and I take it it's because their theory, at least, would
- 7 lead one to the conclusion you would have to provide a
- 8 RFRA objection. But now the -- yes, thank you,
- 9 Mr. Chief Justice.
- 10 The second point is that you're talking
- 11 about a very open-ended increase in the cost to the
- 12 government. Now, we don't know how much that cost would
- 13 be. The reason is because, since this wasn't litigated
- in the lower courts, there's not a record on it. So I
- 15 can't tell you what that -- what that increased cost is
- 16 going to be, but it could be quite considerable.
- 17 JUSTICE SCALIA: You're talking about, what,
- 18 three or four birth controls, not all of them, just
- 19 those that are abortifacient. That's not terribly
- 20 expensive stuff, is it?
- 21 GENERAL VERRILLI: Well, to the contrary.
- 22 And two points to make about that. First, of course
- 23 the -- one of the methods of contraception they object
- 24 to here is the IUD. And that is by far and away the
- 25 method of contraception that is most effective, but has

- 1 the highest upfront cost and creates precisely the kind
- 2 of cost barrier that the preventive services provision
- 3 is trying to break down.
- 4 JUSTICE ALITO: I thought that -- I was
- 5 taken by your answer. I thought it was the government's
- 6 position that providing coverage for the full range of
- 7 contraceptives and other devices and drugs that are
- 8 covered here is actually financially neutral for an
- 9 insurance company, that that reduces other costs that
- 10 they would incur.
- 11 GENERAL VERRILLI: It is for the insurance
- 12 company, but for the woman who is going to not get the
- 13 benefit of the statute if the exemption is granted --
- 14 JUSTICE ALITO: No. No. If she -- if she
- 15 has the coverage through the insurance company but the
- 16 employer has nothing to do with arranging for that.
- 17 GENERAL VERRILLI: Well, so, in other words,
- 18 if they haven't raised a RFRA objection to the
- 19 alternative, but that -- but as I said, you know, the
- 20 logic of their position is that you would get a RFRA
- 21 objection. It can't be --
- 22 JUSTICE BREYER: Still, I want to get --
- 23 press this a little further, and I don't want you simply
- 24 to just agree with what I'm about to say.
- 25 GENERAL VERRILLI: Don't worry.

- 1 (Laughter.)
- 2 JUSTICE BREYER: No, I mean -- I mean, after
- 3 all, somebody, a taxpayer, might say, "I don't want to
- 4 pay for this small war." And it would be a religious
- 5 ground, and it would be very, very little money, in
- 6 fact, that you take from him. Or the church might say,
- 7 "I want a Sunday morning reduction in the cost of
- 8 municipal parking." And by the way, that will not only
- 9 not cost the government anything, they'll make money
- 10 because nobody parks there on Sunday, particularly with
- 11 this high a fee.
- Now, I'm thinking of -- I'm trying to figure
- 13 out where this case fits in that spectrum because I
- 14 think the answer to the first two questions is no. And
- 15 I know, so you're just going to agree, and that's what I
- 16 don't want. I want to understand your thinking on that.
- 17 GENERAL VERRILLI: On that point, I think
- 18 that question plugs into our view of what the
- 19 substantial burden test requires, that their view of
- 20 substantial burden is if you have a sincere religious
- 21 belief and there is any law with a meaningful penalty
- 22 that imposes on you pressure to do something
- 23 inconsistent with your belief, then you may pass the
- 24 substantial burden test.
- 25 I think the problem with that test as they

- 1 formulate it, is that under the two hypotheticals that
- 2 you just gave, Justice Breyer, you've got a substantial
- 3 burden in those situations, because if you don't pay the
- 4 tax you can go to jail, for example.
- 5 And so we think the substantial burden
- 6 analysis has got to be more strenuous than that. It's
- 7 got to incorporate principles of attenuation and
- 8 proximate cause, and that when you think about this case
- 9 where the requirement is to purchase insurance which
- 10 enables actions by others, that you're really closer to
- 11 the tax situation than to imposing a direct obligation
- 12 to act.
- 13 So that's how we would think about that
- 14 issue. But now, with respect to --
- 15 JUSTICE ALITO: Mr. -- General Verrilli,
- isn't that really a question of theology or moral
- 17 philosophy, which has been debated for -- by many
- 18 scholars and adherents to many religions. A does
- 19 something that B thinks is immoral. How close a
- 20 connection does there have to be between what B does
- 21 that may have some -- that may provide some assistance
- 22 to A in order for B to -- to be required to refrain from
- 23 doing that -- that action.
- 24 GENERAL VERRILLI: It's true that it's a
- 25 difficult question. But it isn't --

- 1 JUSTICE ALITO: It is a religious question
- 2 and it's a moral question. And you want us to provide a
- 3 definitive secular answer to it?
- 4 GENERAL VERRILLI: No, but I do think the
- 5 problem, Justice Alito, is that this Court has
- 6 recognized, and certainly the courts of appeals have
- 7 recognized, that there is a difference. You accept the
- 8 sincerity of the belief, but the Court still has to make
- 9 a judgment of its own about what constitutes a
- 10 substantial burden, or otherwise, for example, the tax
- 11 thing would be a substantial burden. Or we cited a D.C.
- 12 Circuit case in which prisoners objected to giving DNA
- 13 samples and the court said: We accept the sincerity of
- 14 that belief, but it's up to us to decide whether that's
- 15 a actually substantial burden.
- 16 In the Bowen case in this Court, the Court
- 17 accepted the sincerity of the belief that the use of the
- 18 child's Social Security number would offend religious
- 19 belief and commitments, but said they still had to make
- 20 a judgment about whether that was a substantial burden.
- 21 So it does have to be, with all due respect,
- 22 part of the analysis.
- 23 JUSTICE KENNEDY: I still don't understand
- 24 how HHS exercised its judgment to grant the exemption to
- 25 nonreligious corporations if you say it was not

- 1 compelled by RFRA.
- 2 GENERAL VERRILLI: I don't think --
- 3 JUSTICE KENNEDY: Then it must have been
- 4 because the health care coverage was not that important.
- 5 GENERAL VERRILLI: It didn't grant an
- 6 exemption to any nonreligious organizations, Justice
- 7 Kennedy. It granted an exemption to churches, and that
- 8 was it. With respect to religious nonprofits, it
- 9 constructed an accommodation, but the accommodation
- 10 delivers the contraceptive coverage to the employees of
- 11 the nonprofits. It just does it through an indirect
- 12 means. But there is no diminution of the -- there's no
- 13 basis for questioning the government's interest with
- 14 respect to that accommodation because the employees get
- 15 the coverage, just as they would --
- 16 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Well, but that of
- 17 course is an issue that's being hotly litigated right
- 18 now, right? Whether the employees can get the coverage
- 19 when you're talking about the religious organizations.
- 20 GENERAL VERRILLI: Well, that's exactly why
- 21 I think you can't look to that as a less restrictive --
- that accommodation, extending that accommodation to
- 23 for-profit corporations. As a less restrictive
- 24 alternative. Precisely because it's being hotly
- 25 litigated whether RFRA will require exemptions to that,

- 1 as well.
- 2 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: But you're
- 3 relying -- you're relying on it to make your point with
- 4 respect to the accommodation, and then you're
- 5 criticizing your friend for relying on the same thing in
- 6 making his points.
- 7 GENERAL VERRILLI: Well, I think -- I think
- 8 what Justice Kennedy -- I took Justice Kennedy to be
- 9 asking me, Mr. Chief Justice, was whether the
- 10 government's choice to provide that accommodation
- 11 reflected a judgment on the part of the government that
- 12 this was something less than a compelling interest, and
- 13 I don't think that inference is possible, because the
- 14 government was trying to use that accommodation to
- 15 ensure that the contraceptives were delivered. So, with
- 16 all due respect, I don't think there is an inconsistency
- 17 there.
- 18 And I -- and I do think, if I could, with
- 19 respect to this issue of whether there are exemptions
- 20 that defeat a compelling interest, that I submit would
- 21 be a very dangerous principle for this Court to adopt in
- 22 the form that my friends on the other side have offered
- 23 it, because not only would you then be in a position
- 24 where it would be very hard to see how Title VII
- 25 enforcement could be justified by compelling interest in

- 1 response to a RFRA objection, ADA enforcement, FMLA
- 2 enforcement, all kinds of things. And I do think --
- 3 JUSTICE GINSBURG: Title VII was passed
- 4 before 1993, so it wouldn't apply -- RFRA wouldn't apply
- 5 to Title VII.
- 6 GENERAL VERRILLI: Well, I think -- with all
- 7 due respect, Justice Ginsburg, I think you could claim a
- 8 RFRA exemption from Title VII. And the problem here
- 9 would be that -- and I think one of the things that's
- 10 significant about the position that my friends on the
- 11 other side are taking here, is that with respect to
- 12 exemptions, for example, from the Title VII requirement
- 13 against discrimination on the basis of religion and
- 14 hiring, Congress made a quite clear judgment to provide
- 15 a very narrow exemption: Churches and religious
- 16 educational institutions and religious associations, and
- 17 that's it. Nobody else can claim an exemption under
- 18 Title VII.
- 19 JUSTICE SCALIA: Except that they passed
- 20 RFRA after that. That made a lot of sense. But the
- 21 question is they passed RFRA after that.
- 22 GENERAL VERRILLI: But I think the further
- 23 question, Your Honor, is whether you would interpret
- 24 RFRA in a manner where you would essentially obliterate
- 25 that carefully crafted -- or what Congress meant to do

- 1 was to obliterate that carefully crafted exemption and
- 2 instead say that every for-profit corporation could make
- 3 a request like that.
- 4 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Well, if Congress
- 5 feels as strongly about this as you suggest, they can
- 6 always pass an exemption, an exception to RFRA, which
- 7 they have done on other occasions. And they haven't
- 8 done it here.
- 9 GENERAL VERRILLI: Well, with all due
- 10 respect, Your Honor, I think you could make the same
- 11 argument either way in this case, that the question here
- 12 is what Congress thought it was doing in 1993, and we
- don't think, given the long history and the fact that
- 14 not only do you have no case in which a for-profit
- 15 corporation ever had a successful --
- 16 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Well, we've already
- 17 discussed that there is no case holding that they can't,
- 18 right?
- 19 GENERAL VERRILLI: In addition, if you look
- 20 at the history of exemptions and accommodations in our
- 21 legislation, State and Federal legislation may extend to
- 22 churches and religious nonprofits, and that's -- and
- 23 individuals. And that's where the line has been drawn
- 24 in our legislation historically. There just is nothing
- 25 in our current --

- 1 JUSTICE KENNEDY: Under your view, a profit
- 2 corporation could be forced -- in principle, there are
- 3 some statutes on the books now which would prevent it,
- 4 but -- could be forced in principle to pay for
- 5 abortions.
- 6 GENERAL VERRILLI: No. I think, as you
- 7 said, the law now -- the law now is to the contrary.
- 8 JUSTICE KENNEDY: But your reasoning would
- 9 permit that.
- 10 GENERAL VERRILLI: Well, I think that -- you
- 11 know, I don't think that that's -- I think it would
- 12 depend on the law and it would depend on the entity. It
- 13 certainly wouldn't be true, I think, for religious
- 14 nonprofits. It certainly wouldn't be true for a church.
- 15 JUSTICE KENNEDY: I'm talking about a profit
- 16 corporation. You say profit corporations just don't
- 17 have any standing to vindicate the religious rights of
- 18 their shareholders and owners.
- 19 GENERAL VERRILLI: Well, I think that if it
- 20 were for a for-profit corporation and if such a law like
- 21 that were enacted, then you're right, under our theory
- 22 that the for-profit corporation wouldn't have an ability
- 23 to sue. But there is no law like that on the books. In
- 24 fact, the law is the opposite.
- 25 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: I'm sorry, I lost

- 1 track of that. There is no law on the books that does
- 2 what?
- 3 GENERAL VERRILLI: That makes a requirement
- 4 of the kind that Justice Kennedy hypothesized. The law
- 5 is the opposite.
- 6 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Well, flesh it out a
- 7 little more. What -- there is no law on the books that
- 8 does what?
- 9 GENERAL VERRILLI: That requires for-profit
- 10 corporations to provide abortions.
- 11 JUSTICE KENNEDY: What if a law like that --
- 12 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Isn't that what we
- 13 are talking about in terms of their religious beliefs?
- 14 One of the religious beliefs is that they have to pay
- 15 for these four methods of contraception that they
- 16 believe provide abortions. I thought that's what we had
- 17 before us.
- 18 GENERAL VERRILLI: It is their sincere
- 19 belief and we don't question that. But I will say, and
- 20 I do think this is important and I say it with all
- 21 respect, that that is how they -- that is the judgment
- 22 that they make. It is not the judgment that Federal law
- 23 or State law reflects. Federal law and State law which
- 24 does -- which do preclude funding for abortions don't
- 25 consider these particular forms of contraception to be

- 1 abortion.
- 2 With all due respect, I would say that I
- 3 think that, you know, we've got about 2 million women
- 4 who rely on the IUD as a method of birth control in this
- 5 country. I don't think they think they are engaged in
- 6 abortion in doing that. It is their belief. It's
- 7 sincere. We respect it.
- 8 But it isn't a belief that we think is
- 9 reflected in Federal or State law or our traditions of
- 10 where that line is drawn. And so -- and I do think that
- 11 that is what makes this a difficult case. I agree.
- 12 And if you disagree with our position at the
- 13 threshold that corporations -- that even though you have
- 14 a situation, and we acknowledge you can have situations,
- in which a tightly knit group of -- a small group of
- 16 tightly knit individuals own and operate a corporation
- where there is appeal to that, to the argument that they
- 18 ought to recognize a claim of exercising religion in
- 19 those circumstances.
- The problem, I would submit, is with the
- 21 implications of doing it, the implications for
- 22 entanglement and making the judgments when you move past
- 23 that group, the administrability problems, and the
- 24 problems of inviting the kinds of claims that are
- 25 predictably going to impose harms on third parties.

- 1 JUSTICE ALITO: What about the implications
- 2 of saying that no for-profit corporation can raise any
- 3 sort of free exercise claim at all and nobody associated
- 4 with the for-profit corporation can raise any sort of
- 5 free exercise claim at all?
- 6 Let me give you this example. According to
- 7 the media, Denmark recently prohibited kosher and halal
- 8 slaughter methods because they believe that they are
- 9 inhumane. Now, suppose Congress enacted something like
- 10 that here. What would the -- what would a corporation
- 11 that is a kosher or halal slaughterhouse do? They would
- 12 simply -- they would have no recourse whatsoever. They
- 13 couldn't even get a day in court. They couldn't raise a
- 14 RFRA claim. They couldn't raise a First Amendment
- 15 claim.
- 16 GENERAL VERRILLI: Well, I'm not sure they
- 17 couldn't raise a First Amendment claim, Justice Alito.
- 18 I think if you had a targeted law like that, that
- 19 targeted a specific religious practice, that -- I don't
- 20 think it is our position that they couldn't make a free
- 21 exercise claim in that circumstance and so --
- 22 JUSTICE ALITO: Why is that --
- 23 JUSTICE KENNEDY: Well, but you're getting
- 24 away from the hypothetical. Say -- Justice Alito's
- 25 hypothetical was that the impetus for this was humane

- 1 treatment of animals. There was no animus to religion
- 2 at all, which in the Church of Lukumi, there was an
- 3 animus to the religion. So we're taking that out of the
- 4 hypothetical.
- 5 JUSTICE ALITO: Exactly.
- 6 GENERAL VERRILLI: Right. Well, I think if
- 7 it were targeted only at the practices of the -- the
- 8 kosher and halal practices, then I think you would have
- 9 an issue of whether it's a targeted law or not. But
- 10 even if it is --
- 11 JUSTICE ALITO: Well, they say no animal may
- 12 be slaughtered unless it's stunned first, unless the
- 13 animal is rendered unconscious before it is slaughtered.
- 14 GENERAL VERRILLI: Well, I think in that
- 15 circumstance, you would have, I think, an ability for
- 16 customers to bring suit. I think you might recognize
- 17 third party standing on behalf of the corporation -- on
- 18 the corporations, on behalf of customers. So a suit
- 19 like that could be brought.
- 20 But even if you disagree with me at the
- 21 threshold, even if you disagree with us with respect to
- 22 the kinds of risks that we think you will be inviting if
- 23 you hold that for-profit corporations can bring these
- 24 claims, when you get to the compelling interest
- 25 analysis, the rights of the third party employees are at

- 1 center stage here. And that's -- I think that's the
- 2 point of critical importance in thinking about this
- 3 case. And I think, frankly, the point that has been
- 4 just left on the sidelines by my friends on the other
- 5 side.
- 6 The consequence of holding here that the
- 7 RFRA exemption applies is not a situation like ones in
- 8 which this Court under the Free Exercise Clause or under
- 9 RFRA have recognized exemptions in the past. Those have
- 10 always been situations where it's a relationship between
- 11 the individual and the government and granting the
- 12 exemption might result in the government not being able
- 13 to enforce the law with respect to the individual, but
- 14 --
- 15 JUSTICE BREYER: I mean, the point that
- 16 Justice Alito was making is that -- take five Jewish or
- 17 Muslim butchers and what you're saying to them is if
- 18 they choose to work under the corporate form, which is
- 19 viewed universally, you have to give up on that form the
- 20 Freedom of Exercise Clause that you'd otherwise have.
- Now, looked at that way, I don't think it
- 22 matters whether they call themselves a corporation or
- 23 whether they call themselves individuals. I mean, I
- 24 think that's the question you're being asked, and I need
- 25 to know what your response is to it.

- 1 GENERAL VERRILLI: Well, I think our
- 2 response is what the Court said in Part 3 of the Lee
- 3 opinion, which is that once you make a choice to go into
- 4 the commercial sphere, which you certainly do when you
- 5 incorporate as a for-profit corporation, you are making
- 6 a choice to live by the rules that govern you and your
- 7 competitors in the commercial sphere.
- 8 But even if you disagree with me about that,
- 9 what I'd like to leave the Court with, is what I think
- 10 is the most important point here, is that if this
- 11 exemption were granted, it will be the first time under
- 12 the Free Exercise Clause or under RFRA in which this
- 13 Court or any court has held that an employer may take --
- 14 may be granted an exemption that extinguishes
- 15 statutorily-guaranteed benefits of fundamental
- 16 importance.
- 17 Lee came to exactly the opposite conclusion
- 18 with respect to Social Security benefits, that you --
- 19 that it was imperative that the employee's interest be
- 20 protected. And that is the fundamental problem with the
- 21 position that my friends on the other side raise here,
- 22 that they leave the third-party employees entirely out
- 23 of the equation.
- JUSTICE SCALIA: That's okay for
- 25 not-for-profit corporations to do that with respect to

- 1 all of their employees, and some of them are pretty big
- 2 operations --
- 3 GENERAL VERRILLI: No.
- 4 JUSTICE SCALIA: -- that's okay there?
- 5 GENERAL VERRILLI: No, we don't think that.
- 6 We don't -- we're not drawing a line between non-profits
- 7 and profits.
- 8 JUSTICE SCALIA: They can make -- you allow
- 9 them to make this religious objection, don't you?
- 10 GENERAL VERRILLI: No. No. Religious
- 11 non-profits get an accommodation in which their
- 12 employees get the contraception. But we are not drawing
- 13 a line between for-profit and profit.
- JUSTICE SCALIA: But they don't have to pay
- 15 for it, right?
- 16 GENERAL VERRILLI: The --
- 17 JUSTICE SCALIA: And you could set that up
- 18 this way, that these people don't have to pay for it.
- 19 GENERAL VERRILLI: Well, as I've said a
- 20 couple of times, they haven't asked for that until this
- 21 morning. But the fundamental point here is that you
- 22 would be extinguishing statutorily-quaranteed health
- 23 benefits of fundamental importance to these employees,
- 24 and that is something that this Court has never done.
- 25 And I submit that Congress can't have thought it was

- 1 authorizing it when it enacted RFRA in 1993.
- 2 Thank you.
- 3 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Thank you, General.
- 4 Mr. Clement, four minutes.
- 5 REBUTTAL ARGUMENT OF PAUL D. CLEMENT
- 6 ON BEHALF OF PRIVATE PARTIES
- 7 MR. CLEMENT: Thank you, Mr. Chief Justice.
- Just a few points in rebuttal. Let me start
- 9 with the Abortion Conscious Clause. It's -- because it
- 10 tells you something about where Congress has drawn the
- 11 line and it tells you the consequences of the
- 12 government's position. Historically, those conscious
- 13 provisions have applied to all medical providers,
- 14 including for-profit medical providers. But we learned
- 15 today that as far as the government's concerned, that's
- 16 just Congress' judgment. If Congress changes its
- 17 judgment and says that a for-profit medical provider has
- 18 to provide an abortion, RFRA doesn't apply. That, with
- 19 all due respect, cannot be what Congress had in mind
- 20 when it passed RFRA. They also suggested if a kosher
- 21 market takes the trouble to incorporate itself, then it
- 22 has no free exercise claims at all.
- Now, you can go back and read the Crown
- 24 kosher case. I took it as common ground, that all nine
- 25 justices thought that if the Massachusetts law there had

- 1 forced Crown kosher to be open on Saturday, that that
- 2 would be a free exercise claim notwithstanding the
- 3 incorporation.
- 4 The second point I want to talk about is the
- 5 least restrictive alternatives. In a colloquy with
- 6 Justice Scalia, the Solicitor General points out that
- 7 yeah, well, it's a little bit different from the
- 8 pre-Smith law because now you have the less restrictive
- 9 alternatives analysis.
- 10 That's not a small difference. That's a
- 11 major difference. And it's really the easiest way to
- 12 rule against the government in this case. Because you
- 13 have a unique situation here where their policy is about
- 14 a government -- a subsidy for a government- preferred
- 15 health care item, and the question is who pays? The
- 16 government paying or a third-party insurer paying is a
- 17 perfectly good least restrictive alternative.
- 18 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: So we go back to the
- 19 start of my question, that would be essentially the same
- 20 for vaccines, blood transfusions, non-pork products, the
- 21 government has to pay for all of the medical needs that
- 22 an employer thinks or claims it has a religious
- 23 exemption to?
- MR. CLEMENT: Not necessarily,
- 25 Justice Sotomayor. It will depend on how you --

JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: Because those things are 1 2 more important? MR. CLEMENT: No, not because they're 3 more --4 5 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: It's really the amount 6 of money --MR. CLEMENT: -- important. But the easiest 7 way to distinguish them is if the government's already 8 9 provided this accommodation for religious employers. JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: Well, but they --10 11 MR. CLEMENT: And with all due respect --12 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: -- they make exemptions 13 for vaccines, presumably, to some people on some basis, 14 but we have a tax code that applies to everybody, but we 15 have a million exemptions. Does the creation of the exemption relieve 16 17 me from paying taxes when I have a sincere religious belief that taxes are immoral? 18 19 MR. CLEMENT: I think Lee says that taxes 20 are different and not all exemptions are created equal, 21 because some exemptions undermine the compelling 22 interest. Now, the reason --23 JUSTICE ALITO: Isn't there a Federal 24 program that pays for vaccines for any children who are not covered by insurance for those vaccines? 25

- 1 MR. CLEMENT: There is, Justice Alito. Of
- 2 course, there's also Title X, which provides for
- 3 contraception coverage, which is another least
- 4 restrictive alternative.
- 5 But I do want to get on the table that it is
- 6 not true, that we have not suggested that the
- 7 accommodation provided to religious employers, like
- 8 nonprofit hospitals, that's not something I invented at
- 9 the podium.
- 10 If you look at page 58 of our brief, the red
- 11 brief, we specifically say that one of the least
- 12 restrictive alternatives would be -- the most obvious
- 13 least restrictive alternative is for the government to
- 14 pay for their favorite contraception methods themselves.
- 15 Later in that paragraph, the only full
- 16 paragraph on the page, we say, "And indeed, the
- 17 government has attempted something like that with
- 18 respect to certain objective employers -- objective
- 19 employees -- employers," and we cite the Federal
- 20 Register provision where there is the accommodation
- 21 provision.
- 22 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: Will your clients claim
- 23 that filling out the form, if -- you're saying they
- 24 would claim an exemption like the churches have already?
- 25 MR. CLEMENT: We haven't been offered that

- 1 accommodation, so we haven't had to decide what kind of
- 2 objection, if any, we would make to that. But it's
- 3 important to recognize that as I understand that
- 4 litigation, the objection is not to the fact that the
- 5 insurance or the provider pays for the contraception
- 6 coverage. The whole debate is about how much complicity
- 7 there has to be from the employer in order to trigger
- 8 that coverage. And whatever the answer is for Little
- 9 Sisters of the Poor, presumably you can extend the same
- 10 thing to my clients and there wouldn't be a problem with
- 11 that.
- 12 If I could have just one second more to say
- 13 that the agency point that Justice Kennedy has pointed
- 14 to is tremendously important, because Congress spoke, it
- 15 spoke in RFRA. Here the agency has decided that it's
- 16 going to accommodate a subset of the persons protected
- 17 by RFRA. In a choice between what Congress has provided
- 18 and what the agency has done, the answer is clear.
- 19 Thank you, Your Honor.
- 20 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Thank you, counsel.
- 21 Counsel, the case is submitted.
- 22 (Whereupon, at 11:39 a.m., the case in the
- 23 above-titled matter was submitted.)

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