1	IN THE SUPREME COURT OF THE UP	IITE	ED ST	'ATES
2		X		
3	UTILITY AIR REGULATORY GROUP,	:		
4	Petitioner	:	No.	12-1146
5	v.	:		
6	ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY;	:		
7		Х		
8		Х		
9	AMERICAN CHEMISTRY	:		
10	COUNCIL, ET AL.,	:		
11	Petitioners	:	No.	12-1248
12	v.	:		
13	ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY,	:		
14	ET AL.,	:		
15		Х		
16		Х		
17	ENERGY-INTENSIVE MANUFACTURERS	:		
18	WORKING GROUP ON GREENHOUSE GAS	:		
19	REGULATION, ET AL.,	:		
20	Petitioners	:	No.	12-1254
21	v.	:		
22	ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY,	:		
23	ET AL.,	:		
24		Х		
25		Х		

1	SOUTHEASTERN LEGAL FOUNDATION,	:		
2	INC., ET AL.,	:		
3	Petitioners	:	No.	12-1268
4	V.	:		
5	ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY,	:		
6	ET AL.,	:		
7		X		
8		X		
9	TEXAS, ET AL.,	:		
10	Petitioners	:	No.	12-1269
11	V.	:		
12	ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY,	:		
13	ET AL.,	:		
14		X		
15		X		
16	CHAMBER OF COMMERCE OF	:		
17	THE UNITED STATES, ET AL.,	:		
18	Petitioners	:	No.	12-1272
19	V.	:		
20	ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY,	:		
21	ET AL.,	:		
22		Х		
23	Washington, D.C.			
24	Monday, February 24, 20	14		
25				

1	The above-entitled matter came on for oral
2	argument before the Supreme Court of the United States
3	at 10:05 a.m.
4	APPEARANCES:
5	MR. PETER KEISLER, ESQ., Washington, D.C.; on behalf of
6	the Private Party Petitioners.
7	MR. JONATHAN F. MITCHELL, ESQ., Solicitor General of
8	Texas, Austin, Texas; on behalf of State Petitioners.
9	DONALD B. VERRILLI, JR., ESQ., Solicitor General,
10	Department of Justice, Washington, D.C.; on behalf of
11	Respondents.
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1	PROCEEDINGS
2	(10:05 a.m.)
3	CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: We will hear
4	argument this morning in Case 12-1146, Utility Air
5	Regulatory Group v. The Environmental Protection Agency
6	and the consolidated cases.
7	Mr. Keisler.
8	ORAL ARGUMENT OF PETER KEISLER
9	ON BEHALF OF THE PRIVATE PARTY PETITIONERS
10	MR. KEISLER: Mr. Chief Justice, and may it
11	please the Court:
12	The situation presented by this case is, to
13	our knowledge, unprecedented in at least two respects.
14	First, EPA agrees that if its interpretation of the PSD
15	and Title V statutes is adopted, then applying other
16	provisions of those same statutes would, according to
17	their terms, would in EPA's words, result in a program
18	that would have been unrecognizable to the Congress that
19	enacted it, and so contrary to Congress's intent that
20	the agency calls it absurd.
21	And second, EPA took that conclusion not as
22	a reason to reexamine its interpretation, but as a basis
23	for rewriting other provisions of the statutes that are
24	clear and unambiguous, the numerical permitting
25	thresholds that Congress enacted, because the agency

- 1 wrongly believes that fixes the problem. And this is
- 2 not a single one-time act of statutory rewriting, as
- 3 problematic as that alone would be, because the agency
- 4 has said it intends to continually adjust and readjust
- 5 thresholds into the indefinite future based on its
- 6 ongoing assessment of the costs and benefits of
- 7 regulation. So --
- 8 JUSTICE KAGAN: Mr. Keisler, I'm sorry. Can
- 9 I ask about your interpretation of the phrase "any air
- 10 pollutant"? Because there are a lot of different
- 11 interpretations that have gone on among the various
- 12 briefs and among the lower court opinions in this case.
- 13 So here are some choices, all right? And I want really
- 14 to ask you to pick what you're arguing for.
- 15 Your original position was that "any air
- 16 pollutant" meant any NAAQS pollutant for which the area
- 17 is in attainment; that was your original position.
- 18 Judge Kavanaugh's position is that it means any NAAQS
- 19 pollutant. There is another position that goes on in
- 20 the briefs that says, no, it doesn't mean any NAAQS
- 21 pollutant; it means any local pollutant, whether or not
- 22 it's a NAAQS pollutant; and there is still another
- 23 position that says it's really any regulated pollutant
- 24 other than greenhouse gases.
- 25 So those are four different interpretations

- 1 that all of the folks on your side, and I realize there
- 2 are a lot of them, have presented. And I guess I'm
- 3 asking you which one you're arguing for.
- 4 MR. KEISLER: Yes. Your Honor, I'm here on
- 5 behalf of all the Private Party Petitioners, and we have
- 6 two arguments. Our principal argument and the one I
- 7 would like to focus on first is that while other
- 8 programs of the Clean Air Act give EPA authority to
- 9 regulate greenhouse gases from stationary sources, PSD
- 10 does not. And that is because -- and this is where I
- 11 would choose one of the options Your Honor gave me --
- 12 and that is because the PSD program is exclusively
- 13 focused on emissions that have area-specific air quality
- 14 impacts, and not on globally undifferentiated phenomena.
- 15 I wouldn't use the words --
- 16 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: May I ask --
- 17 JUSTICE KAGAN: When you say area-specific,
- 18 I mean, I take it that these sort of ozone pollutants
- 19 are not area-specific. Would your interpretation
- 20 exclude those as well?
- 21 MR. KEISLER: If the EPA couldn't make a
- 22 regulatory finding that they had an area-specific air
- 23 quality impact, yes. Now, the Solicitor --
- 24 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: Could I ask you a
- 25 follow-up to Justice Kagan? Now that's a fifth

- 1 interpretation by your side. That to me is the
- 2 quintessential ambiguity in a statute where we give
- 3 deference to the agency. So if your side can't even
- 4 come to one interpretation, why shouldn't we defer to
- 5 the agency?
- 6 MR. KEISLER: Well, first of all, Your
- 7 Honor, the deference that an agency is afforded is
- 8 always going to be limited to reasonable
- 9 interpretations, and we would start out with the premise
- 10 that an interpretation that requires the agency to
- 11 rewrite other provisions of the Act is not reasonable.
- 12 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: Well, it hasn't
- 13 rewritten them. All it has said, as I understand it,
- 14 and I don't understand -- other than your view that
- 15 there are too many people it's regulating, is that we
- 16 can't implement it immediately, because it would
- 17 overburden us administratively. It hasn't said that
- 18 over time, with streamlining and with other adjustments,
- 19 that it can't do this. It's just said we can't do it
- 20 right away.
- 21 MR. KEISLER: That's right, Your Honor. And
- 22 that actually reflects a deeper problem, and I'd like to
- 23 address that, and then also explain why our position, we
- 24 think, is the correct and only correct interpretation of
- 25 the statute on the broader question.

- 1 JUSTICE GINSBURG: Before you do that, can
- 2 you clarify whether or not you agree with the dissenting
- 3 judges on the D.C. Circuit? That is, if we limit it to
- 4 criteria pollutants, even so, BACT must be installed for
- 5 greenhouse gases. You seemed in your main brief to
- 6 agree with that. You have a footnote saying it's got a
- 7 heck of a lot of differences. It's 86 percent of the
- 8 emissions on the Government's theory; 83 on yours. But
- 9 your reply brief seems to turn 180 degrees from that.
- 10 MR. KEISLER: And -- and let me sort that
- 11 out. And I recognize, Your Honor, that having six
- 12 opening briefs isn't the most effective or most helpful
- 13 way to the Court to present our position. So let me
- 14 express on behalf of all the private Petitioners, there
- 15 are two arguments.
- 16 Our principal argument, and the one I would
- 17 like to focus on the most, is that greenhouse gases are
- 18 not included within the PSD program at all. They can't
- 19 trigger its applicability and they wouldn't be subject
- 20 to the Best Available Control Technology determination.
- 21 JUSTICE KAGAN: But, again, that's because
- they're not local.
- 23 MR. KEISLER: Because they don't have
- 24 area-specific air quality impacts, yes.
- JUSTICE GINSBURG: Well, what do you make --

- 1 what do you make of the endangerment finding that
- 2 greenhouse gases have severe effects at the local level
- 3 that -- I think the endangerment finding is not before
- 4 us today. The endangerment finding is that they
- 5 exacerbate ground-level ozone and smog.
- 6 MR. KEISLER: Certainly, every effect that
- 7 any environmental phenomenon has on the planet and on
- 8 people will at some point be felt in some local area.
- 9 Our point is that that is not the kind of measurable
- 10 area-specific, regionally-defined air quality impact
- 11 that the PSD statute --
- 12 JUSTICE SCALIA: It's certainly not
- 13 measurable. The agency doesn't even assert that it's
- 14 measurable, right?
- 15 MR. KEISLER: That's right. And -- and
- 16 maybe it would help if I specifically identified. There
- 17 are three features of the PSD --
- 18 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: I'm sorry. Before
- 19 you do that, we have an outstanding question from
- 20 Justice Sotomayor. Maybe --
- 21 MR. KEISLER: Thank you very much, Mr.
- 22 Chief Justice.
- 23 The problem is not simply that the agency
- 24 rewrote the thresholds and said that it will eventually
- 25 try, as it did say, to get down to the level of the

- 1 statutory thresholds, because the reason that Congress
- 2 wrote those thresholds was because it wanted to exempt
- 3 small entities from the costs and burdens of the
- 4 permitting process. And so when EPA says that it hopes
- 5 eventually to get down to the apartment buildings and
- 6 large high schools that would be covered if those
- 7 thresholds were applied to carbon dioxide, it is
- 8 contravening congressional intent in another way.
- 9 JUSTICE SCALIA: I didn't read them as
- 10 saying that anyway. I read them as saying they'll try
- 11 to do it, but make whatever exemptions are necessary.
- 12 MR. KEISLER: Well, and the problem is,
- 13 Justice Scalia, that those exemptions violate the
- 14 statute as well. The exemptions they're talking about
- 15 in order to deal with the small entities that Congress
- 16 meant to exclude would be to have general permits by
- 17 category. And the statute specifically says that these
- 18 determinations are to be case by case followed by an
- 19 individualized hearing. And so --
- 20 JUSTICE SCALIA: It -- it clearly is not a
- 21 matter of the EPA simply saying we can't do it right
- 22 away, but we're going to do it eventually.
- 23 MR. KEISLER: That's right.
- 24 JUSTICE SCALIA: It hasn't said that.
- 25 MR. KEISLER: It hasn't, and if they did say

- 1 that, they would be violating the statute in worse ways.
- 2 They would be treating a command by Congress not to
- 3 regulate small entities into a command to regulate small
- 4 entities.
- 5 JUSTICE ALITO: Mr. Keisler, do you really
- 6 mean to say that the only difference between greenhouse
- 7 gases and the air pollutants that Congress clearly had
- 8 in mind when it enacted the Clean Air Act is that
- 9 greenhouse gases don't have a localized effect? Isn't
- 10 there also a big difference in that the quantity of
- 11 greenhouse gases that are emitted by sources are much
- 12 greater than the quantity of these other pollutants and
- 13 that's why there's this discrepancy between the
- 14 statutory threshold and the threshold that EPA has --
- 15 MR. KEISLER: That's right.
- 16 JUSTICE ALITO: -- substituted?
- 17 MR. KEISLER: That's right, Your Honor. And
- 18 I think there are really two parallel problems that
- 19 we're dealing with, each of which creates its own need
- 20 for the EPA to violate the statute in order to save it
- 21 for greenhouse gases.
- One is the one that Your Honor and Justice
- 23 Sotomayor were referring to, which is this was a statute
- 24 designed for case-by-case permitting of a small number
- of large sources that materially contribute to the

- 1 problem. And whether you rewrite the thresholds or
- 2 promise to regulate down to the infinitesimal level, you
- 3 are violating that aspect of the statute.
- But the other aspect of the statute, which
- 5 is equally violated here, is the requirement that this
- 6 particular program, not the other programs in the Act,
- 7 but this particular program, be focused on these
- 8 area-specific air quality impacts. And there are three
- 9 features, the three central features of the PSD statute,
- 10 which we think show that.
- 11 The first is Section 7471, which is, I
- 12 think, on page 13A of the appendix to the Government's
- 13 brief. And that is the provision that specifies what
- 14 the PSD program applies to and also explains what PSD,
- 15 "prevention of significant deterioration," refers to.
- 16 And 7471 says, "The program consists of emissions
- 17 limitations and other measures as may be necessary to
- 18 prevent significant deterioration of air quality in each
- 19 region that bears certain designations." And "air
- 20 quality in each region" is Clean Air Act language for
- 21 that subset of air pollution problems that have
- 22 regionally-defined effects on the air that people
- 23 breathe.
- 24 JUSTICE BREYER: How does the -- this
- 25 differ? I mean, there are many statutes, I believe,

- 1 particularly in the regulatory area, where Congress
- 2 passes a statute that tells the agency, do A, B, C and
- 3 D. And then it turns out, since there's so many of the
- 4 regulated things, that it just doesn't make sense to
- 5 apply A, B and C and D to all of them. So often I would
- 6 think courts read in an exception where it makes no
- 7 sense.
- 8 For example, if there were a statute that
- 9 said you have to throw out all bubble gum that's been
- 10 around for more than a month. Well, what about bubble
- 11 gum used in a display case that nobody ever intends to
- 12 eat? You see? And so what we do all the time is we
- 13 say, well, it doesn't mean to apply to that. Now, why
- 14 can't we take the same approach or EPA takes the same
- 15 approach here? It says 250 tons or more and we apply
- 16 that all over the place, except it doesn't make sense
- 17 here, so we read an exception into it, unwritten, for
- 18 places where it makes no sense?
- 19 MR. KEISLER: I don't know that there
- 20 actually is a precedent of this Court which says the
- 21 agency can do precisely what it did here, which is take
- 22 an express command that identifies thresholds, that
- 23 didn't delegate to the agency the determination of the
- 24 thresholds but says --
- 25 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: But I'm -- but I'm a

- 1 little confused, because there have to be pollutants
- 2 who -- where it doesn't emit just 250, where it emits a
- 3 million. And the Best Available Control Technology
- 4 won't get it down to below 250. Yet the PSD program is
- 5 in effect when they get down below 250 on any pollutant
- 6 of the six criteria. So it can't be your view that this
- 7 statute was written only to -- to get to measurable
- 8 pollutants that -- that are at 250 or -- or can be
- 9 brought below 250.
- 10 MR. KEISLER: Well, that's right, Your
- 11 Honor. It's not our position that the purpose of Best
- 12 Available Control Technology is to bring facilities down
- 13 to below the 250 level. It's our position that the
- 14 statute sets that 250 ton per year level as the trigger,
- 15 that a facility which emits or has a potential to emit
- 16 that or more is subject --
- 17 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: That's a minimum, but
- 18 anything --
- 19 MR. KEISLER: That's right.
- 20 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: -- above it.
- 21 MR. KEISLER: That's right. Anything above
- 22 it.
- 23 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: All right. So --
- 24 MR. KEISLER: And then -- and then Best
- 25 Available --

- 1 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: And so GHG is something
- 2 that's above that and it's never going to be brought
- 3 down below it.
- 4 MR. KEISLER: That's right. But it's above
- 5 it for millions of entities that Congress intended to
- 6 exempt from the permitting process. And if I could just
- 7 continue --
- 8 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: Right. Well, let's
- 9 go --
- 10 JUSTICE KAGAN: Mr. Keisler, if I could
- 11 follow up, really, on Justice Breyer's question, because
- 12 the conundrum here, you keep saying: Look, EPA is
- 13 violating this specific statutory term. But the
- 14 conundrum that this cases raises is that everybody is
- 15 violating a statutory term. EPA is saying, no, we can't
- 16 do the 100 to 250 with respect to greenhouse gases, but
- 17 you are also violating a statutory term. You know, it
- 18 says any pollutant or it says in the other provision
- 19 each pollutant subject to regulation. Nobody would
- 20 think that the most natural, most reasonable readings of
- 21 those phrases are any pollutant if they have localized
- 22 effects, but not otherwise.
- 23 So I mean, what's happened here is that you
- 24 have this new kind of emission that basically makes
- 25 these two terms of the statute irreconcilable, and the

- 1 agency has essentially picked one. It said: Look,
- 2 we're not going to just exempt a broad class of
- 3 pollutants. Instead, we're going to fudge the numbers.
- 4 And why isn't that the more reasonable of the two things
- 5 to do?
- 6 MR. KEISLER: Because we don't agree, Your
- 7 Honor, that those two -- that those two horns of the
- 8 dilemma that Your Honor described are equally situated.
- 9 Certainly, 100 and 250 tons per year is a clear and
- 10 unambiguous congressional command. The question of how
- 11 to interpret the phrase "air pollutant" is -- that is an
- 12 issue that is subject to interpretation. And if I could
- 13 just then follow up --
- 14 JUSTICE KAGAN: Well, I think I don't really
- 15 understand then. But I mean, it's true that one is a
- 16 number. But the other, each pollutant subject to
- 17 regulation or any air pollutant, what the EPA has done
- 18 is for 30 years across presidential administrations
- 19 treated those phrases as meaning a single thing, which I
- 20 think if you put aside the absurdity problem in this
- 21 case, everybody would agree is the most reasonable
- 22 interpretation of those phrases. And you're saying the
- 23 EPA should junk that most reasonable interpretation of
- 24 those phrases because there's a new kind of emitted --
- 25 emitted chemical or whatever that makes the numbers not

- 1 work.
- 2 MR. KEISLER: No. Let me -- it goes much
- 3 beyond the numbers, Justice Kagan. I think if anybody
- 4 were looking at the PSD statute in isolation, without
- 5 the benefit of Massachusetts v. EPA, assume that the
- 6 word "pollutant" was an undefined term and the question
- 7 was, what pollutants does this provision of the Clean
- 8 Act refer to, they would conclude that it refers to
- 9 pollutants only that have those area-specific air
- 10 quality impacts. And it's not only that the prevention
- 11 of significant deterioration referred to in the statute
- 12 is the deterioration of air quality in each region. It
- 13 is also two other features of that statute which we
- 14 think make that unambiguously clear.
- 15 The first is Section 7475(e), which can be
- 16 found on pages 27A to 29A, I think, of the Government's
- 17 statutory appendix. And that mandates the one analysis
- 18 that has to be conducted in every permitting process,
- 19 and the one analysis that Congress has required be
- 20 available for public hearing, and that is an analysis of
- 21 the air quality and local conditions at the site of the
- 22 facility and each area that is going to be affected by
- 23 the emissions.
- 24 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Counsel, you began
- 25 that discussion by saying putting Massachusetts v. EPA

- 1 to one side. But I was in the dissent in that case, but
- 2 we still can't do that.
- 3 MR. KEISLER: No, that's --
- 4 (Laughter.)
- 5 MR. KEISLER: That's -- that's right, Your
- 6 Honor. And I think --
- 7 JUSTICE KENNEDY: And -- and my question is
- 8 along that exact same line. Let's assume, and it's the
- 9 case, that we're bound by both the result and the
- 10 reasoning of Massachusetts and EPA, and the -- the
- 11 American Electric v. Connecticut case. Under your view,
- 12 what regulatory force, what regulatory significance, do
- 13 those cases have under, A, your approach and, B, the
- 14 approach by the Chamber of Commerce in the blue brief?
- 15 I -- I think that may be consistent with the subject the
- 16 Chief Justice just opened.
- 17 MR. KEISLER: Sure. Let me begin with
- 18 Massachusetts v. EPA and then I'll turn to AEP v.
- 19 Connecticut. Massachusetts v. EPA did not hold that the
- 20 interpretation of pollutant in that opinion had to be
- 21 applied every time the word "pollutant" appears in the
- 22 Clean Air Act. The same day that Massachusetts came
- 23 out, this Court decided Environmental Defense v. Duke,
- 24 in which it specifically said that even when a defined
- 25 term in the statutory definition provision is construed

- 1 a particular way, that doesn't mean that that same term
- 2 used elsewhere in the statute can't be construed
- 3 differently where context requires. And the Court
- 4 reversed the Fourth Circuit for holding that they had to
- 5 be the same.
- And that's why in Massachusetts, after
- 7 indeed holding that the definition of "pollutant"
- 8 unambiguously in its literal sense included greenhouse
- 9 gases, the Court didn't stop there. It went on to ask
- 10 whether applying that definition to the Title II
- 11 provisions on motor vehicles that were at issue in that
- 12 case would produce what the Court called "extreme
- 13 measures or counterintuitive results." And only after
- 14 finding that there'd be no extreme or counterintuitive
- 15 results did the Court direct the EPA to apply that
- 16 definition to those Title II provisions.
- 17 And I think what that reflected was that the
- 18 Court understood that the literal definition of
- 19 "pollutant" was sufficiently broad that it shouldn't be
- 20 mechanically applied, plugged in everywhere in the Act
- 21 that the word "pollutant" appears, without some
- 22 additional analysis of the context of those provisions.
- 23 JUSTICE GINSBURG: What else does it cover
- 24 other than Title II, other than mobile vehicles?
- 25 MR. KEISLER: There are multiple places in

- 1 which the word "pollutant" appears in the Act in which
- 2 the EPA has understood Mass v. EPA the way I just
- 3 described, in which they have interpreted the words "any
- 4 air pollutant" to mean only a subset of the pollutants
- 5 that -- that the definition literally could be held to
- 6 encompass.
- 7 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: That's generally because
- 8 the section that it's in gives a different definition
- 9 directly.
- 10 MR. KEISLER: No, that's -- with respect,
- 11 Your Honor, that's not correct. So, for example, in the
- 12 PSD in Title V provisions, it says, "any air pollutant."
- 13 The EPA has interpreted that to mean any regulated air
- 14 pollutant, not because of any separate definition, but
- 15 because of context.
- 16 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: You are right, but --
- 17 MR. KEISLER: The context suggests
- 18 otherwise. The same thing with the provision on
- 19 visibility-impairing pollutants.
- 20 JUSTICE KENNEDY: But your -- your answer is
- 21 that they can be treated differently under different
- 22 parts of the Act. Doesn't that contradict your earlier
- view that we can't change the statute?
- 24 MR. KEISLER: No, I don't think so, Your
- 25 Honor, because it was an act of interpretation in

- 1 Massachusetts v. EPA of a particular term, and the
- 2 question is, reading that decision as a whole, what
- 3 import did the Court give that interpretation. It would
- 4 not have needed to go on and say, let's look at
- 5 specifically the Title II provisions at issue here and
- 6 ask whether it will produce extreme or counterintuitive
- 7 measures if it weren't the case that that was an
- 8 additional part of the inquiry that was necessary.
- 9 JUSTICE GINSBURG: And what other programs
- 10 I asked earlier. So we have the mobile vehicles. What
- 11 else? You're saying it excludes PSD. What else does
- 12 it --
- 13 MR. KEISLER: I think most critically, Your
- 14 Honor, it includes the new source performance standards
- 15 program of Section 111 that this Court discussed in
- 16 Connecticut v. AEP. And this is a very important point,
- 17 because this case is not about whether EPA can regulate
- 18 greenhouse gases from stationary sources. This Court
- 19 held that it could under this program in Section 11.
- This is about whether State and local
- 21 permitting authorities, the 90-plus State and local
- 22 permitting authorities, are supposed to regulate plant
- 23 by plant under this particular PSD program. And I
- 24 mention the NSPS program because the features of that
- 25 program highlight what's wrong here because the NSPS

- 1 program doesn't contain the elements of the PSD program
- 2 that require the PSD program to be rewritten in so many
- 3 particulars to make greenhouse gases fit.
- 4 NSPS doesn't have the 100- and 250-ton per
- 5 year thresholds. It lets EPA by notice and comment
- 6 rulemaking decide what categories of sources are most
- 7 contributing to the problem and most require regulation.
- 8 It doesn't require the area-specific local impact
- 9 analysis of subsection (e) of 7475, which EPA has told
- 10 State and local permitting authorities, even though it's
- 11 mandatory, don't conduct it because it can't be done for
- 12 greenhouse gases.
- NSPS permits the EPA to look at reducing the
- 14 national footprint without regard to area-specific
- impacts, and it permits the EPA to do this through a
- 16 national uniform emissions standard that the plants can
- 17 then determine how best to meet, rather than asking 90
- 18 State and local permitting authorities, which is what
- 19 PSD is about, to decide plant by plant what they think
- 20 each plant in their jurisdiction should do about global
- 21 warming.
- 22 JUSTICE BREYER: So in your opinion -- is --
- 23 I'm not sure what the statutory cite is to the provision
- 24 you are talking about. Is it 7411?
- 25 MR. KEISLER: That's right, Your Honor.

- 1 JUSTICE BREYER: All right. So you're
- 2 saying they could use 7411(a) and (b) to get to just the
- 3 same place they are today.
- 4 MR. KEISLER: Yes, without --
- 5 JUSTICE BREYER: You don't see an objection.
- 6 There must be some reason they didn't do that.
- 7 MR. KEISLER: Well, they are doing it, Your
- 8 Honor.
- 9 JUSTICE BREYER: They are doing it? Well,
- 10 then I don't know what this case is about. I mean, it's
- 11 a question of whether they do exactly the same thing
- 12 under one provision or another provision. And you agree
- 13 with them that they could do it under the other one and
- 14 we'd end up at exactly the same place.
- 15 MR. KEISLER: But it's not exactly the same
- 16 thing, Your Honor. And it is the difference between
- 17 having the EPA, through notice and comment rulemaking,
- 18 establish a national emissions standards, and then the
- 19 plants can deal with that incentive system in the best
- 20 way they can and figure out how to meet it, versus this
- 21 command and control PSD mechanism, where 90-plus State
- 22 and local permitting authorities are each having to
- 23 decide on their own what controls they think each plant
- 24 in their area should engage in, in order to deal with
- 25 global warming. It makes perfect sense to have 90 State

- 1 and local permitting authorities addressing the
- 2 area-specific air quality impacts of plants that are
- 3 built in their States.
- 4 JUSTICE BREYER: It says, "such standards
- 5 with such modifications as he deems appropriate."
- 6 That's the language of 7411(b).
- 7 MR. KEISLER: Right.
- 8 JUSTICE BREYER: Okay. So if this is the
- 9 right program, why couldn't they copy it word for word
- 10 into the rules and just put a different section number
- 11 at the bottom? I know you'd have a preferred way to do
- 12 it, but if they disagreed with you and they think this
- is the perfect program, why can't they do it?
- MR. KEISLER: Because the statutory language
- 15 and structure of the PSD program does not, we think,
- 16 encompass these kinds of pollutants that have globally
- 17 dispersed results and not area-specific impacts. And
- 18 it's for the reasons that I've indicated. 7411, which
- 19 says -- sorry. 7471, which says that the prevention of
- 20 significant deterioration is focused on deterioration of
- 21 air quality in each region; the study required by
- 22 7475(e), which is of local conditions; and the fact that
- 23 this is assigned to 90 State and local permitting
- 24 authorities.
- JUSTICE SCALIA: Is that your second point?

- 1 I've been keeping a list here of points you -- you have
- 2 not been permitted to get to.
- 3 (Laughter.)
- 4 JUSTICE SCALIA: One, you were going to
- 5 discuss not just the Massachusetts case, but the
- 6 follow-on case to Massachusetts.
- 7 MR. KEISLER: Oh, well, Connecticut.
- 8 JUSTICE SCALIA: You never did that, yes.
- 9 MR. KEISLER: Well, Connecticut v. AEP, and
- 10 the only point to make about that is that that was the
- 11 case which held that the commission -- that the EPA has
- 12 authority under Section 111, the NSPS provision, to
- 13 address greenhouse gases without having to rewrite
- 14 thresholds by designating the categories of sources like
- 15 it's trying to do here. But it has to do it by national
- 16 emissions standards through notice and comment
- 17 rulemaking. Connecticut v. AEP certainly did not
- 18 approve -- the PSD provisions here -- certainly did not
- 19 approve the regulations rewriting the statutory
- 20 thresholds that the EPA had to -- had to promulgate in
- 21 this case.
- JUSTICE SCALIA: The other thing -- you were
- 23 going to give two points and you only got to -- what is
- 24 it -- 7411(e), but there was another point.
- 25 MR. KEISLER: There were really -- yes,

- 1 there were three features I mentioned of the PSD statute
- 2 which we think make the context clear.
- 3 JUSTICE SCALIA: You got the first, which
- 4 was the --
- 5 MR. KEISLER: Which was 7471, prevention of
- 6 significant deterioration.
- 7 JUSTICE SCALIA: Right.
- 8 MR. KEISLER: The second was that study, the
- 9 only required study is of local conditions and
- 10 area-specific impacts. And the third is just that this
- is assigned to 90 State and local permitting
- 12 authorities, which is -- it is not plausible to think
- 13 that with respect, not to these area-specific impacts,
- 14 but to a global problem like global warming that what
- 15 Congress was doing was saying we think 90 State and
- 16 local permitting authorities should make those decisions
- 17 rather than, perhaps, EPA on a national basis.
- 18 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: You -- just to be clear,
- 19 your reading would say that the -- that the agency was
- 20 not permitted, with notice and opportunity to be heard,
- 21 to say -- to make a -- make this a criteria of pollution
- 22 in NAAQS.
- 23 MR. KEISLER: If the agency had tried to
- 24 establish a NAAQS for greenhouse gases, we think that
- 25 would be contrary to the statute because the National

- 1 Ambient Air Quality Standards are all about regional
- 2 concentrations. Is this area in or out of compliance?
- 3 If the gas goes up to the atmosphere and is mixed there,
- 4 either the whole country is going to be in attainment or
- 5 the whole country is going to be out of attainment. It
- 6 doesn't work at all with the NAAOS structure.
- 7 And if I could reserve the ---
- 8 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Well, why don't you
- 9 take an extra 5 minutes, and -- and you can begin by
- 10 answering the question: You know, the Government
- 11 disaggregates the discussion, and their first point in
- 12 their brief is that greenhouse gases can be regulated
- 13 with respect to sources that are already covered by the
- 14 PSD program. That position does not implicate your
- 15 concern about the broad reach of EPA regulation, does
- 16 it?
- 17 MR. KEISLER: I think it does, Your Honor,
- 18 because while that might deal with the specific issue of
- 19 rewriting the thresholds, the fact that the PSD
- 20 provisions for the reasons I have indicated is limited
- 21 to area-specific air impacts would, we think, be
- 22 violated merely by applying Best Available Control
- 23 Technology to a globally dispersed substance like
- 24 greenhouse gases.
- 25 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: I understand. But

- 1 they would only be applying that with respect to sources
- 2 that are already required to operate under PSD permits.
- 3 MR. KEISLER: That's right, but they would
- 4 be applying it to a substance, greenhouse gases, which
- 5 the PSD program was not designed to address, which was
- 6 designed to be addressed by other programs. And I would
- 7 say, Your Honor, that while they have tried to separate
- 8 those issues out, that there's one issue about who has
- 9 to get a permit and the other issue about whether the
- 10 requirements of Best Available Control Technology apply,
- 11 the regulation that they have adopted to implement what
- 12 they call their tailoring rule applies equally to both.
- What they've done is say that the words
- 14 "subject to regulation," which are the words in the BACT
- 15 provision, shall only apply to greenhouse gases, even
- 16 when they are regulated, if you're emitting them at
- 17 levels of 100,000 tons per year or more.
- 18 When they did that, they both rewrote the
- 19 provision that says who has to get a permit and they
- 20 rewrote the provision that says what Best Available
- 21 Control Technology applies. They did both at once even
- 22 though their brief treats it as separate.
- 23 And if -- I'm not certain how much time I
- 24 have, Mr. Chief Justice. If I have --
- 25 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: You have three and a

- 1 half minutes left.
- 2 MR. KEISLER: Not including rebuttal?
- 3 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: No. You will get 5
- 4 minutes of rebuttal.
- 5 MR. KEISLER: Thank you, Your Honor.
- If I could then turn briefly to the second
- 7 argument that I made reference to at the very beginning,
- 8 which is an argument that need not be addressed if the
- 9 Court is persuaded by what I've just said. But if not,
- 10 we have a second, narrower argument which is in the
- 11 American Chemistry Council brief, which addresses the
- 12 requirements for triggering the PSD statute, and our
- 13 position on that is very much like Judge Kavanaugh's
- 14 position below, which is that the statute is triggered
- only by emissions of major amounts of a pollutant for
- 16 which the area is in attainment.
- 17 JUSTICE KAGAN: Well, but that's not Judge
- 18 Kavanaugh's position. I thought Judge Kavanaugh's
- 19 position is any NAAQS pollutant, all NAAQS pollutants.
- 20 MR. KEISLER: That's right, Your Honor, and
- 21 that is a distinction. Our position is similar but not
- 22 identical to his position.
- 23 JUSTICE KAGAN: And it comes from a
- 24 different portion of the statutory language.
- 25 MR. KEISLER: That's right. We are focused

- on the language in any area to which this part applies,
- 2 and that is because Part C, the PSD provision, applies
- 3 not to an area as a whole, but for some pollutants and
- 4 not for others in any particular area.
- 5 JUSTICE KAGAN: Can I ask, Mr. Cavanaugh,
- 6 why Judge Kavanaugh's argument has been left by the
- 7 wayside?
- 8 MR. KEISLER: It is very similar, Your
- 9 Honor, to the argument that we're making, but we get at
- 10 it in a different way and with a slightly different
- 11 result.
- 12 JUSTICE KAGAN: Well, it does -- it comes
- 13 from different statutory language. His arguments about
- 14 the structure of the statute don't apply to your
- 15 argument. So I think, notwithstanding that there is
- 16 some overlap between the arguments, the legal rationales
- 17 are entirely different, and I guess I'm just curious.
- 18 MR. KEISLER: This is the argument we made
- 19 below and it's the argument we've continued to make
- 20 here. And the point of the argument --
- 21 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: I don't think that
- 22 answers the question.
- 23 MR. KEISLER: Excuse me, Your Honor?
- 24 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: I said I don't think --
- 25 I don't think it answers the question, which is I know

- 1 that's the argument; are you saying you can't defend his
- 2 argument or are you saying that --
- 3 MR. KEISLER: No, it's just that it's been
- 4 hard enough to make two alternative arguments in this
- 5 forum, and to add a third to it would be more than I
- 6 think I could handle.
- 7 (Laughter.)
- 8 JUSTICE GINSBURG: Can you clarify that? We
- 9 have the NAAQS criteria. EPA has added many others
- 10 across the years. For 30 years it's been adding things
- 11 for which there are no NAAQS. What about all of those?
- 12 MR. KEISLER: Your Honor, it is true that
- 13 ever since 1980 -- although it proposed our
- 14 interpretation as its original interpretation of the
- 15 statute, ever since 1980, EPA has said that any
- 16 pollutant, whether it's a NAAQS pollutant, whether it's
- 17 a pollutant for which the area is in attainment, any
- 18 pollutant would be sufficient to trigger PSD permit
- 19 requirements. But that has had virtually no practical
- 20 effect because all of those other pollutants, if they
- 21 are emitted in threshold quantities, invariably -- we've
- 22 been able to find about two or three exceptions over 30
- 23 years -- invariably the facility that is emitting them
- 24 is also emitting 250 tons per year of one of the
- 25 criteria pollutants.

- 1 So this was a difference which made no
- 2 difference until greenhouse gases came onto the scene.
- 3 And with the Court's permission, I will
- 4 reserve the remainder of my time.
- 5 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Thank you, counsel.
- 6 General Mitchell.
- 7 ORAL ARGUMENT OF JONATHAN F. MITCHELL
- 8 ON BEHALF OF STATE PETITIONERS
- 9 MR. MITCHELL: Mr. Chief Justice, and may it
- 10 please the Court:
- 11 There are at least two issues in this case
- 12 in which EPA and the Petitioners agree. The first is
- 13 that the term "air pollutant" cannot be given a uniform
- 14 construction throughout the Clean Air Act even after
- 15 this Court's ruling in Massachusetts that "air
- 16 pollutant" includes all things airborne for purposes of
- 17 Title II. The second point of agreement is that
- 18 greenhouse gases cannot be treated the same as other air
- 19 pollutants for purposes of the PSD and Title V programs,
- 20 because the unambiguous statutory requirements of those
- 21 programs are incompatible with sensible regulation of
- 22 greenhouse gases.
- 23 EPA thinks it can fix this problem by
- 24 imposing an atextual agency-created regime that applies
- only to greenhouse gases. The proper response, however,

- 1 is for EPA to conclude that Congress never delegated
- 2 regulatory authority over greenhouse gases in the PSD
- 3 and Title V programs. Congress does not establish round
- 4 holes for square pegs, and Brown & Williamson holds in
- 5 these situations, an agency cannot make a round hole
- 6 square by rewriting unambiguous statutory language.
- 7 JUSTICE KAGAN: General, I take it that the
- 8 unambiguous statutory language that you are referring to
- 9 is the references to 100 and to 250. And it seems to me
- 10 that that's an odd kind of term to drive such an
- 11 important statutory interpretation question, because
- 12 what those numbers were all about is that they were
- 13 supposed to separate major emitters from minor emitters.
- 14 I mean, they were supposed to be about the size of the
- 15 facility. They were not supposed to have -- they were
- 16 not supposed to make any distinctions as to the type of
- 17 pollutant.
- 18 So you're essentially using those numbers to
- 19 make distinctions as to the type of pollutant rather
- 20 than, it seems to me a more sensible approach would be
- 21 to say, look, the 100 and 250 numbers don't work for
- 22 this new kind of pollutant, we're going to up the
- 23 numbers, and that will leave the rest of the statute and
- 24 all the purposes of Congress intact.
- 25 MR. MITCHELL: Justice Kagan, the reason we

- 1 don't think the approach that you describe is
- 2 permissible is because there are statutory provisions in
- 3 the Clean Air Act that specifically forbid EPA to do
- 4 what Your Honor is describing. 7661(a)(A) says that EPA
- 5 cannot under any circumstance exempt any major source
- 6 from the Title V requirements. And because that
- 7 provision is in the statute, EPA cannot be claiming to
- 8 seize discretion when Congress has specifically withheld
- 9 that type of discretion here. This is akin to a
- 10 dispensing power, for EPA to be coming in and rewriting
- 11 the Title V permitting thresholds in the way that they
- 12 are.
- 13 And the question to ask is whether the term
- 14 "air pollutant" is flexible enough to accommodate
- 15 different meanings in different statutory contexts. And
- 16 here even EPA agrees with us that "air pollutant" can
- 17 mean different things in different parts of the Act,
- 18 even after Massachusetts.
- 19 Massachusetts held that "air pollutant"
- 20 unambiguously includes all things airborne, all airborne
- 21 compounds of whatever stripe for purposes of Title II.
- 22 But EPA has refused to carry over that definition
- 23 throughout the Clean Air Act when the term "air
- 24 pollutant" appears in at least three different places.
- One of them is section 7411(a)(4), which is part of the

- 1 NSPS program. In that provision the term "air
- 2 pollutant" appears as part of the definition of
- 3 modification.
- 4 EPA does not interpret that to mean all
- 5 things airborne. It doesn't even interpret it to mean
- 6 all regulated air pollutants. It interprets that to
- 7 mean air pollutants for which a standard of performance
- 8 has been established. In the PSD and Title V permitting
- 9 thresholds, EPA interprets the phrase "any air
- 10 pollutant" not to mean all things airborne, but to mean
- 11 any regulated air pollutant.
- 12 And then finally, in Section 7491 EPA
- 13 interprets the phrase "any pollutant" to mean any
- 14 visibility-impairing pollutant. So if Massachusetts's
- 15 all things airborne view of the phase "air pollutant" is
- 16 forced to be applied to every provision of the Clean Air
- 17 Act where the word "air pollutant" appears, all of these
- 18 longstanding EPA interpretations would have to be
- 19 discarded.
- 20 JUSTICE KAGAN: But, General, if you think
- 21 about the question of what any pollutant means, and you
- 22 put aside this whole absurdity question that the numbers
- 23 get you to, you just say, what does any air pollutant
- 24 mean? Does it mean what EPA has said it has meant for
- 25 30 years, which is any pollutant that's regulated under

- 1 this Act, or does it mean something more along the lines
- of what you're saying, which is anything other than
- 3 greenhouse gases, or anything other than pollutants that
- 4 have particular localized effects.
- 5 You would obviously choose EPA's version of
- 6 the thing. And the only reason that you're not choosing
- 7 that is because of these numbers that are in the
- 8 statute, which were designed only, only to distinguish
- 9 between major and minor emitters.
- 10 So if you can distinguish between major and
- 11 minor emitters while keeping the completely sensible
- 12 longstanding interpretation of any pollutant, why
- 13 wouldn't you do that?
- 14 MR. MITCHELL: Because I don't think it can
- 15 be said, Justice Kagan, that the phrase "any air
- 16 pollutant" unambiguously means any regulated pollutant.
- 17 That is a possible interpretation of air pollutant, but
- 18 there are others, and EPA has adopted other definitions
- 19 depending on the surrounding statutory --
- 20 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: Let me ask you a
- 21 question. Assuming we agree with you, that neither
- 22 Massachusetts or Alabama -- there's no statutory command
- 23 to come to EPA's conclusion, what do we do? Do we just
- 24 reverse them, or do we vacate and remand and tell them,
- 25 no, you were wrong at step one; there is ambiguity in

- 1 the statute?
- 2 MR. MITCHELL: It's more than just that
- 3 there's ambiguity, Justice Sotomayor. We're asking the
- 4 Court to hold that a greenhouse gas inclusive
- 5 interpretation of air pollutant simply does not fit with
- 6 the unambiguous provisions of the PSD and Title V
- 7 programs, just as a tobacco inclusive or nicotine
- 8 inclusive interpretation of the word "drug" was not able
- 9 to fit with the unambiguous requirement --
- 10 JUSTICE BREYER: But that's a difficult -- I
- 11 think where Justice Kagan is going -- and I will if she
- 12 wasn't, but I think she was -- is put the definition
- 13 from 7479 in your mind. That means something to you,
- 14 right? You know what I'm talking about.
- 15 MR. MITCHELL: The definition of?
- 16 JUSTICE BREYER: Of the major emitting
- 17 facility.
- 18 MR. MITCHELL: Right.
- 19 JUSTICE BREYER: Okay. Now, we look at
- 20 7475, and it says you have to have a permit and use Best
- 21 Available Control Technology. For what? And then we go
- 22 to the definition, and it says, among other things, "For
- 23 any source with the potential to emit 250 tons per year
- 24 or more of any pollutant."
- Now, that doesn't -- my God, that maybe

- 1 means every 500 people, every school is applied here.
- 2 So you say we've got to do something about this statute
- 3 because they don't really mean to every football game
- 4 they're going to have a permit, or it doesn't mean every
- 5 500 people, like all of my relatives are together, they
- 6 have to have a permit. No, it can't mean that.
- 7 So we have two choices. Choice A, which is
- 8 what you would like, is it means any air pollutant, any
- 9 regulated air pollutant, but not greenhouse gases.
- 10 Okay. That's choice one.
- 11 Choice two is it means any air pollutant
- 12 including greenhouse gases, but implicitly EPA has the
- 13 authority to exempt small emitters. You see?
- Now, which does the less violence to the
- 15 statute?
- 16 MR. MITCHELL: Choice one. And the reason
- 17 choice one --
- 18 JUSTICE BREYER: I knew you would say that.
- 19 (Laughter.)
- 20 MR. MITCHELL: The reason choice one does
- 21 less violence is because the term "air pollutant" is
- 22 flexible and has been acknowledged to be by EPA for
- 23 decades. And I think even by this Court,
- 24 notwithstanding its holding in Massachusetts, it's
- 25 permissible for an agency to construe ambiguous

- 1 statutory language to avoid absurdity. In fact, it must
- 2 construe the ambiguous language to avoid absurdity
- 3 before taking choice two that Your Honor described,
- 4 where it rewrites unambiguous statutory language to
- 5 avoid absurdity.
- If the simple choice were between construing
- 7 one unambiguous statutory provision to avoid the
- 8 anomalous results and construing another unambiguous
- 9 statutory provision to avoid that outcome, then EPA
- 10 would have a much stronger case for deference here.
- 11 The problem for EPA is they've insisted for
- 12 decades that air pollutant can mean different things in
- 13 different parts of --
- 14 JUSTICE BREYER: All right. So let me
- 15 modify my question. I get that answer on the language
- 16 there. But if you had been sitting in Congress and the
- 17 Senate, Mr. Billings, I think, is the staff person,
- 18 Senator Muskie, and suppose that you had this choice put
- 19 to you with your language. We'd either like to have the
- 20 authority implicit here to exempt the football team, the
- 21 tiny emitters, or we'd like it not to cover it at all.
- Which do you think the Senate would have
- 23 chosen in enacting this bill from the evidence in the
- 24 language itself, in the evidence which I look at, the
- 25 history of the bill?

- 1 MR. MITCHELL: I think they did make a
- 2 choice, and it's in the language of the bill, that EPA
- 3 does not have the authority to exempt any major source
- 4 from Title V. They say that right there in Section
- 5 7061(a)(A) on page 44 of the statutory appendix in --
- 6 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: Title V is not the PSD
- 7 requirement. Title V is just the recordkeeping
- 8 provision.
- 9 MR. MITCHELL: That's true, but EPA --
- 10 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: And so why should we
- 11 exempt people from Title V? That's not what's causing
- 12 the burden that you're talking about. It's just a
- 13 recordkeeping provision.
- MR. MITCHELL: But it's a -- it's a very
- 15 burdensome recordkeeping provision as -- as EPA
- 16 acknowledges. That's why they're not willing to impose
- 17 it on every entity that emits more than 100 tons per
- 18 year of carbon dioxide. It costs, on average, \$20,000
- 19 to get a Title V permit and -- and hundreds of man
- 20 hours. And it's plausible to impose those burdens,
- 21 perhaps, on large industrial sources, but certainly not
- 22 to impose that on the corner deli or -- or the Chinese
- 23 restaurant or a high school building.
- So, again, to return to Justice Breyer's
- 25 question, which would Congress have chosen, the choice

- 1 was made in the statute to establish rigid numerical
- 2 permitting thresholds that were defined not only by 100
- 3 tons and 250 tons per year, but also defined by a
- 4 specific metric.
- 5 And to withhold from the agency the
- 6 discretion to depart from those unambiguous
- 7 requirements. Instead, they provided looseness to the
- 8 extent they provided it in the definition of air
- 9 pollutant, which even though this Court held in
- 10 Massachusetts unambiguously includes all things
- 11 airborne, for purposes of Title II, EPA has narrowed
- 12 that construction in numerous other parts of the
- 13 statute.
- 14 JUSTICE BREYER: All right. If you can
- 15 narrow it, why not narrow that one? Any air pollutant,
- 16 including greenhouse gases, to the extent that they can
- 17 be sensibly controlled under this statute. Now I've
- 18 worked with the words "air pollutant." You see, I can
- 19 do it any way you want if I'm prepared to read in
- 20 exceptions. And, of course, we do have exceptions when
- 21 agencies enforce statutes. We do have exceptions from
- 22 general language all the time.
- 23 MR. MITCHELL: I don't -- yeah, I don't
- think it would be a permissible act of statutory
- 25 construction to say that carbon dioxide could be an air

- 1 pollutant and not an air pollutant at the same time.
- 2 JUSTICE SCALIA: Well, you -- you'd accept
- 3 his definition, wouldn't you? You'd be happy with a
- 4 definition that says air pollutant means any air
- 5 pollutant to the extent it can be sensibly controlled
- 6 under the statute. And you would say this one obviously
- 7 can't.
- 8 MR. MITCHELL: Right, which means it can't
- 9 be regulated under the Title V --
- 10 JUSTICE SCALIA: So that would be a
- 11 wonderful definition.
- 12 JUSTICE BREYER: It can, though. It can in
- 13 large quality -- quantities. I mean, you don't see
- 14 anything wrong with large quantities. It's just the
- 15 small quantities you have a problem with.
- 16 MR. MITCHELL: Well, we have a problem
- 17 with --
- 18 JUSTICE BREYER: I mean, are you saying it
- doesn't make sense to control major emitters of CO2?
- 20 MR. MITCHELL: We're saying it doesn't make
- 21 sense to construe air pollutant in a greenhouse
- 22 gas-inclusive manner for purposes of the PSD program
- 23 because the unambiguous requirements require the EPA to
- 24 reach the small emitters. And if EPA wants to fix the
- 25 problem, they can't resort to this form of agency

- 1 self-help. They need to get --
- 2 JUSTICE KAGAN: General, one question is
- 3 what would Congress have wanted, given the obvious
- 4 purposes of the Act. And that's an important question.
- 5 Another question is: What did the agency decide here?
- 6 I mean, obviously, this is the apex of Chevron
- 7 deference. There's nothing that gets more deference
- 8 than this agency with respect to this complicated a
- 9 statute.
- 10 And given that this whole thing arises
- 11 because there's this new kind of emission, which --
- 12 which the numbers don't work for, but which essentially
- 13 makes these two terms in the statute irreconcilable, why
- 14 isn't that a classic case for deference to the agency,
- 15 that the agency gets to choose how to make the thing
- 16 work as best it can, when a changed circumstance makes
- 17 it work not entirely the way Congress had foretold?
- 18 MR. MITCHELL: I think because the Court
- 19 rejected that very idea in Brown & Williamson, where
- 20 tobacco was trying to be regulated by FDA under a
- 21 statute where the word "drug" clearly included nicotine,
- 22 if you just looked at the definition of "drug" in
- 23 isolation, but this Court rejected FDA's assertion of
- 24 jurisdiction by saying that the unambiguous requirements
- 25 of the Food and Drug Act would be --

- 1 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: To accept your -- your
- 2 argument, we have to reverse Massachusetts.
- 3 MR. MITCHELL: No, not at all, Justice
- 4 Sotomayor.
- 5 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: Well, you're saying
- 6 that the -- that Congress didn't intend to control this
- 7 pollutant. We said there that it did.
- 8 MR. MITCHELL: No. The Court only needs to
- 9 revisit Massachusetts if it believes that air pollutant
- 10 must have a uniform, unambiguous construction everywhere
- 11 it appears in the Clean Air Act. And -- and not even
- 12 EPA is making that assertion to this Court. And we've
- 13 shown throughout how EPA has interpreted air pollutant
- 14 differently. So there is no need to revisit
- 15 Massachusetts at all to conclude that at least in the
- 16 context of the PSD and Title V programs, it's not
- 17 plausible for the agency to construe the phrase "air
- 18 pollutant" to include greenhouse gases.
- 19 If the Court has no further questions, I
- 20 yield my time back to the Court.
- 21 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Thank you, General
- 22 Mitchell.
- 23 ORAL ARGUMENT OF GENERAL DONALD B. VERRILLI, JR.
- ON BEHALF OF THE RESPONDENTS
- 25 GENERAL VERRILLI: Mr. Chief Justice, and

- 1 may it please the Court:
- 2 Greenhouse gases pose the same threat to
- 3 public health and welfare when they are emitted from a
- 4 power plant as when they are emitted from the tailpipe
- 5 of a car; and in American Electric Power this Court said
- 6 it was plain that EPA has the authority to prescribe
- 7 general rules limiting greenhouse gas emissions by
- 8 stationary sources like power plants. Yet Petitioners
- 9 say EPA lacks any authority to use the PSD permitting
- 10 program to regulate the same emissions, from the same
- 11 sources, causing the same harms.
- 12 That's not a reasonable reading of the
- 13 statutory text, and it rests on a fundamental
- 14 misunderstanding of the PSD program and the way it is
- 15 supposed to operate in conjunction with the --
- 16 JUSTICE SCALIA: Why? Why would it be
- 17 unreasonable to give -- give EPA authority to regulate
- 18 mobile sources and not authority to -- to regulate
- 19 stationary sources, given that stationary sources have
- 20 to be licensed in this fashion and it -- it produces all
- 21 sorts of other problems? That doesn't seem to me
- 22 irrational at all.
- 23 GENERAL VERRILLI: Well, the Court said, I
- 24 think, that it was plain that Congress gave EPA the
- 25 authority to regulate stationary sources in the American

- 1 Electric Power case under Section 7411, and that I think
- 2 gets to a fundamental premise where the Petitioners are
- 3 just wrong.
- 4 Section 7411 -- and this relates to a
- 5 question you asked, Justice Breyer -- Section 7411 and
- 6 the PSD program are not aimed at different problems.
- 7 They are aimed at the same problem, and you can see that
- 8 from the statutory text. For example, if one looks at
- 9 Section 7475(a)(3), which you can find at page 21A of
- 10 our appendix, you will see that in order to become
- 11 eligible for a PSD permit if you are a major emitting
- 12 facility, you've got to -- if you are looking at
- 13 subsection (3), under (3)(A) and (3)(B), you've got to
- 14 show that you can meet all of the local air quality
- 15 requirements of the NAAQS, those standards; and then (C)
- 16 says you've got to meet any other applicable emissions
- 17 standard or standard of performance under this chapter.
- 18 And that standard of performance language is
- 19 not an accident. In 7411 the standards that are set,
- 20 the nationwide standards that Mr. Keisler was discussing
- 21 for greenhouse gases or other air pollutants, are called
- 22 standards of performance. So it's specifically picking
- 23 up the Section 7411 standard.
- 24 Then if one turns to the definition of Best
- 25 Available Control Technology under the PSD program,

- 1 which you can find at page 34A of the appendix to our
- 2 brief, you will notice that Congress specifically linked
- 3 the operation of the Section 7411 standards and the Best
- 4 Available Control Technology under the PSD program. And
- 5 what this provision says, I won't belabor you by reading
- 6 the lengthy provision, but what it says is that once
- 7 Congress has set a standard under section 7411, a
- 8 nationwide standard, that becomes a floor for the
- 9 evaluation of Best Available Control Technology.
- 10 JUSTICE KENNEDY: Are you reading subsection
- 11 (3), the (A), (B) and (C), and you focus on (C), any
- 12 other applicable -- are you reading those in the
- 13 alternative? I read that they -- that all three have to
- 14 be complied with.
- 15 GENERAL VERRILLI: Yes, they all three have
- 16 have to be complied with, yes, Justice --
- 17 JUSTICE KENNEDY: But then that doesn't help
- 18 you, because you are right back to where you started.
- 19 You have the tonnage per year requirement.
- 20 GENERAL VERRILLI: Well, I would be happy
- 21 to --
- JUSTICE KENNEDY: And with the absurd result
- 23 that follows.
- 24 GENERAL VERRILLI: Well, I would be happy to
- 25 get to that. But if I could just finish off this point

- 1 about the connection between the operation of the two,
- 2 because I do think it's of critical importance here.
- 3 That what you are supposed to do under BACT is use Best
- 4 Available Control Technology to get above the floor,
- 5 that the NSPS program sets those standards on an every
- 6 8-year basis, and the point of BACT is to force best
- 7 practices to keep raising the bar during those 8-year
- 8 intervals.
- 9 And there is an additional point to be made
- 10 about the relationship between the two. This goes back
- 11 to Senator Muskie in 1977. The NSPS program was enacted
- 12 as part of the 1970 Act. The PSD program was added in
- 13 1977; and it was added in 1977 because of
- 14 dissatisfaction over both the pace and the
- 15 comprehensiveness of the -- of air pollution regulations
- 16 that were being enacted by EPA under the 7411 standard;
- 17 and it's because under 7411, EPA has got to go one
- 18 source category at a time. It has got to do power
- 19 plants; then it's got to do refineries; then it's got to
- 20 do the next thing, and the next thing, and the next
- 21 thing.
- 22 And so EPA hadn't gotten standards in place
- 23 for all the different sources, and the point of -- of
- the PSD program is to put in place an additional
- 25 requirement. It's exactly what Congress was after. So

- 1 that when there is a standard under 7411 that becomes
- 2 the floor, and you -- and BACT says let's keep raising
- 3 the bar. But when there isn't a standard under 7411,
- 4 PSD is supposed to fill the breach, and it makes sense
- 5 because you want to get -- the PSD program, remember,
- 6 applies to -- excuse me -- it applies to new
- 7 construction or major modification. The idea behind it
- 8 is you want to get in there at the beginning when the
- 9 source is first being constructed, so that they don't
- 10 lock in old pollution -- pollution-causing technology.
- 11 They have got to meet Best Available Control Technology.
- 12 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: About the Best
- 13 Available Control Technology, I think I have an idea of
- 14 what that looks like with respect to sources already
- 15 regulated, because they're relating to the NAAQS. You
- 16 know, filters, scrubbers and all that; I'm sure it's
- 17 oversimplified. But what does Best Available Control
- 18 Technology look like with respect to greenhouse gases?
- 19 GENERAL VERRILLI: Well, it's an evolving
- 20 process, Your Honor, and there are now 140 or so permits
- 21 that have been issued applying BACT to greenhouse gas
- 22 emissions. There is some very helpful discussion of
- 23 this kind of specifics in two places: The State
- 24 Respondents' brief, pages 35 to 39, and the Calpine
- 25 amicus brief. Calpine is a major utility, regulated --

- 1 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Right. But am I --
- 2 am I right because the greenhouse gases do not affect
- 3 ambient air quality in a way that the current or the
- 4 NAAQS provisions do? I mean, you're dealing with
- 5 regulation of energy usage, right, as opposed to
- 6 emissions of lead, emissions of the other NAAQS
- 7 provisions?
- 8 GENERAL VERRILLI: Well, it's -- one
- 9 thing we're doing -- the main thing now is significant
- 10 energy efficiency, for example, different kinds of
- 11 turbines; different kinds of processes, that sort of --
- 12 that sort of thing. That's right.
- 13 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: The same sort of
- 14 thing as with -- for domestic uses, as the energy
- 15 efficient light bulbs.
- 16 GENERAL VERRILLI: Well, I really don't
- 17 think this is about light bulbs, Mr. Chief Justice.
- 18 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: No, but my point is
- 19 it relates to energy consumption as opposed to
- 20 particulate emission.
- 21 GENERAL VERRILLI: At the -- at the moment
- 22 that's largely true, not entirely true; there are some
- 23 other technologies described. But of course, the EPA is
- 24 considering and scientists are trying to develop
- 25 additional control technologies like carbon capture

- 1 technologies; and that's the whole point of Best
- 2 Available Control Technology, is as technology advances
- 3 and better options come on line, that allow for even
- 4 greater control of the pollutants, the statute requires
- 5 that they be incorporated. That's how it's supposed to
- 6 work.
- 7 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: If you -- if you
- 8 regulate -- I'm talking about your two distinct
- 9 arguments in your -- in your brief. If you prevail on
- 10 the first: In other words, greenhouse gases may be
- 11 regulated with respect to sources that are already
- 12 subject to permitting, my understanding, it gets you to
- 13 83 percent of the greenhouse gas emissions.
- 14 GENERAL VERRILLI: That's correct.
- 15 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Prevailing on the
- 16 second argument gets you to 86 percent.
- 17 GENERAL VERRILLI: That's correct.
- 18 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: So this is a
- 19 fight -- putting aside your first argument -- about an
- 20 additional 3 percent, and yet according to the
- 21 Petitioners that brings in this huge regulatory problem,
- 22 of, you know, regulating the high school football game
- 23 and what-not.
- 24 GENERAL VERRILLI: Right. Just an aside on
- 25 the high school football game. Human beings are

- 1 actually net neutral on carbon emissions, and you will
- 2 need a chemist to explain that to you. But it doesn't
- 3 matter how many family members you have; you won't get
- 4 to the limit. But with respect to the -- with respect
- 5 to the question --
- 6 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: The lights at the
- 7 game.
- 8 GENERAL VERRILLI: The lights at the game I
- 9 don't think would be a problem, either. But anyway,
- 10 there obviously is -- and EPA has acknowledged that
- 11 there is a significant expansion of the permitting
- 12 obligation under EPA's present understanding of
- 13 permitting. But let me try to take this in two pieces,
- 14 if I could.
- 15 Let me first talk about why it's not just
- 16 about the 3 percent, and then let me try to get back to
- 17 Justice Kennedy's question to talk about the expansion
- 18 of the permitting obligation and what EPA is actually
- 19 thinking and doing about that.
- 20 The problem here is that the options -- one
- 21 of the problems, significant problem is that the options
- 22 that the -- the American Chemistry Council have advanced
- 23 and even that Judge Kavanaugh has advanced would require
- 24 an invalidation of or at least a significant, a
- 25 significant revision of EPA's 34-year understanding of

- 1 the meaning of the phrase "any air "pollutant" in
- 2 7479(1), which they have always interpreted to mean any
- 3 -- any air pollutant subject to regulation under the
- 4 Act. That -- you can't apply that 34-year-long agency
- 5 interpretation here and get to one of those results.
- 6 You've got to -- you've got to change it.
- 7 JUSTICE SCALIA: Yes, but the 34-year agency
- 8 interpretation is not a statute.
- 9 GENERAL VERRILLI: No, it's not, Justice
- 10 Scalia, of course.
- 11 JUSTICE SCALIA: And you are -- you know,
- 12 you are saying, oh, rather than alter our 34-year
- interpretation, we're -- we're going to revise the
- 14 provisions of the statute. I don't think that's a --
- 15 that's a good trade.
- 16 GENERAL VERRILLI: Well, I -- with all due
- 17 respect, I don't think that's what the agency is doing.
- 18 And if I may, just -- let me, if I could just sort of
- 19 finish off this. The problem is that if you take the --
- 20 if you draw the line either at NAAQS pollutants versus
- 21 all other previously regulated pollutants, or if you
- 22 draw the line at local pollutants, but not global
- 23 pollutants, you are going to knock out some sources that
- 24 have been subjected to the permitting requirement
- 25 previously.

- 1 JUSTICE ALITO: Can I ask you this question
- 2 about -- can I ask you this question about EPA's
- 3 position? Because this is something I don't understand.
- 4 On the one hand, EPA says that applying the statutory
- 5 thresholds to greenhouse gases would transform the PSD
- 6 program into something that would be unrecognizable to
- 7 the Congress that enacted the program; isn't that right?
- 8 GENERAL VERRILLI: Yes, they did say that.
- 9 JUSTICE ALITO: On the other hand, EPA says,
- 10 but that's what we're going to aim to achieve at some
- 11 point down the road.
- 12 GENERAL VERRILLI: No, that's a fundamental
- 13 misconception, Justice Alito, and I would like to try to
- 14 clear it up, and it goes to -- I'll try to answer Your
- 15 Honor's question as well, Justice Scalia.
- 16 What EPA's doing here is saying this is a
- 17 transition, it's not a rewrite. And the goal of the
- 18 transition is not to gradually expand the permitting
- 19 requirement until they've got all the Dunkin' Donuts in
- 20 America under it. That's not what's going on. In fact,
- 21 it's the opposite. What they're saying is, they're
- 22 taking a look at the standards they used to decide who's
- 23 eligible for a permit. They're looking to change those,
- 24 to the extent they can, consistent with their statutory
- 25 authority and appropriate Chevron deference, to

- 1 substantially narrow the numbers of people who will be
- 2 deemed eligible. And that's in particular --
- 3 JUSTICE ALITO: Well, then they're never
- 4 going to get to the statutory thresholds. I thought EPA
- 5 said, well, we're going to work toward that.
- 6 GENERAL VERRILLI: No, this is -- this is to
- 7 try to get to the statutory threshold. Well, let me
- 8 give you an example of the main -- one of the main ways
- 9 --
- 10 JUSTICE ALITO: Well, that's -- then I don't
- 11 understand the position. If -- if applying the
- 12 statutory thresholds makes the program unrecognizable,
- 13 and yet that's what they're going to aim to do down the
- 14 road, get to -- get to the statutory thresholds, will it
- 15 become more recognizable at that point?
- 16 GENERAL VERRILLI: Under the point -- the
- 17 nuance there, that I think answers Your Honor's
- 18 question, is that there -- the agency has discretion in
- 19 deciding what constitutes the potential to emit 250 tons
- 20 per year. What they have done historically is evaluate
- 21 that on the basis of an assumption that it's facilities
- 22 operating 24 hours a day --
- 23 JUSTICE BREYER: But then they'll -- then
- 24 they'll be back down to -- to 41,000 people fully within
- 25 this. And when you get to Number 5, Title V, 6.1

- 1 million, that sort of changes what -- I mean, if that's
- 2 the question, does, in fact, this provision give the EPA
- 3 the -- the obligation to impose permit requirements on
- 4 41,000 businesses of a size that really are --
- 5 constitute, at most, 10 or 15 percent of the problem,
- 6 well, that's -- that's pretty hard to accept.
- 7 GENERAL VERRILLI: Well --
- 8 JUSTICE BREYER: What I thought the question
- 9 was, was whether EPA had the authority to implement this
- 10 in a way that EPA itself thinks makes sense, which might
- 11 be, on their own reasoning, to not impose permitting
- 12 requirements on tens of thousands, perhaps millions of
- 13 small businesses. I thought that was what the question
- 14 was. That did seem to be the way they put it.
- 15 GENERAL VERRILLI: It is. But I think the
- 16 two things converge, Justice Breyer. They're trying to
- 17 get to the point of saying that you won't have to apply
- 18 -- if you apply the standards EPA uses now, you sweep in
- 19 all these people, and EPA says, well --
- 20 JUSTICE BREYER: Are they going to get some
- 21 new standards? But are these -- but the words they used
- 22 in their opinion were streamlining.
- 23 GENERAL VERRILLI: Right.
- 24 JUSTICE BREYER: The words they used in
- 25 their opinion implied to me when I read them that

- 1 they're never going to want to put tiny boilers under
- 2 this because it just doesn't do very much good and it's
- 3 expensive to administer. That's how I read it.
- 4 GENERAL VERRILLI: That's correct.
- 5 JUSTICE BREYER: All right. Then my
- 6 question is back, because you've been -- this has been
- 7 very helpful. I learned I'm not a net emitter of carbon
- 8 dioxide. Believe me, because that means I'm a part of
- 9 sustainable development. I thought --
- 10 (Laughter.)
- 11 JUSTICE BREYER: All right. So I learned
- 12 quite a lot from this, and I'd like to learn one more
- 13 thing, which is, look, 7411, remember what the Chief
- 14 Justice just said about the 83 percent and the 86
- 15 percent. And even if you lose, they still can regulate
- 16 83 percent, and if you win, you can regulate 86 percent.
- 17 And, my goodness, if 7411 is over there letting them do
- 18 precisely what they want, why do you need this, too?
- 19 That's the part that I haven't got a clear answer to in
- 20 my mind.
- 21 GENERAL VERRILLI: So the -- it's the reason
- 22 I tried to suggest earlier, Justice Breyer, that the PSD
- 23 program is supposed to work as a complement together
- 24 with 7411. For example, if 7411 now is being used, at
- 25 least EPA's contemplating setting standards, greenhouse

- 1 gas emission standards for power plants. That's a very
- 2 significant contributor of greenhouse gases, but it's
- 3 not the only one. There are refineries, there are other
- 4 major sources --
- 5 JUSTICE BREYER: Well, put those all in.
- 6 Put those all in. Write -- write complicated standards.
- 7 Write standards that have certain enforcement capacities
- 8 and abilities. Write standards that require you to get
- 9 a PSD permit. I mean, what's wrong with all that?
- 10 GENERAL VERRILLI: They can do all of that,
- 11 but the -- but the problem is that that's going to take
- 12 a lot of time, and that was the very reason Congress put
- 13 the PSD program into existence in 1977 was because of
- 14 the dissatisfaction, because of the time it took to go
- 15 source by source, pollutant by pollutant under the EPA's
- 16 7411 program.
- 17 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: I'm sorry. I just want
- 18 to make sure that I understood correctly.
- 19 Under 7411, you can require a PSD --
- 20 GENERAL VERRILLI: No, you can set a
- 21 national standard.
- JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: Right.
- 23 GENERAL VERRILLI: But part of the reason,
- 24 as I said, I think it's just wrong to think about the
- 25 PSD program as being -- addressing a different kind of

- 1 problem from the 7411 problem is that you've got to meet
- 2 the 7411 standard in your PSD application.
- 3 JUSTICE KAGAN: General -- General, if I
- 4 could actually get back to Justice Alito's question,
- 5 because I had a similar issue with what EPA did here.
- 6 It seems to me it would be completely responsible and
- 7 understandable if EPA had said, look, the 100 and 250
- 8 don't work with respect to this category of pollutant,
- 9 Congress didn't know that this kind of pollutant was out
- 10 there when it wrote those numbers, what it was trying to
- 11 do was to distinguish between major and minor emitters.
- 12 The new numbers are X and Y for that -- for this kind of
- 13 pollutant.
- 14 But, you know, and I understand that EPA may
- 15 have felt like, oh, gosh, can we really do that? But
- 16 the solution that EPA came up with actually seems to
- 17 give it complete discretion to do whatever it wants,
- 18 whenever it wants to, and to not -- and to be much more
- 19 problematic than if EPA had just said, no, it's not 100
- 20 and 250. It's 10 times that.
- 21 GENERAL VERRILLI: I take that point, Your
- 22 Honor. I don't actually think that's what EPA was
- 23 trying to do. I know it's been portrayed that way. I
- think that they were trying to do the opposite. They
- 25 were trying to say, well, let's look at how we define

- 1 what it means to emit 250 tons per year, and see if we
- 2 can make that a more realistic analysis by going from
- 3 the 24/7, 365-day-a-year hypothesis to figuring out how
- 4 much this source is actually likely to emit, and you
- 5 could drastically lower the number of sources who would
- 6 be found to emit 250 tons per year, and that would bring
- 7 -- it would try to bring the system into line with the
- 8 expectations that major emitters would be regulated.
- 9 That -- that's their objective here.
- 10 JUSTICE ALITO: Are greenhouse gases the
- 11 only air pollutant for which EPA has the authority to
- 12 change the statutory thresholds?
- 13 GENERAL VERRILLI: Well, I'd like to make a
- 14 point, if I could, about that. The real problem here is
- 15 CO2. Actually, of the other -- of the six greenhouse
- 16 gases, the other five you could use the statutory
- 17 thresholds on without difficulty. It's the CO2 alone
- 18 really that causes a difficulty.
- 19 JUSTICE ALITO: But could it do -- could it
- 20 do this for another pollutant, something other than any
- 21 of the greenhouse gases?
- 22 GENERAL VERRILLI: Well, I think, in
- 23 fairness, what EPA is saying here is that we've got an
- 24 obligation under the statute to regulate. We've got an
- obligation to require a permit when there's more than

- 1 250 tons per year, and we've got an obligation to get
- 2 the permits out within a year. That's also a statutory
- 3 requirement. And that just given the reality of the CO2
- 4 emission, something's got to give. So I don't think
- 5 it's that they're asserting authority to rewrite the
- 6 statutory thresholds. They're dealing with a practical
- 7 problem that's arisen under the immediate circumstances.
- 8 JUSTICE GINSBURG: One of the things that
- 9 EPA said in -- in the explanation of this rule is that
- 10 EPA could say that PSD or Title V applies only to
- 11 certain GHG sources -- it's been suggested that that
- 12 source would be carbon dioxide -- applies only to
- 13 certain GHG sources and does not apply to the remaining
- 14 GHG sources. But there didn't seem to be any follow-up
- on that idea. Well, the way to cure it is carbon
- 16 dioxide doesn't work, take it out.
- 17 GENERAL VERRILLI: But I think the reason,
- 18 Justice Ginsburg, is because that is not going to
- 19 make -- the carbon dioxide is also a huge part of the
- 20 problem, and so you're really not going to be getting to
- 21 the heart of the problem. And there really is an
- 22 urgency here, you know, that's part of what's driving
- 23 EPA in this situation, of course, is understanding that
- 24 this is an urgent environmental problem. It's the -- it
- 25 is the gravest environmental problem that we face now as

- 1 far as EPA and EPA's judgment, and it is one that gets
- 2 worse with the passage of time. The effects are
- 3 cumulative and they're delayed, and so every year we
- 4 wait, we make the hole deeper and we create an even
- 5 greater threat to future generations. And that really
- 6 goes to --
- 7 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: I'm sorry. I didn't
- 8 get an answer to -- hear an answer to Justice Alito's
- 9 question and I think it's an important one. There are
- 10 currently criteria pollutants under the -- under the
- 11 Act. Let's assume you find out that there's a
- 12 particular substance that does cause harm to ambient air
- 13 quality that is not already covered, and you publish a
- 14 NAAQ for that, can you decide that 100 and 250, you want
- 15 to regulate at a different threshold, just like you have
- 16 here. I mean, is this a particular assertion of
- 17 authority only with respect to greenhouse gases or does
- 18 it cover any pollutant under the Act?
- 19 GENERAL VERRILLI: Well, if you're -- if
- 20 you're going to use the NAAQS approach and designate it
- 21 as a NAAQ, as a NAAQS pollutant, then you would be under
- 22 the rules of NAAQS pollutant and -- pollutants, and that
- 23 would include this standard. But this is --
- 24 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Can you publish a
- 25 NAAQ for greenhouse gases?

1 GENERAL VERRILLI: I think it would be 2 within EPA's authority to do so, but there are really 3 significant problems with trying to regulate that way, and that's why -- but -- and -- but it's important to 4 5 understand, Mr. Chief Justice, that the PSD program 6 applies to more than just NAAQS pollutants. It's --7 it's any pollutant subject to regulation under the Act. 8 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Okay. Let's pick --9 there is a pollutant that isn't currently regulated, and 10 science advances to the point where you think it should 11 be regulated. Can you change the 100 and 250 thresholds 12 for that new covered pollutant? 13 GENERAL VERRILLI: I quess what I would say 14 about that is that if EPA found itself in exactly the 15 same circumstances it finds itself in with respect to greenhouse gases, where it's -- it feels like the 16 17 statutory definition compels it to regulate, it kicks in at 250, and you've got to issue a permit in a year, that 18 they could make a judgment comparable to the one they 19 20 made here. But it's -- that would require that 21 confluence of circumstances to arise. 22 JUSTICE BREYER: But why? Why does it have 23 to do that? Statutes all the time have implicit 24 exceptions, and not every statute has such exceptions 25 written in words into it. I mean -- you know, it's a

- 1 classic example, one after another. A statute that
- 2 requires animals to pay 50 percent on the train does not
- 3 apply to snails. Okay. I mean, that's the most common
- 4 thing in law.
- 5 So what's the big problem here that
- 6 everybody seems to have, except me, just about. I mean,
- 7 what's the big problem with writing an implicit
- 8 exception so that you don't regulate tiny little things
- 9 which no one normally wants to have regulated?
- 10 GENERAL VERRILLI: Well, if the Court were
- 11 to do that, that would certainly justify the
- 12 EPA's judgement --
- 13 JUSTICE BREYER: And now, my problem is I
- 14 will hear from many that what I would -- perhaps it
- isn't a question of what I'd like to do. The question
- 16 is, what does the law permit? And therefore, it's
- 17 helpful if you can or others think of similar examples.
- 18 GENERAL VERRILLI: Well, EPA has committed
- 19 itself in this -- in the regulations, in the rulemaking
- 20 proceedings, to try to bring the 250 tons per year into
- 21 alignment with the expectation that only large sources
- 22 will be regulated. That's what EPA is committed to.
- 23 It's --
- 24 JUSTICE SCALIA: General Verrilli, you know,
- 25 I don't have as expansive a notion of reading exceptions

- 1 into a statute that are not there as Justice Breyer
- 2 does. But assuming, just assuming that you can -- you
- 3 can read exceptions, that isn't the issue here. The
- 4 issue is whether you can read in exceptions
- 5 unnecessarily when the absurdity in question doesn't
- 6 flow inevitably from the statute, when the statute can
- 7 be interpreted another way that would not produce the
- 8 absurdity.
- 9 Aren't you compelled where there is
- 10 ambiguity to adopt the interpretation of the statute
- 11 that does not produce absurdity rather than adopting the
- 12 interpretation that produces absurdity, and then going
- 13 around altering the provisions of the contract -- of the
- 14 statute? I mean, to take Justice Breyer's bubble gum
- 15 example, yes, I suppose it -- would you have to make an
- 16 exception for bubble gum in the display window if the
- 17 statute were subject to two interpretations, one of
- 18 which would include display windows, and the other one
- 19 of which wouldn't.
- It seems to me, of course, you would have to
- 21 adopt the interpretation that didn't include display
- 22 windows. And that's what is going on here. There's --
- 23 there's -- yes, there's absurdity but the issue is how
- 24 is that absurdity to be taken account of? By simply
- 25 letting EPA rewrite the very clear numbers in the

- 1 statute, or else by adopting a permissible
- 2 interpretation of the statute that does not lead to that
- 3 absurdity. And I think that's quite a different
- 4 question from -- from what we've been discussing.
- 5 GENERAL VERRILLI: Two points about that, if
- 6 I could. First, that goes to the question of what
- 7 triggers the permit application. It's only the
- 8 expansion of the number of permit applicants that even
- 9 raises this question of the so-called absurdity. It
- 10 doesn't go to the -- to the argument -- the Petitioners
- 11 are making a far more substantial argument, that EPA
- 12 lacks any authority to consider greenhouse gas emission
- 13 under the BACT provision and other provisions, even for
- 14 sources that have a permit for their emissions of
- 15 non-greenhouse gases.
- 16 So it only goes to the question of the scope
- 17 of the triggering provision, not to EPA's authority to
- 18 use PSD to regulate greenhouse gases for entities that
- 19 are already subject to the permit for other reasons.
- Now, with respect to the trigger, what I
- 21 would say about that, Justice Scalia, is that the
- 22 statutory language is "any air pollutant." Reading
- 23 Massachusetts against EPA, the EPA came to the
- 24 conclusion that that language necessarily encompasses
- 25 greenhouse gas emissions. That conclusion is most

- 1 consistent with the EPA's statutory obligations here,
- 2 because if the choice -- and you can say the choice is
- 3 between doing something sensible and absurd results.
- 4 But really, the choice is between throwing
- 5 up your hands with respect to what EPA considers to be
- 6 the most serious air pollution problem we have or trying
- 7 to deal with the implementation problem that exists with
- 8 respect to the --
- 9 JUSTICE KAGAN: And --
- 10 GENERAL VERRILLI: -- about 15 percent of
- 11 the sources. That's really the choice here.
- 12 JUSTICE KAGAN: General, wouldn't it be
- 13 right to say that the rule that Justice Scalia is
- 14 referring to only applies if there are alternative
- 15 interpretations that are consistent with the legislative
- 16 purpose. There have to be plausible alternative
- 17 interpretations of the statute. And reading the phrase
- 18 "any pollutant" to mean any pollutant except for
- 19 greenhouse gases for reasons that have nothing to do
- 20 with the purposes of the statute is not a plausible
- 21 alternative interpretation. Wouldn't that be the
- 22 argument?
- 23 GENERAL VERRILLI: Yes, that's exactly the
- 24 argument, and I think that's exactly what EPA did when
- 25 it read Massachusetts against EPA and its understanding

- 1 of air pollutant and thought about that in the context
- 2 of the regulatory goals of this program.
- 3 JUSTICE SCALIA: In the -- you know, the
- 4 argument against that is, no, that the statute evidences
- 5 concern with ambient air quality and requires that to be
- 6 measured. And the agency acknowledges that you cannot
- 7 possibly measure the effect on ambient air quality of
- 8 greenhouse gases.
- 9 So it is not clearly compatible with the
- 10 statute to bring greenhouse gases into regulation.
- 11 JUSTICE BREYER: All right. And the other
- 12 is -- I mean, this is quite -- I see -- I've got it
- 13 focused now. It seems to me in my mind that we have two
- 14 questions, and I think they were well stated by Justice
- 15 Scalia, actually. The first is, what is the alternative
- 16 interpretation that doesn't apply it here? And that
- 17 would be an interpretation that doesn't put greenhouse
- 18 gases within this PSD provision at all. And that might
- 19 be really unthinkable -- no, not unthinkable, but have
- 20 worse consequences than worrying about the
- 21 interpretation of this trigger provision.
- 22 So either we have to do the one or the
- 23 other. Either we have to interpret the trigger
- 24 provision with flexibility so that there are written
- 25 exceptions -- unwritten exceptions in it, one way or the

- 1 other, or we have to say you can't do that, and
- 2 therefore they don't apply to all. Which is worse? Is
- 3 that a -- have I got it right?
- 4 GENERAL VERRILLI: I think that states it
- 5 fairly. I think that states it fairly.
- 6 JUSTICE SCALIA: I don't think so. I mean,
- 7 it depends on what you mean by "unthinkable," General
- 8 Verrilli. Is it --
- 9 GENERAL VERRILLI: I think that was Justice
- 10 Breyer who said "unthinkable."
- 11 (Laughter.)
- 12 JUSTICE SCALIA: But what is supposed to be
- 13 unthinkable, that greenhouse gases should not be
- 14 regulated? Maybe that is unthinkable. But the issue
- is, is it unthinkable that Congress did not intend to
- 16 regulate greenhouse gases when it enacted the current
- 17 provisions of the statute?
- JUSTICE KAGAN: But isn't that the argument?
- 19 Justice's Scalia's alternative plausible interpretation
- 20 of the statutes might have been an alternative plausible
- 21 interpretation of the statute pre-Massachusetts. But it
- 22 no longer is; isn't that right?
- 23 GENERAL VERRILLI: That's certainly true,
- 24 but it wasn't -- but it -- also, even before
- 25 Massachusetts, it had -- there's significant problems

- 1 with it.
- 2 JUSTICE ALITO: Here we have a statutory
- 3 provision that has very specific numbers, and the agency
- 4 has said these numbers are absurd. We're going to
- 5 multiple them by 400. Now, in the entire history of
- 6 Federal regulation what is the best example you can give
- 7 us of an agency's doing something like that, where it
- 8 has taken a statute with numbers and has crossed them
- 9 out and written in the numbers that it likes?
- 10 GENERAL VERRILLI: Obviously, I wouldn't
- 11 characterize it quite that way. I don't have a case
- 12 that's exactly on point. I think Morton against Ruiz is
- 13 a case that's like this in the sense that the agency had
- 14 an obligation to provide something to a certain
- 15 population, and it didn't have the funds that made it
- 16 available to provide it to the whole population that was
- 17 statutorily entitled, and it made the judgments it made
- 18 to try to get the program to work. And I mean, if I
- 19 could give you a hypothetical --
- 20 JUSTICE KENNEDY: What was that case?
- 21 GENERAL VERRILLI: Morton against Ruiz. And
- 22 -- and if I gave you a hypothetical on that -- if
- 23 Congress enacted a statute that said that the -- the
- 24 Customs authorities, border authorities have an
- 25 obligation to search every cargo container that comes

- 1 into a port in the United States for radioactive
- 2 materials, but no container shall be delayed more than 3
- 3 days, if a -- if an agency were faced with those kinds
- 4 of obligations, and it didn't have the resources to get
- 5 every container searched within 3 days, and it said,
- 6 well, what we're going to do is search the containers
- 7 that come from places where we think the risk is most
- 8 likely, I think everyone would think that that's a
- 9 reasonable interpretation of the -- of the agency's
- 10 charge under the statute; and that's essentially what
- 11 the EPA has done here.
- 12 JUSTICE KENNEDY: Just to be clear, you're
- 13 not saying -- or are you saying -- that if you're denied
- 14 the authority you seek here, there can be no significant
- 15 regulation of greenhouse gases under the Act? You are
- 16 not saying that?
- 17 GENERAL VERRILLI: No. I think -- I want to
- 18 provide some more specificity, though, in my answer, if
- 19 I could. The Court has held in American Electric Power
- 20 that the EPA has the authority to prescribe general
- 21 national standards. Now, with respect to the PSD
- 22 program, I want to -- I do want to emphasize that there
- 23 is a distinction between the question of what triggers
- 24 your obligation to get a PSD permit and whether your
- 25 emissions of greenhouse gases count as any air pollutant

- 1 that triggers it, versus a situation in which if you are
- 2 already subject to a PSD permit because you are
- 3 emitting, say, a NAAQS pollutant or another one of the
- 4 regulated pollutants, whether under Section 7574(a)(4),
- 5 you have to meet the Best Available Control Technology
- 6 requirement, which is phrased in terms of a requirement
- 7 for each pollutant subject to regulation under the Act.
- 8 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: That's the 80 --
- 9 that's the 8386 question, right?
- 10 GENERAL VERRILLI: That's correct, Your
- 11 Honor. That's correct. And so I think those things are
- 12 different. And so there really are three points.
- 13 There's 7411, there's triggering, and then there's if --
- 14 if you're already subject to the permit. And the
- 15 questions about whether the PSD program is limited
- 16 entirely to pollutants that affect local ambient air
- 17 quality, I just don't think that adds up at the end of
- 18 the day.
- 19 For one thing, EPA has been regulating since
- 20 1988 under the PSD program something called
- 21 ozone-depleting substances. We talked about this a
- 22 little bit in our brief. Those are substances that have
- 23 no local effects; they -- they are substances that are
- 24 released; they go up into the stratosphere; and they eat
- 25 up the ozone and that then creates additional

- 1 ultraviolet rays which cause cancer and cataracts.
- 2 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Well, that has local
- 3 effects. I mean, everybody knows there's smog in Los
- 4 Angeles versus Montana, right?
- 5 GENERAL VERRILLI: Well, that -- well, if
- 6 those local effects count, then certainly, greenhouse
- 7 gases have those kinds of local effects, because they
- 8 raise the sea levels, which cause flooding in certain
- 9 places and they cause droughts in other places. And so,
- 10 to the extent you're talking about local effects, the
- 11 greenhouse gases really aren't local --
- 12 JUSTICE SCALIA: Where have the sea levels
- 13 risen other than Massachusetts?
- 14 (Laughter.)
- 15 GENERAL VERRILLI: Well, certainly
- 16 Massachusetts, but -- but with respect -- but EPA has
- 17 been regulating ozone-depleting substances since 1988.
- 18 JUSTICE ALITO: Is it your argument Congress
- 19 has acquiesced in that?
- 20 GENERAL VERRILLI: Yes. In fact, we think
- 21 in 1990, that they ratified it. Because in 1990,
- 22 Congress undertook a very substantial amendment of the
- 23 Clean Air Act. One thing they did was specifically
- 24 address ozone-depleting substances. They created a new
- 25 Title VI for ozone-depleting substances, so they were

- 1 clearly focused on it. And they did not pull
- 2 ozone-depleting substances out of the PSD program at
- 3 that time. They left them in. And that's significant
- 4 because they did pull out hazardous air pollution -- air
- 5 pollutants, which was another new category they created
- 6 in 1990 for the PSD program.
- 7 JUSTICE ALITO: I thought there was a very
- 8 short time lag between EPA's assertion of the authority
- 9 to regulate the ozone-depleting substances under the PSD
- 10 program and the enactment of --
- 11 GENERAL VERRILLI: 2 years. It was 2 years.
- 12 JUSTICE ALITO: So was it a full 2 years?
- 13 GENERAL VERRILLI: I don't know if it was a
- 14 full 2 years, but -- but the Congress focused
- 15 specifically on exactly how ozone-depleting substances
- 16 were going to be regulated under the Clean Air Act, and
- 17 they created a new -- they were -- it's not an accident.
- 18 They were focused exactly on how they were going to be
- 19 regulated. So I do think -- so I do think it's quite a
- 20 strong ratification argument. And --
- 21 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: What's the -- I know
- 22 litigants hate this question. If you were going to
- lose, what's the best way for you to lose?
- 24 GENERAL VERRILLI: I knew you were going to
- 25 ask me that question.

1 (Laughter.) 2 GENERAL VERRILLI: So I actually think, you know, there's the Judge Kavanaugh approach, there's the 3 ACC approach, you know, we -- obviously, we're not 4 5 endorsing this, but --6 JUSTICE GINSBURG: There's a difference 7 between them. 8 GENERAL VERRILLI: There is a significant 9 difference between them. But --JUSTICE GINSBURG: So which one? Either one 10 11 of them? GENERAL VERRILLI: Well, I've got another 12 13 thought on that subject --14 (Laughter.) 15 GENERAL VERRILLI: -- which is, as I said to 16 Justice Alito earlier, the whole problem in terms of expanding the permitting requirement is CO2. And so 17 that if the Court were to say that "any air pollutant" 18 can't be interpreted in the way that EPA has interpreted 19 it at the trigger level, to mean what we think it says, 20 21 and what Massachusetts against EPA compelled, but if the 22 Court disagrees with that, it seems to me the -- the 23 answer that is least problematic from EPA's point of view does the -- is the least dissonant and the least --24 25 causes the least risk of collateral consequences with

- 1 respect to established regulatory programs, which go
- 2 beyond NAAQS pollutants under PSD, would be to say that
- 3 you can't read any air pollutant to include CO2, because
- 4 the inclusion of CO2 generates a permitting obligation
- 5 that is out of accord with what Congress would have
- 6 expected. I think -- I'm not endorsing that, but I
- 7 think that's --
- 8 JUSTICE GINSBURG: Well, what -- what about
- 9 BACT for CO2, then?
- 10 GENERAL VERRILLI: Well, no, BACT would be
- in -- that's just at the trigger, Justice Ginsburg.
- 12 Just at the trigger. We think that the -- I just don't
- 13 see, given that BACT says in unambiguous terms in
- 14 Section 7475(a)(4) that anybody who's subject to a
- 15 permit has got to meet BACT for each pollutant subject
- 16 to regulation under the chapter, meaning the Act. I
- 17 just don't see how you can get out from under that --
- 18 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: You've got to
- 19 follow -- you've got to follow the plain text of the
- 20 statute there.
- 21 GENERAL VERRILLI: Well, if the command of
- 22 the statute is that BACT applies for each pollutant
- 23 subject to regulation --
- 24 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Yeah, but the plan
- 25 of the statute is 250 tons per year, too; and you've

- 1 changed that to 100,000 tons per year.
- 2 GENERAL VERRILLI: Right, but I think --
- 3 JUSTICE KENNEDY: And you were going to get
- 4 to 7475(3), (a), (b), (c) on that point.
- 5 GENERAL VERRILLI: Well, 7475(3)(c) also
- 6 does say that if -- if EPA does set a greenhouse gas
- 7 standard for a particular stationary source like power
- 8 plants, then that becomes a condition of the permit.
- 9 That's what (c)(3) says. And so between (c)(3) and
- 10 BACT, greenhouse gas -- assuming that EPA acts under
- 11 7411, those, it seems to me, have to be in.
- 12 This is a question about the definition of
- 13 the trigger. Now, we don't agree with it. But -- but
- 14 in trying to faithfully answer Your Honor's question,
- 15 that's what I think. That that's --
- 16 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: I just want to be clear.
- 17 Your reading or -- or your suggested out would mean
- 18 that -- that only the major facilities as defined now
- 19 essentially would -- would --
- 20 GENERAL VERRILLI: If you took CO2 out of
- 21 the equation, I don't think this -- the expanded scope
- 22 of the permitting obligation is going to happen, because
- 23 it's the CO2 emissions that expand the scope. And so
- 24 that's why -- you know, I'm not endorsing this. I'm
- 25 just saying --

1	JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: Well, Justice Breyer
2	said the difference between 83 percent and 86 percent,
3	that 3 percent difference of who you're covering is
4	thousands and thousands of people.
5	GENERAL VERRILLI: That's correct.
6	JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: Or entities, I should
7	say, not people, of institutions. Is that going to be
8	the same under the reading that you are proposing?
9	GENERAL VERRILLI: Pretty close. But I
10	think but I think the reason that we would the
11	reason that the exclusion of CO2 seems to me to be the
12	least problematic is that EPA does have an established
13	regulatory framework here that applies not just to NAAQS
14	pollutants, but to the other non-NAAQS pollutants,
15	sulfuric acid mist and the other things that EPA
16	regulates under the PSD program. And you wouldn't be
17	redefining the trigger to exclude those things which
18	have previously been included. That's, I think, the
19	the rifle shot solution, to the extent that the Court
20	thinks it's a problem.
21	JUSTICE GINSBURG: Well, wouldn't the proper
22	answer be if we are rejecting your entire position to
23	say there are these other options? We're not going to
24	say take out CO2. We're not going to say adopt the
25	Kavanaugh approach. We're going to say those are

- 1 choices for EPA to make.
- 2 GENERAL VERRILLI: Yes, certainly that's
- 3 right. Certainly, that's right. But I think the -- the
- 4 argument that, as I -- as I read Judge Kavanaugh's
- 5 opinion and as I understood my friend's argument on
- 6 behalf of the ACC, was that the statute essentially
- 7 compelled the conclusion that you had to pick one or the
- 8 other of those alternative readings in order to avoid
- 9 expanding the permitting obligation.
- And the problem with that way of thinking
- 11 about it is that there are many other pollutants,
- 12 non-NAAQS pollutants that EPA has regulated for years
- 13 and used as a trigger for years to require PSD permits,
- 14 which you would be at risk of excluding from the program
- if you were to adopt the ACC or the Judge Kavanaugh
- 16 reading as triggers, and that's a problem that, it seems
- 17 to me, the Court ought to be thinking about trying to
- 18 avoid.
- 19 JUSTICE KENNEDY: I have to say in reading
- 20 the brief for the States and reading your brief, I -- I
- 21 couldn't find a single precedent that strongly supports
- 22 your position. Brown & Williamson I think is
- 23 distinguishable for the reasons set forth in the reply
- 24 brief. And what are the cases you want me to cite if I
- write the opinion to sustain your position?

- 1 GENERAL VERRILLI: So at the -- at the --
- 2 sustaining the argument that the trigger applies here, I
- 3 do think there aren't -- there aren't a lot of cases.
- 4 You're right. This is not a -- a situation that arises
- 5 very often. I think Morton against Ruiz comes the
- 6 closest.
- 7 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: But that's not cited
- 8 in your brief, is it?
- 9 GENERAL VERRILLI: No, it's not, Mr. Chief
- 10 Justice. That's true. It was cited and relied upon by
- 11 the EPA in the rulemaking proceedings and rulemaking
- 12 opinions.
- So if I could just sum up here. The EPA did
- 14 what it did because the problem it's confronting is a
- 15 problem that EPA considers to be urgent.
- 16 JUSTICE ALITO: General, I don't want to
- 17 interrupt your summation, but on the -- let me just ask
- 18 this quick question. On the issue of what happens with
- 19 a facility that is subject to the PSD program because of
- 20 the emission of other pollutants, the Petitioners argue
- 21 that the permitting process would be entirely different
- 22 for greenhouse gases because it would make no sense to
- 23 require monitoring of local air conditions and -- air
- 24 conditions. It would make no sense to try to assess the
- 25 effect of the emission of the greenhouse gases on the

- 1 area in the region. Could you just give a guick
- 2 response to that?
- 3 GENERAL VERRILLI: You know, I'm glad you
- 4 raised that, Justice Alito. That's actually quite
- 5 important. That's just not right. I mean, if you think
- 6 about it in multiple ways, there are multiple pollutants
- 7 that are currently regulated under the PSD program.
- 8 Some of them have National Ambient Air Quality
- 9 Standards, and the local testing makes sense for those.
- 10 Others don't have National Air Quality -- Ambient Air
- 11 Quality Standards, like sulfuric acid mists, for
- 12 example, and others. There aren't standards for those.
- And the way EPA has handled that is they
- 14 look at the regulations. The regulation says in terms
- of the monitoring that the statute requires, there's a
- 16 specific exemption for substances that are otherwise
- 17 regulated but for which there is no NAAQS or related
- 18 standard. So they're just exempt from the monitoring
- 19 requirement.
- There's also an analysis requirement. And
- 21 what EPA has said and what the States do in their
- 22 permitting processes with respect to the analysis
- 23 requirement for the non-NAAQS substances, for example,
- 24 sulfuric acid mists, is to apply a very simple idea.
- 25 You're not trying in that situation to make sure that

- 1 the particular emissions aren't having -- are consistent
- 2 with the overall ambient air quality level. It's a very
- 3 simple calculus. More is worse; less is better.
- 4 And so with respect to things like sulfuric
- 5 acid mist, with respect to things like ozone-depleting
- 6 substances, that is how it has always worked at the
- 7 State level under the PSD program. You just -- you look
- 8 at what the BACT emissions levels are. You try to get
- 9 them down.
- And so you're not treating greenhouse gases
- 11 any differently than sulfuric acid mist or
- 12 ozone-depleting substances or the others that don't have
- 13 those requirements.
- 14 And then in terms of localized effects
- 15 versus wider effects, I mean, I would just remind the
- 16 Court about the EMC-Homer City case from just a few
- 17 months ago, it's not at all unusual that the EPA would
- 18 be regulating emissions in one place because they --
- 19 they impose effects hundreds or even thousands of miles
- away.
- 21 The pollutants emitted in Ohio or Kentucky
- 22 contribute to the air pollution levels in New Haven or
- 23 Bangor, Maine. That's what that case was all about.
- 24 And so -- and you regulate those pollutants also through
- 25 the PSD program. And so you don't -- you aren't in that

- 1 situation looking just to see what happens in the local
- 2 area. It's just never been the nature of this program.
- 3 It's not -- it just doesn't work that way.
- 4 And if I could just remind the Court, in
- 5 conclusion, why EPA did what it did, it is because this
- 6 is an urgent problem. Every year that passes, this
- 7 problem gets worse, and the threat to future generations
- 8 get worse. And I think, faced with the obligations that
- 9 EPA had, it made the most reasonable choice available to
- 10 it. Thank you.
- 11 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Well, you've got
- 12 five extra minutes, to be -- to be fair.
- 13 And one thing --
- 14 GENERAL VERRILLI: You should have told me
- 15 that before my summation.
- 16 (Laughter.)
- 17 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: You had already
- 18 gotten going, I didn't want to disturb -- you don't
- 19 think that greenhouse gases should be regulated at the
- 20 250-tons-per-year level, right? You said Congress did
- 21 not intend that, and it would be absurd.
- 22 GENERAL VERRILLI: Yes. Certainly --
- 23 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: So what level do you
- 24 think they should be regulated at? In other words, what
- 25 intelligible principle are you taking from the statute

- 1 to say we're going to -- we're at 100 now. We're going
- 2 to aim for 50 or -- in other words, if you had all the
- 3 resources you need, what level would you pick as the
- 4 proper one --
- 5 GENERAL VERRILLI: Well, I think --
- 6 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: -- other than --
- 7 since it's not 250?
- 8 GENERAL VERRILLI: You would want to look at
- 9 the definition of what it means to emit 250 tons per
- 10 year, and then you'd want to think about the underlying
- 11 notion that what Congress is trying to do is to impose
- 12 these obligations on facilities that are capable of
- 13 responding to them, that are going to tend to be
- 14 facilities that are major in quality. And then those
- 15 are the things that are going to guide you in trying to
- 16 figure out what the number is. And I think that is what
- 17 EPA is trying to do.
- 18 JUSTICE KAGAN: Could I make sure I
- 19 understand that? Would you pick the number that leads
- 20 to the same class of emitters? Is that the number you
- 21 would pick?
- 22 GENERAL VERRILLI: I'm sorry, Justice Kagan.
- 23 The same class of emitters as?
- 24 JUSTICE KAGAN: As in the more typical
- 25 emissions context, right? So 100 and 250 --

- 1 GENERAL VERRILLI: It might -- I don't think
- 2 it would --
- 3 JUSTICE KAGAN: -- captures a certain set of
- 4 emitters. Are you essentially looking for the number
- 5 that captures the same class of emitters?
- 6 GENERAL VERRILLI: I think -- I don't know
- 7 that it will be the same, but I think it'll be -- but I
- 8 think the -- the class will be a lot smaller than the
- 9 class under EPA's current understanding of what it means
- 10 to emit 250 tons per year.
- 11 JUSTICE GINSBURG: Well, how did the EPA
- 12 come at -- settle on the number?
- 13 GENERAL VERRILLI: Yeah, they tried to
- 14 explain that in -- in one of the rulemaking orders, and
- 15 I think what they did was to try to figure out the right
- 16 balance point where they were accomplishing very
- 17 significant emissions limitations while not sweeping in
- 18 sources that were -- these very large number of small
- 19 sources that were only making the incremental -- an
- 20 incremental difference.
- 21 And what EPA did was say, essentially, we
- 22 can get to 85 percent of the emissions we're trying to
- 23 get to by setting the standards where we've set them.
- 24 JUSTICE BREYER: Why -- two things. One is,
- 25 you haven't said anything about the Title V problem,

- 1 which they said was at 6.1 million persons or
- 2 individuals or, you know, businesses coming into it. So
- 3 how do you get them out of that one?
- 4 GENERAL VERRILLI: Well, I think the
- 5 streamlining. Same idea, I mean --
- 6 JUSTICE BREYER: It's the same basic point.
- 7 Okay. Why -- and there would be a good reason for this,
- 8 but the bell that it rang is that agencies have
- 9 tremendous authority about how they distribute their
- 10 enforcement resources. They don't have to enforce
- 11 everything against everything. And that is a basic
- 12 principle. They have to put their money where it will
- 13 do the most good. And so why wasn't that -- no one's
- 14 really argued it --
- 15 GENERAL VERRILLI: Well, I --
- 16 JUSTICE BREYER: I just wondered. It's sort
- 17 of like the missing --
- 18 GENERAL VERRILLI: There would be a helpful
- 19 point for us, but for this, and then I'll tell you
- 20 why -- explain why we didn't, because there is a citizen
- 21 suit provision in the -- in the law. And so the --
- that's what they'll tell you on rebuttal.
- JUSTICE BREYER: Yes.
- 24 GENERAL VERRILLI: And so, I think that's
- 25 the reason why, because it's subject to a citizen suit,

- 1 whether we exercise our --
- 2 JUSTICE BREYER: In other words, you would
- 3 be out of it totally, and any citizen could go bring a
- 4 suit and say where is your permit?
- 5 GENERAL VERRILLI: Right.
- 6 JUSTICE BREYER: I see.
- 7 GENERAL VERRILLI: That's the problem with
- 8 that. If there are no further questions, thank you.
- 9 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Thank you, General.
- 10 Mr. Keisler, 5 minutes.
- 11 REBUTTAL ARGUMENT OF PETER KEISLER
- 12 ON BEHALF OF PRIVATE PARTY PETITIONERS
- 13 MR. KEISLER: Thank you, Mr. Chief Justice.
- 14 You had asked the Solicitor General what
- 15 would BACT involve in this kind of situation. And I
- 16 think Your Honor gave a perhaps absurd hypothetical
- 17 about light bulbs. Your Honor should know that EPA's
- instruction to the State and local permitting
- 19 authorities does address light bulbs in the cafeteria.
- 20 What it says is that State and local permitting
- 21 authorities likely -- likely do not need to look at
- 22 whether more efficient light bulbs should be used in a
- 23 plant's cafeteria because that would probably be not
- 24 worth the burden in terms of the payoff.
- But the fact that they are talking about it

- 1 at that level of detail just brings into sharp relief
- 2 that this PSD process when applied to greenhouse gases,
- 3 which is about energy efficiency, not about adding
- 4 technology to control the stuff that comes out of smoke
- 5 stacks, is pervasive in potentially affecting every
- 6 aspect of an industrial plant's operation and asking the
- 7 90 State and local permitting authorities to decide what
- 8 needs to be done. And that's what is so different
- 9 between this and the NSPS program which functions by
- 10 setting emissions standards that each plant can then
- 11 decide how best --
- 12 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: So what do I do with the
- 13 examples in the brief of the 144 permits that have
- 14 already been given, people who have managed to come into
- 15 compliance under BACT?
- 16 MR. KEISLER: It's certainly not our
- 17 submission that every single determination by every one
- 18 of these authorities is going to be unreasonable or
- 19 outrageous or is going to reach into the cafeterias.
- 20 But it is the scope of this is so different in nature
- 21 and kind than the NSPS program, which would set
- 22 efficient standards that people would be able to meet.
- And the second point I would like to make,
- 24 Your Honor, is there is a selectivity about what the
- 25 agency considers ambiguous and unambiguous. It

- 1 unambiguously is required to apply Massachusetts'
- 2 definition of "pollutant," but "any air pollutant" is
- 3 ambiguous enough to accommodate any regulated air
- 4 pollutant.
- 5 But 100 and 250 tons per year, that's really
- 6 ambiguous because it can mean 100,000. And I mention
- 7 this because the selectiveness with which EPA has turned
- 8 the ambiguity on and off, so that in combination it
- 9 maximizes the agency's discretion shows that when we
- 10 talk about what is -- what does the least violence to
- 11 the statute, we have to think about it, among other
- 12 things, along the parameter of separation of powers and
- 13 whether the way in which the agency has perceived it
- 14 here has arrogated an exceptional and troubling degree
- of discretion to design its own climate change program.
- 16 And finally, with respect to the different
- 17 definitions of pollutant, we have certainly proceeded
- 18 here as if we are defining that particular word in the
- 19 statute, but here is another way to think about the
- 20 interpretative exercise here and that is Brown &
- 21 Williamson. Brown & Williamson started with the
- 22 assumption that the definitions in the statute of drug
- and device encompassed nicotine and cigarettes, but then
- 24 it went on to say that giving the FDA jurisdiction under
- 25 those programs over tobacco would be inconsistent with

1	the regulatory structure that Congress enacted.
2	And when it did that, it didn't go back to
3	those definitions and say, we have to now figure out
4	which word in that definition means something different
5	than what we originally assumed. It said that the
6	interpretation as a whole conflicted with the statute as
7	a whole and that was sufficient. We think the same is
8	true here.
9	If the Court has no further questions, I
10	thank the Court.
11	CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Thank you, counsel,
12	counsel. The case is submitted.
13	(Whereupon, at 11:42 a.m., the case in the
14	above-titled matter was submitted.)
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