1	IN THE SUPREME COURT OF THE UNITED STATES		
2	x		
3	MOONES MELLOULI, :		
4	Petitioner : No. 13-1034		
5	v. :		
6	ERIC H. HOLDER, JR., :		
7	ATTORNEY GENERAL. :		
8	x		
9	Washington, D.C.		
10	Wednesday, January 14, 2015		
11			
12	The above-entitled matter came on for oral		
13	argument before the Supreme Court of the United States		
14	at 10:11 a.m.		
15	APPEARANCES:		
16	JON LARAMORE, ESQ., Indianapolis, Ind.; on behalf of		
17	Petitioner.		
18	RACHEL P. KOVNER, ESQ., Assistant to the Solicitor		
19	General, Department of Justice, Washington, D.C.; on		
20	behalf of Respondent.		
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PROCEEDINGS

2	(10:11 a.m.)		
3	THE COURT: We'll hear argument first this		
4	morning in Case 13-1034, Mellouli v. Holder.		
5	Mr. Laramore.		
6	ORAL ARGUMENT OF JON LARAMORE		
7	ON BEHALF OF THE PETITIONER		
8	MR. LARAMORE: Mr. Chief Justice, and may it		
9	please the Court:		

- The initial goal of this appeal was to
- 11 reverse a single Board of Immigration Appeals decision
- 12 that changed the removability analysis for drug
- 13 paraphernalia convictions. It abandoned the
- 14 longstanding practice that Congress had ratified.
- We wanted to reinstate the rule that still
- 16 applies in all other drug deportation decisions which
- 17 looks at the facts that must be established by a
- 18 conviction and at the record of conviction, when that's
- 19 appropriate, under this Court's precedents in Moncrieffe
- 20 and Descamps. That methodology has led to tens of
- 21 thousands of drug deportations each year, but not for
- 22 someone convicted of possessing a sock.
- Now, the government has argued that this
- 24 wrongheaded BIA paraphernalia decision should be
- 25 expanded to all drug convictions. The government wants

- 1 any drug conviction to be a deportable offense, even if
- 2 it's clearly for a non-Federal drug.
- 3 This Court should reject the government's
- 4 position and the BIA's position and adhere to the
- 5 time-tested approach that the statute -- to the -- to
- 6 the statute that Congress has ratified.
- 7 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: Can I --
- 8 JUSTICE ALITO: Can we begin by looking at
- 9 the text of the statute? What does the phrase "relating
- 10 to a controlled substance," et cetera, modify?
- 11 MR. LARAMORE: Relating to serves the
- 12 function of connecting the very broad range of offenses
- 13 that Congress wants to make deportable to the list of
- 14 substances that -- that the -- that Congress has
- 15 specified.
- 16 JUSTICE ALITO: Well, let's say we were --
- 17 let's say we're back in high school and we have to
- 18 diagram this sentence.
- 19 MR. LARAMORE: Yes.
- 20 JUSTICE ALITO: We could start out that way,
- 21 and maybe we'll get beyond it, but let's start out that
- 22 way. We have a phrase here, "relating to a controlled
- 23 substance." What does it modify? It has to modify a
- 24 noun. What noun does it modify?
- 25 MR. LARAMORE: "Relating to" would modify --

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1 would modify "law" or "regulation." But if you
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- 2 bought -- if you diagram the sentence, everything --
- JUSTICE ALITO: If it modifies "law," then I
- 4 think you've lost the case.
- 5 MR. LARAMORE: But if -- if you diagram the
- 6 sentence, though, everything in that whole phrase,
- 7 "convicted of a violation of a law or regulation
- 8 relating to a controlled substance under Section 802,"
- 9 all modifies "alien." The whole phrase has to be taken
- 10 together and read together to modify what alien is
- 11 deportable.
- 12 And -- and the pure grammar does -- is not
- 13 sufficient to determine what Congress meant when it
- 14 enacted that text.
- 15 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: If you -- if you -- I
- 16 think Justice Alito is right. If you're claiming that,
- 17 then you're accepting that there's ambiguity, and you
- 18 have an uphill battle to fight.
- 19 MR. LARAMORE: Well, again, given the text
- 20 and the context of this statute and the history of its
- 21 application over decades and decades, um there's --
- 22 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: That's an argument that
- 23 they're arbitrary and capricious.
- MR. LARAMORE: Well, it -- it's also part of
- 25 the analysis that goes into determining the Chevron, the

- 1 question that you allude to, Justice Sotomayor, because
- 2 Chevron should be approached after applying the usual
- 3 principles of statutory interpretation, and that's --
- 4 that's what Chevron says.
- 5 JUSTICE BREYER: Wait, wait. How does it --
- 6 how does it -- I've missed this. I -- I'm missing
- 7 something. Why -- why do you lose the case?
- 8 MR. LARAMORE: Well --
- 9 JUSTICE BREYER: I mean, I -- I assume
- 10 that -- I assumed as you said -- what -- what are you
- 11 fighting here? I assumed, as you said, that -- that the
- 12 words --
- 13 JUSTICE ALITO: Well, that was my question.
- 14 JUSTICE BREYER: -- relating to a controlled
- 15 substance as defined in Section 102 concern any law or
- 16 regulation. And --
- MR. LARAMORE: And that's only --
- JUSTICE BREYER: You deny that?
- 19 MR. LARAMORE: Well -- and -- but that's
- 20 only part of the analysis.
- JUSTICE BREYER: I understand that it's not.
- 22 I thought that was not your argument to deny that. Your
- 23 argument was that this -- where -- where you have a -- a
- 24 State law or a foreign law or something, and it does
- 25 relate to the regulation of a controlled substance, but

- 1 a lot of other things as well, that that falls outside.
- 2 MR. LARAMORE: Yes. And particularly in a
- 3 sentence that -- that has such a focus on the word
- 4 "convicted."
- 5 JUSTICE BREYER: Suppose it
- 6 relates to the State law, there -- there are 36 802
- 7 substances and here it has -- it relates to 37. That's
- 8 case one.
- 9 Case two, it relates to 4,037.
- 10 MR. LARAMORE: Yes
- 11 JUSTICE BREYER: And both of these statutes
- 12 contain the 36 that are in Section 802. One contains
- 13 4,000 more, and one contains one more. How am I
- 14 supposed to analyze those two statutes?
- 15 MR. LARAMORE: This goes to the application
- 16 of the categorical approach and the modified categorical
- 17 approach. If the identity of the substance is -- is an
- 18 element of the offense, then you use the modified
- 19 categorical approach, you look at the record of
- 20 conviction, and you determine what substance is
- 21 involved. And if it's a substance on the 802 list, then
- 22 the person is deportable.
- 23 And as the analysis that we've provided in
- 24 the appendix to our reply brief shows, many, many, many
- 25 State statutes um are divisible in exactly that manner.

- 1 JUSTICE BREYER: Okay. So your -- your
- 2 argument is, it relates to 4,036, and 36 are 802s. And
- 3 so what we do is we read the statute. It doesn't tell
- 4 us what this conviction is about. We look to the
- 5 documents in the modified categorical. If it lists one
- of the 36, that's the end of it, good-bye, he's
- 7 deported.
- 8 MR. LARAMORE: Yes.
- 9 JUSTICE BREYER: If it doesn't, we don't
- 10 know. If we don't know, he wins.
- 11 MR. LARAMORE: Yes. That's exactly right.
- 12 JUSTICE BREYER: Okay.
- JUSTICE ALITO: Well, that -- that might be
- 14 sensible, but I -- I really do need to start with the
- 15 text of the statute and understand what you make of the
- 16 text of the statute.
- 17 So if "relating to" modifies "law," do you
- 18 deny that the law -- that the -- the Kansas law in
- 19 question here relates to a controlled substance? Or do
- 20 you read relating to a controlled substance to mean
- 21 relating solely to controlled substances as defined by
- 22 Federal law?
- 23 MR. LARAMORE: The Kansas statute in this
- 24 instance relates to a Federally controlled substance
- 25 sometimes. It relates to -- and that's why --

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1 JUSTICE ALITO: But the law -- the law
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- 2 relates to what it relates to. It doesn't relates to.
- 3 It doesn't relate to something at one time and something
- 4 at another time. What does the law relate to? The law
- 5 relates to a long list of drugs. The great majority of
- 6 them are on the Federal list. A few of them are not on
- 7 the Federal list. Now, if it said relating solely to
- 8 drugs on the Federal list, you'd have an argument. I
- 9 just need to know what you want us to do with the text
- 10 of the -- of the statute.
- 11 MR. LARAMORE: When it's in the context that
- 12 it's in, in -- in this sentence, again, with the focus
- on convicted, a -- a law that -- or I'm sorry, a word
- 14 that Congress has put -- has used in our immigration
- 15 statutes for decades with this particular meaning,
- 16 convicted is the statutory hook, as the Court said in
- 17 Moncrieffe, for the categorical approach. And it's --
- 18 JUSTICE GINSBURG: Suppose -- suppose the
- 19 State's list was identical to the Federal list. You
- 20 still don't know which particular. We know, but it's
- 21 not part of the charge.
- MR. LARAMORE: Yes.
- JUSTICE GINSBURG: So Kansas has an
- 24 identical list.
- 25 MR. LARAMORE: If it's identical or

- 1 narrower, the person is deportable. And there are many
- 2 statutes --
- 3 JUSTICE GINSBURG: And if it has one that's
- 4 different, not deportable?
- 5 MR. LARAMORE: No. If -- if the -- if the
- 6 substance is an element and you use the modified
- 7 categorical approach, then you can determine what --
- 8 what substance is at issue and --
- 9 JUSTICE GINSBURG: Well, we don't know what
- 10 substance -- in this case, we don't.
- 11 MR. LARAMORE: If you don't --
- 12 JUSTICE GINSBURG: It's not charged. So
- 13 it's not an element.
- 14 MR. LARAMORE: That's --
- 15 JUSTICE GINSBURG: So it's not -- it's the
- 16 difference that --
- 17 MR. LARAMORE: It's not in the record of
- 18 conviction.
- 19 JUSTICE GINSBURG: It -- it doesn't seem to
- 20 make a whole lot of sense to say deportable if the lists
- 21 are identical, but if Kansas has one more on the list
- 22 not deportable.
- 23 MR. LARAMORE: This Court has -- well, this
- 24 Court has -- has applied the categorical approach in
- 25 just that way, as have many of the courts of appeals.

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1 It is a -- it is a way of determining what
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- 2 is the -- the -- what the person was convicted of,
- 3 because you look at the facts that are -- that must be
- 4 found for the conviction, and it's a mode of analysis
- 5 that's been used in the immigration laws going back
- 6 decades.
- 7 JUSTICE SCALIA: I mean, that's lovely, but
- 8 it doesn't get you around the question that Justice
- 9 Alito asked, what is the law? May I make a suggestion?
- 10 MR. LARAMORE: Certainly, Justice Scalia.
- 11 JUSTICE SCALIA: Perhaps the law -- if you
- 12 ask somebody what law did Mellouli violate here, it
- 13 would be perfectly natural to respond by reciting one --
- 14 the elements of the law that he violated. He was
- 15 convicted of possessing drug paraphernalia to store a
- 16 controlled substance.
- 17 And so also with any other violation of a
- 18 law that names a number of controlled substances. If
- 19 you ask what law did -- did you violate, he would say, I
- 20 violated the -- the law that made it unlawful to have
- 21 marijuana or that it made it unlawful to have cocaine.
- 22 It seems to me you've got to -- you -- you
- 23 have to divide the word "law" and the word "regulation"
- 24 up into the component elements of the law or regulation
- 25 before you can reach the result that you would like to

- 1 reach.
- 2 MR. LARAMORE: Yes. And that's --
- JUSTICE SCALIA: Is that a good suggestion?
- 4 (Laughter.)
- 5 MR. LARAMORE: Yes, your Honor. And -- and
- 6 in our view that's precisely the work that's done in the
- 7 statute by the word "conviction" and its association
- 8 with the categorical approach.
- 9 JUSTICE KAGAN: Mr. Laramore --
- 10 MR. LARAMORE: That's the framework.
- 11 JUSTICE KAGAN: -- that is one way of
- 12 looking at it, but might I suggest that you gave in a
- 13 little bit too fast to Justice Alito that the phrase
- "relating to a controlled substance" has to modify
- 15 "law." It's -- it's very true that usually in grammar a
- 16 phrase like that would modify the last noun --
- 17 MR. LARAMORE: Yes.
- 18 JUSTICE KAGAN: -- which in this case is
- 19 "law." There is another noun in this sentence, which is
- 20 "violation." And can I suggest to you that maybe, if
- 21 you read this entire provision, it's pretty clearly
- 22 talking about violation, because here is the way it
- 23 reads. It's -- "convicted of a violation of any law
- 24 relating to a controlled substance other than a
- 25 marijuana offense." "Other than a marijuana offense."

- 1 Now, it just doesn't make any sense to say,
- 2 a law relating to a controlled substance other than a
- 3 marijuana offense. What makes sense is to say, a
- 4 violation of law --
- 5 MR. LARAMORE: Violation.
- 6 JUSTICE KAGAN: -- other than a marijuana
- 7 offense. So this last phrase, "other than a marijuana
- 8 offense," which is an exception and so you say what's it
- 9 an exception to? The offense is an exception to the
- 10 violation. So the violation is the key word doing the
- 11 work in this phrase.
- MR. LARAMORE: Yes. And "law" really has to
- 13 be in the sentence to support "States, United States,
- 14 and -- and foreign country." Other -- otherwise, that,
- 15 which is an important concept in the law, couldn't be
- 16 sensibly -- sensibly there.
- 17 JUSTICE ALITO: It certainly is possible for
- 18 "relating to" to modify "violation." It's an awkward
- 19 way of phrasing it, but that is possible. It's a noun.
- 20 It could modify that.
- 21 So what would the violation be? Is the --
- 22 the violation then is not -- the violation, I take it,
- 23 then, would be the alien's conduct, what the alien did.
- MR. LARAMORE: I think that's right. I
- 25 think that's right.

- 1 JUSTICE ALITO: Is that right?
- 2 MR. LARAMORE: I believe so.
- 3 JUSTICE ALITO: So what then happens if the
- 4 alien's conduct relates to a Federally controlled
- 5 substance, but the conviction is under a law that does
- 6 not relate to a Federally controlled substance? What if
- 7 the alien, for example, is convicted of burglarizing a
- 8 house for the purpose of stealing drugs that are in the
- 9 house?
- 10 MR. LARAMORE: It --
- 11 JUSTICE ALITO: The law doesn't relate to a
- 12 controlled substance, but the conduct does relate to a
- 13 controlled substance.
- MR. LARAMORE: Right. And the deportability
- 15 rises and falls on what the person is convicted of.
- 16 JUSTICE KAGAN: Yes. It's not the conduct.
- 17 I think you misspoke when you said that. It's -- the
- 18 violation is the crime of conviction.
- 19 MR. LARAMORE: I certainly didn't mean to
- 20 say conduct if I did, and I know that conviction is the
- 21 key concept here and it always has been the key concept
- 22 as we've applied this set of laws to -- to our
- 23 immigration, to noncitizens.
- 24 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: A few moments ago, I
- 25 understood you to concede when Justice Ginsburg asked

- 1 the question that if there is an exact parallel between
- 2 the State law and the Federal law, your client would be
- 3 deportable.
- 4 MR. LARAMORE: Yes.
- 5 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: So the fact that
- 6 there's a -- it's a drug paraphernalia conviction has
- 7 nothing to do with the -- the issue before us?
- 8 MR. LARAMORE: Well, the um -- the -- the
- 9 drug paraphernalia statute under which he's convicted
- 10 requires that the conduct be associated with a
- 11 controlled -- a Kansas controlled substance. So if the
- 12 Kansas controlled substance list is the same as the
- 13 Section 802 list, and then the conviction satisfies the
- 14 statute.
- 15 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: So, so long as the
- 16 drug offense is related to, then the paraphernalia
- 17 offense is related to? So it doesn't make any
- 18 difference that we're dealing with paraphernalia?
- 19 MR. LARAMORE: I -- I think I understand
- 20 your question, and I think that the answer to your
- 21 question is yes, because the paraphernalia statute
- 22 specifically incorporates the controlled substance
- 23 schedule from Kansas.
- JUSTICE GINSBURG: So you don't get any help
- 25 by what seems to be the case, that this sock would not

- 1 count as drug paraphernalia if we were -- if we were
- 2 dealing with a Federal prosecution.
- 3 MR. LARAMORE: You are absolutely right that
- 4 it would not. Possession of paraphernalia is not a
- 5 Federal offense. One cannot be prosecuted Federally for
- 6 possessing drug paraphernalia.
- 7 JUSTICE GINSBURG: But the question I wanted
- 8 to ask --
- 9 MR. LARAMORE: But that --
- 10 JUSTICE GINSBURG: -- is a sock considered
- 11 drug paraphernalia under Federal law?
- MR. LARAMORE: It would not, be because the
- 13 Federal statute says that -- I don't have the language
- in my head, but the concept is that to be paraphernalia
- 15 it -- its usual purpose has to be to facilitate drug
- 16 sales or drug use or one of those things that
- 17 paraphernalia does. And the Kansas definition is far
- 18 broader than that. It's really any object that can be
- 19 used to store or facilitate storage of or facilitate use
- 20 of a controlled substance.
- 21 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Well, that's why I
- 22 would have thought your answers to me would have been
- 23 different because you would want to say that the
- 24 paraphernalia is an additional hurdle. Just because the
- 25 drugs relate to the Federal drugs doesn't mean that you

- 1 can say the paraphernalia does, because it covers all
- 2 sorts of things that the Federal law doesn't.
- 3 MR. LARAMORE: That's correct. It does --
- 4 it does cover many things that the Federal law doesn't.
- 5 And it would -- it would be inappropriate.
- 6 It -- that shows why this isn't the conduct that
- 7 Congress was trying to address when it --
- 8 JUSTICE ALITO: What if the -- what if
- 9 someone was convicted of possession of a pipe that is
- 10 very well designed to smoke crack, but maybe conceivably
- 11 could be used to smoke a little bit of tobacco. So
- 12 it -- maybe it's lawfully sold in some places because it
- 13 could have a legitimate use. What would -- what would
- 14 happen then?
- 15 MR. LARAMORE: The question is what the
- 16 person is convicted of and --
- 17 JUSTICE ALITO: He's convicted of possessing
- 18 a crack pipe.
- 19 MR. LARAMORE: If he is convicted of
- 20 possessing --
- 21 JUSTICE ALITO: It's necessary to show
- 22 that -- that there was crack in the pipe?
- 23 MR. LARAMORE: Not under the Kansas statute.
- 24 The Kansas statute just says that the -- that the object
- 25 has to have -- have been used or is intended to be

- 1 used --
- 2 JUSTICE ALITO: Well, in your view, in order
- 3 to make -- in order to make this count as a -- as a
- 4 deportable offense, it would be necessary to show that
- 5 there actually was crack in the pipe or that he actually
- 6 used the pipe to smoke crack.
- 7 MR. LARAMORE: Not the way we read the
- 8 statute. But the conviction would have to involve a
- 9 controlled substance and would -- if it's both tobacco
- 10 and crack, the crack would have to be in the -- in the
- 11 conviction.
- 12 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: It has to involve a
- 13 controlled -- a Federally controlled substance.
- 14 MR. LARAMORE: It has to involve a Federally
- 15 controlled, Section 802 controlled substance, yes.
- 16 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: That -- that's the
- 17 linchpin.
- 18 MR. LARAMORE: Yes.
- 19 JUSTICE ALITO: Well, crack is a Federally
- 20 controlled substance.
- 21 MR. LARAMORE: Yes.
- 22 JUSTICE ALITO: So I didn't understand the
- 23 answer to your question. Would -- would it be -- would
- the crack pipe itself be enough or do you have to show
- 25 actual crack?

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1 MR. LARAMORE: The crack pipe itself would
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- 2 be enough, as long as there was proof or a pleading to
- 3 its use with, at some point, or its intention to be used
- 4 with crack. That's --
- 5 JUSTICE SCALIA: Well, well, wait.
- 6 Only -- only using the modified approach so that you
- 7 would show it was -- it was intended to be used with
- 8 crack. But on its face, if the Kansas statute still
- 9 covers crack, yes, but a lot of other stuff --
- 10 MR. LARAMORE: That is correct.
- 11 JUSTICE SCALIA: -- that alone would not
- 12 support the conviction, would it?
- 13 MR. LARAMORE: That is --
- JUSTICE SCALIA: You -- you'd have to go to
- 15 look to see what he was actually convicted of.
- 16 MR. LARAMORE: Right. And -- and our
- 17 analysis, again, as I point to that lengthy appendix, is
- 18 that the great majority of State statutes that cover the
- 19 primary drug activities -- manufacturing, sale, and
- 20 possession -- are divisible statutes and would be
- 21 subject to the modified categorical approach.
- There are also many statutes that fit within
- 23 the Federal -- within the Federal 802 schedule under the
- 24 categorical approach. There are State statutes that
- 25 outlaw marijuana possession, that outlaw narcotic

- 1 possession, in ways that -- that the statute just fits
- 2 within the categorical approach. But -- but the
- 3 modified categorical approach is what may apply most of
- 4 the time and -- and it would -- it -- and really what
- 5 we're doing here is, is I'm making this argument about
- 6 the modified categorical approach to counter the
- 7 government's policy argument, which is that our
- 8 perspective would cut back on the number of people who
- 9 could be deported for drug violations and -- and that's
- 10 just not so.
- In fact, the Board of Immigration Appeals
- 12 has been applying the law the way we say it should be
- 13 applied for -- for all nonparaphernalia offenses for
- 14 decades, and it always is deporting, if you look at
- 15 their own statistics, 30,000, 35,000 people a year for
- 16 drug offenses.
- 17 So it's not -- the approach that we are
- 18 advocating here, that has been used for many years, is
- 19 not something that brings a halt to drug deportations.
- 20 Drug deportations have been happening all along in --
- 21 under -- under the approach that we suggest.
- The government is really reading the law
- 23 here to encompass all drug convictions, and it would be
- 24 odd for that -- for that argument to be correct, given
- 25 that the statute says -- makes this reference to Section

- 1 802, which is only Federally controlled substances.
- 2 You can't really reconcile that with the
- 3 Section 802 reference. The government's position reads
- 4 that out of the statute.
- 5 The last -- well, Congress has always --
- 6 well, the categorical approach has applied for decades.
- 7 The -- the academic history takes it back to 1913, the
- 8 first application of the doctrine, and Congress has been
- 9 aware of that approach to the law, that approach to
- 10 applying the law, has continued to pass statutes that
- 11 use the word "convicted," which is what embodies the
- 12 categorical approach. And under the -- under the
- 13 application of that principle that we are advocating
- 14 here, Congress has add -- has amended the statute
- 15 numerous times since it was put into the form it's in
- 16 now, which is 1986, in a way that add -- that signifies
- 17 its ratification of the approach that we're suggesting.
- 18 Congress has not only been aware of the
- 19 categorical approach, but also has, since the outset of
- 20 the statute, controlled the list of drugs that are
- 21 deportable. And currently, the way the statute is set
- 22 up is --
- 23 JUSTICE SCALIA: Nobody's disagreeing with
- 24 the categorical approach. I don't know why you're
- 25 wasting your argument on that. We -- we all agree with

- 1 the categorical approach.
- 2 MR. LARAMORE: Well, let me --
- 3 JUSTICE SCALIA: The question is categorical
- 4 to what? That's the issue.
- 5 MR. LARAMORE: Well -- and just to
- 6 differentiate our -- what we're saying from the
- 7 government's position, which they also argue, is a
- 8 species of the categorical approach, we're talking about
- 9 the categorical approach as it has traditionally been
- 10 applied, where the elements of -- of the conviction have
- 11 to be compared to the generic Federal statute or to the
- 12 statute of --
- 13 JUSTICE ALITO: When you say "categorical
- 14 approach," you mean the modified categorical approach,
- 15 do you not?

- 17 JUSTICE ALITO: In -- in a jurisdiction like
- 18 Kansas or in any foreign jurisdiction that has a list of
- 19 controlled substances that is a little bit broader than
- 20 the Federal list, lists at least one or two that are
- 21 broader than the Federal list, the pure categorical
- 22 approach would never result in -- in removal; am I
- 23 right?
- 24 MR. LARAMORE: No --
- 25 JUSTICE ALITO: In a removable offense.

- 1 MR. LARAMORE: That's not correct.
- 2 JUSTICE ALITO: How would it? You'd say --
- 3 the person was convicted of selling a drug that is
- 4 categorized, that is on a list or part of a list, that
- 5 would be the element of the offense.
- 6 MR. LARAMORE: But um --
- 7 JUSTICE ALITO: So you would have to look
- 8 beyond that to see which particular drug. That's the
- 9 modified approach, is it not?
- 10 MR. LARAMORE: Many States, including
- 11 Kansas, have some statutes that don't invoke their
- 12 entire schedule. For example, a marijuana possession
- 13 statute that stands alone. That would be -- that would
- 14 fit under the categorical approach.
- 15 JUSTICE SCALIA: That's not his
- 16 hypothetical. His hypothetical is a statute that
- 17 includes one drug which is not on the Federal list.
- 18 MR. LARAMORE: I misunderstood. Then under
- 19 the categorical approach that person would not be
- 20 deportable. As -- as we've shown, we think that most of
- 21 those statutes would be analyzable under the modified
- 22 categorical approach, yes.
- 23 Congress always has retained control over
- 24 the substances that can lead to deportability. Under
- 25 the current statute it's opened up the conduct, the

- 1 kinds of crimes that are deportable, allowing those to
- 2 be crimes defined by the States, defined by the
- 3 United States or defined by foreign countries, as long
- 4 as they relate to the Federal crimes.
- 5 And that is -- that is shown by -- these
- 6 substances that are on the State schedules that are not
- 7 on the Federal schedules could be on the Federal
- 8 schedules if the attorney general determined that they
- 9 were serious enough drugs, that they were dangerous
- 10 enough drugs. Some of the subjects -- of the substances
- on the Kansas schedule, TFMPP, which is a hallucinogen,
- 12 for example, have been on the Federal schedule, but have
- 13 been removed from the Federal schedule.
- So these indicate that they're -- they're
- 15 substances of the sort that the government has not
- 16 thought to be significant enough to even involve in
- 17 Federal crimes --
- 18 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: Counsel, if we -- just
- 19 to move you along, if we -- do you agree with the
- 20 government that if we find the government's distinction
- 21 between drug trade offenses like the paraphernalia
- 22 statute and drug possession and distribution offenses
- 23 unreasonable, do we remand to the board? And if not,
- 24 why not? And if you want to save it in an answer on
- 25 rebuttal, you can.

- 1 MR. LARAMORE: Well, I think that the -- the
- 2 BIA has had its chance to state its position and it has
- 3 carved out -- this drug trade exception is really a drug
- 4 paraphernalia exception. Nothing fits within drug trade
- 5 except for drug paraphernalia. The things we ordinarily
- 6 think of as drug trade, like selling and trafficking,
- 7 are not part of the drug trade exception.
- 8 So the BIA has had its chance to -- to
- 9 construe the statute.
- 10 I'd like to reserve the remainder of my
- 11 time.
- 12 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Thank you, counsel.
- 13 Ms. Kovner.
- 14 ORAL ARGUMENT OF RACHEL P. KOVNER
- 15 ON BEHALF OF THE RESPONDENT
- 16 MS. KOVNER: Mr. Chief Justice, and may it
- 17 please the Court:
- 18 There are two independently sufficient
- 19 reasons why Petitioner's drug paraphernalia conviction
- 20 permitted his removal.
- 21 The first is that Federal law allows the
- 22 removal of an alien convicted of violating a law
- 23 relating to controlled substances, and State drug laws
- 24 that cover hundreds of Federally controlled substances,
- 25 in addition to some additional drugs, are laws that

- 1 relate to Federally controlled substances.
- 2 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: What -- what if the
- 3 State law covers controlled substances entirely
- 4 different from the Federal law? Maybe they figure the
- 5 feds can take care of that list; we're just going to
- 6 have a law with these. Does the State law relate to
- 7 controlled substances?
- 8 MS. KOVNER: We would say it does not relate
- 9 to "controlled substances as defined in Section 802,"
- 10 which is the full statutory phrase.
- 11 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: I'm sorry, I don't
- 12 understand that. You're doing the flip of Justice
- 13 Ginsburg. You're -- so how many drugs on that list have
- 14 to relate to 802 drugs for it to relate generally?
- 15 MS. KOVNER: It -- we would concede, along
- 16 the lines of Justice Breyer's hypothetical, that if you
- 17 have a State law that controls 6,000 State-controlled
- 18 substances and one federally controlled --
- 19 JUSTICE KAGAN: How about half and half?
- 20 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Wait, what was the
- 21 answer? If you have it --
- 22 (Laughter.)
- 23 MS. KOVNER: That -- that law has the kind
- of tenuous relationship to federally controlled drugs
- 25 that the Court has said is not a relating to --

- 1 relation --
- 2 JUSTICE SCALIA: It doesn't say more than
- 3 tenuously related to. It says related to. Where are
- 4 you smuggling in the "tenuously"?
- 5 MS. KOVNER: I'm taking it from this Court's
- 6 cases. The Court has said "relating to" is extremely
- 7 broad, but the Court has said there is some outer limit
- 8 at which even if there's a literal relating to
- 9 relationship --
- 10 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: Well, that's how you get
- 11 to drug paraphernalia, meaning, as Justice Kagan said,
- 12 the drug paraphernalia comes in only because it relates
- 13 to drug possession and distribution --
- 14 MS. KOVNER: That's right.
- 15 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: -- of a controlled
- 16 substance under 801.
- 17 MS. KOVNER: We think that --
- 18 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: Or 802, what is it --
- 19 whatever it is.
- 20 MS. KOVNER: That's right. We think that
- 21 crimes involving drug paraphernalia are crimes that
- 22 relate to controlled substances, and there are two --
- 23 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: You keep leaving out the
- 24 802. There are other sections of the criminal act that
- 25 specifically say, any conviction and -- and it could be

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1 of any law, right? But this one doesn't say it that
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- 2 way.
- 3 MS. KOVNER: We think that, as Your Honor
- 4 correctly notes, these are laws that relate to
- 5 controlled substances as defined in Section 802. And
- 6 there are two reasons why: The first is that a statute
- 7 that -- that relates -- a statute that forbids
- 8 possession of paraphernalia that's connected to hundreds
- 9 of federally controlled drugs, and here nine additional
- 10 substances, relates to federally controlled drugs. And
- 11 the second is that --
- 12 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: And -- difficult -- now
- 13 answer.
- 14 MS. KOVNER: Yes.
- 15 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: How many of the laws --
- 16 how many of the controlled substances have to be on the
- 17 State list? Is 50/50 enough, 75/25, 6 out of --
- MS. KOVNER: We think that --
- 19 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: I mean, what -- what's
- 20 the -- how many have to be on the list?
- 21 MS. KOVNER: We think that all the State
- 22 laws that currently exist are laws that relate to
- 23 federally controlled substances. And all of those --
- JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: But that's not true of
- 25 foreign laws and this relates to foreign laws. I mean,

- 1 there are some foreign countries that list many of the
- 2 controlled substances the U.S. does but adds alcohol.
- 3 Now, some people may think alcohol is a controlled
- 4 substance, but it's not on the 802 list.
- 5 MS. KOVNER: Your Honor, we acknowledge
- 6 there might be a case involving a foreign law or
- 7 involving if in the future a State decided to take a
- 8 very different approach, where you would have a literal
- 9 relating-to relationship, but there would be a question
- 10 of whether the law was so far beyond what existed at the
- 11 time and what Congress could have imagined that it no
- 12 longer relates to. But Petitioner's reading of
- 13 "relating to" isn't a permissible reading of the --
- 14 JUSTICE BREYER: But what second --
- 15 second --
- 16 JUSTICE SCALIA: Do you, please -- do you
- 17 think that if we apply a modified categorical approach
- 18 and focus in on the conviction here which was for a
- 19 sock? Do you think a sock is more than tenuously
- 20 related to -- to these Federal drugs?
- 21 MS. KOVNER: Yes, Your Honor. And here's
- 22 why: These drug paraphernalia statutes modified on the
- 23 model act, like Kansas's, are quite broad, and we
- 24 acknowledge.
- 25 JUSTICE SCALIA: Right. That's why I'm

- 1 proposing modified categorical approach. He was
- 2 convicted of having a sock and you think that's more
- 3 than tenuously related to these Federal drugs.
- 4 MS. KOVNER: We do, because he wasn't
- 5 exactly convicted of having a sock. He was convicted
- 6 using an innocent item as a tool for the storage of
- 7 drugs, and that's true of every drug paraphernalia
- 8 conviction. Typically drug paraphernalia involves
- 9 objects that have an innocent use and objects that have
- 10 an illicit use. But essentially every State has decided
- 11 that in order to impede the drug trade and drug use you
- 12 need to prohibit those.
- 13 JUSTICE BREYER: What about, you said
- 14 second? You said two reasons. You got your first out
- 15 and I'd like to hear your second.
- 16 MS. KOVNER: Yes.
- 17 JUSTICE SCALIA: You said the second, didn't
- 18 you?
- 19 MS. KOVNER: There is an additional reason,
- 20 Your Honor.
- 21 JUSTICE SCALIA: She said it.
- JUSTICE BREYER: She didn't.
- 23 MS. KOVNER: The BIA has reasoned -- the BIA
- 24 has reasoned, in a conclusion that entitled to Chevron
- 25 deference, that paraphernalia statutes are statutes that

- 1 attack the drug trade in general.
- 2 JUSTICE BREYER: Okay. Now I got the second
- 3 one. Now I do have one question, and it's right related
- 4 to Justice Scalia's, and it seems to me that --
- 5 what he said, if I understand it correctly, makes this
- 6 not too difficult a case, but you won't like it:
- 7 That -- that we have long -- yes, it modifies law, but
- 8 we have long, if we go back to the seminal case, Taylor.
- 9 There is a Massachusetts statute. It forbids a burglary
- 10 of a boat, a car, and a house. So what Justice Blackmun
- 11 said -- I think it was he who wrote it -- go back to the
- 12 documents to see whether he was charged with burglary of
- 13 a house, a boat, or a car.
- So we have a tradition of looking back to
- 15 the charging documents and maybe a couple of others to
- 16 see what part of the statute. Now, this statute is a
- 17 statute that first penalizes many, many things,
- 18 packaging -- packaging is relevant here. What kind of
- 19 packaging? Packaging of drugs. Okay. What drugs? It
- 20 doesn't say drugs. It says controlled substance, so you
- 21 have to cross-reference.
- Then we look to cross-reference, and it says
- 23 controlled substance means a substance included on State
- 24 schedule 12345 or part B, so it incorporates that.
- 25 So then we go look to those documents, and

- 1 those documents will have a long list. And we look to
- 2 see here which of the documents on the list which is
- 3 incorporated into the statute is he charged of
- 4 packaging. Very simple. Happens it's not that simple
- 5 to do, but that is absolutely traditional given our
- 6 holdings on how to apply the categorical -- modified
- 7 categorical system.
- 8 So why not just do that right here? Solves
- 9 every problem that's raised.
- 10 MS. KOVNER: Let me give two responses. One
- 11 is a textual one, and the second, I think, goes to your
- 12 practical point because I really think it's important
- 13 that it won't actually solve the practical problems
- 14 here.
- 15 As to the textual point, when Your Honor
- 16 talks about Taylor, I think it's important to note how
- 17 different the statute here is, which is unlike many
- 18 provisions that talk about being deportable or suffering
- 19 some other consequence for being convicted of a crime
- 20 relating to something, here it's talking about being
- 21 convicted of violating a law relating to something.
- 22 But I really want to address this practical
- 23 point, because, Your Honor, we think the result under
- 24 Petitioner's view is going to be a real patchwork in
- 25 terms of what conduct is removable depending on what

- 1 State you're in. And the reason why, Justice Breyer, is
- 2 that it's not going to be possible to apply the modified
- 3 categorical approach to many drug statutes. It will
- 4 sometimes and it won't other times, and let me explain
- 5 why.
- 6 For instance, here, under this statute, it
- 7 appears and under paraphernalia status generally, there
- 8 will typically not be a requirement of a finding or an
- 9 admission of what particular drug you intended to use
- 10 the --
- 11 JUSTICE KAGAN: But if I understand the way
- 12 the law works, right, Ms. Kovner, that's -- that is true
- of paraphernalia drugs, that they're indivisible with
- 14 respect to the controlled substance. It's not true with
- 15 respect to most possession statutes or distribution
- 16 statutes or so forth. And the reason that there is that
- 17 distinction is because paraphernalia offenses are
- 18 generally extremely minor offenses; they're not
- 19 felonies. They're just, as in this case, they're
- 20 misdemeanors that are meant to catch leftover things
- 21 that, you know, prosecutors plead to when they don't
- 22 really want to charge a more serious offense.
- 23 And so it makes good sense that all of these
- 24 paraphernalia offenses would be counted out by this
- 25 approach. You're counting out a bunch of trivial -- I

- 1 mean, you know, "trivial," I don't want to say
- 2 trivial -- minor offenses.
- 3 MS. KOVNER: Your Honor, I think two points
- 4 about that. The first is that we don't think it's
- 5 correct that this is going to be just paraphernalia
- 6 offenses and not any possession or distribution
- 7 offenses. And if you look at the cases that are cited
- 8 on page 31 of our brief, they illustrate that, which is
- 9 the conviction records are not necessarily specifying
- 10 the drug that's involved in a particular offense. And
- 11 so you're going to have a really haphazard system.
- 12 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: Well, right now even
- 13 your brief admits that the BIA is applying a different
- 14 standard to possession and distribution offenses. It's
- 15 applying the 802 specification.
- 16 MS. KOVNER: Your --
- 17 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: And it's trying to draw
- 18 a difference. I don't -- I still don't understand how
- 19 it does it, but my point is that you're proving it's --
- 20 you're living by the 802 distinction with distribution
- 21 and possession.
- 22 MS. KOVNER: Your Honor, I'm not sure that
- 23 that's true. We think that the BIA's precedent at this
- 24 point in unclear. The BIA --
- 25 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: Yeah, what you're hoping

- 1 for is that they will change that one, too. But let's
- 2 answer what's happened up until now.
- 3 MS. KOVNER: Yes. As to what's happened up
- 4 until now, I don't think that's clear. My understanding
- 5 is that the BIA will generally try to seek removal of
- 6 people who have been convicted --
- 7 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: Because they have
- 8 discretion. If they're not automatically removable and
- 9 they look at the underlying papers and decide it's a
- 10 more serious crime than -- than the -- than the strict
- 11 removability statute, they let the person -- they remove
- 12 this person anyway.
- 13 MS. KOVNER: I don't think that's correct,
- 14 Your Honor. What we're seeking here is the authority to
- 15 seek removal for persons who've committed these
- 16 offenses. If -- in this case, for instance, if we were
- 17 to not prevail, we would lack the authority, the
- 18 government would lack the authority to remove Petitioner
- 19 no matter how serious it regarded his underlying
- 20 conduct.
- 21 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: A couple of
- 22 sentences ago you said that a sock, when it's used in
- 23 connection with the drug activity, is sufficiently
- 24 related to the Federal Controlled Substances Law. What
- 25 about a gun? Those are often used in connection with

- 1 drug activity. So is a law concerning gun possession or
- 2 gun control or whatever, a State law that relates to the
- 3 Federal Controlled Substances Law?
- 4 MS. KOVNER: Your Honor, I think this would
- 5 be a -- a difficult question on either of our sides,
- 6 which is to say, for -- for both parties there would be
- 7 some set of statutes that are related to -- that have
- 8 some connection to drugs indirectly and there would be a
- 9 question of whether those statutes count. We don't
- 10 think that a statute that addresses guns merely because
- 11 guns and drugs have some, you know, relationship --
- 12 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Well, yes. But if a
- 13 statute addresses socks, it does.
- MS. KOVNER: Well, here, Your Honor, it's
- 15 not a statute addressing socks. It's a statute --
- 16 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: It was addressing
- 17 socks when used in connection with drug activity. I'm
- 18 talking about guns when used in connection with drug
- 19 activity.
- 20 MS. KOVNER: Oh. Your Honor, a statute like
- 21 the 924(c) that applies to guns when used in connection
- 22 with drug activity, we think would be a law that relates
- 23 to controlled substances. We think statutes that
- 24 regulate conduct, that um leads to the proliferation of
- 25 drugs or the use of drugs is a poor statute relating to

- 1 the drug trade.
- 2 JUSTICE ALITO: Under your definition --
- 3 under your understanding of this, what practical work is
- 4 done by the phrase as defined in Section 802 of Title
- 5 XXI?
- 6 MS. KOVNER: Your Honor --
- 7 JUSTICE ALITO: You said a couple of minutes
- 8 ago, and I had assumed this to be true, that under the
- 9 laws of all the States, the great majority of controlled
- 10 substances are on the Federal list, and there -- in some
- 11 instances -- are a few additional ones and you said that
- 12 all of those laws would be covered. If that's the case,
- 13 then I don't see what was achieved by putting the
- 14 reference to the Federal list in the statute. They
- 15 might have just said relating to a controlled substance.
- 16 MS. KOVNER: Your Honor, we think that this
- 17 parenthetical clarifies that -- the meaning of
- 18 controlled substance, the thing that it has to relate to
- 19 are the substances as defined in Federal law. There is
- 20 another colloquial meaning of controlled substance if
- 21 you look in, like, Black's Law Dictionary, which is just
- 22 any regulated drug and that would apply to, for
- 23 instance, prescription drugs that aren't controlled
- 24 under the Controlled Substances Act.
- 25 JUSTICE SCALIA: Would it have to be drugs?

- 1 I mean, there are some States that ban pate, for
- 2 example, right?
- 3 (Laughter.)
- 4 JUSTICE SCALIA: You wouldn't want that
- 5 swept into this statute, would you?
- 6 MS. KOVNER: That would not be a statute
- 7 under the law of a State relating to a controlled
- 8 substance as defined in Section 802, because it wouldn't
- 9 be regulated under a State's direct statutes that also
- 10 include the Section 802 substances.
- And if I could just explain why we think
- 12 that Congress enacted or -- a law that applies to any
- 13 person who violates a State law relating to controlled
- 14 substances. When Congress enacted the -- the provision
- of the INA that's currently in effect, it acted against
- 16 the backdrop of State laws that were designed to tightly
- 17 coordinate with Federal laws and that were designed to
- 18 produce the kind of regime that they have, in fact,
- 19 produced for any -- any overlap between the State and
- 20 Federal schedules is the overwhelming proportion of the
- 21 drugs that are controlled on State schedules.
- 22 And, Justice Breyer, if the Court were to
- 23 hold that those laws aren't laws relating to controlled
- 24 substances, whether an alien is removable under those
- 25 State laws designed to parallel with Federal laws is

- 1 going to depend on what -- what kinds of findings the
- 2 State requires to be made in connection with those
- 3 possession --
- 4 JUSTICE BREYER: Well, that's -- it wouldn't
- 5 make that law a nullity. Indeed, the person would be
- 6 deportable provided when you went through the State
- 7 charge, the State charge was you violated the packaging
- 8 for use statute, packaging a controlled substance, in
- 9 respect to Item 13 under Schedule II, which they could
- 10 say, anyway, and that happens to be heroin. And if, in
- 11 fact, when you went through Schedule III, Part 4(a), the
- 12 word there was "alcohol," then it wouldn't.
- Now, that's simple. And if the State's
- 14 charging practice is such that they don't tell you,
- 15 that's equivalent to a State charging practice that in
- 16 Massachusetts didn't tell you whether you were accused
- 17 of burglary of a boat, of a house or of a car. And if
- 18 the State wants to do that, I guess it might be up to
- 19 them if you get a guilty plea and then you could not
- 20 deport the person.
- 21 MS. KOVNER: But Congress didn't want that
- 22 result, Justice Breyer. Congress --
- 23 JUSTICE BREYER: Well, I want -- a lot of
- 24 people -- but they can't control the State charging
- 25 practices and the States are likely, for reasons of

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1 information, to put in the charge the whole thing,
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- 2 including the correct reference on the schedule. So is
- 3 that the only thing you find wrong with it? And I agree
- 4 with you that that is a slight problem, that -- that
- 5 we'll read back the conviction of four years ago in
- 6 Missouri and we will see that it doesn't tell us what
- 7 item on the schedule. That's the problem that you see.
- 8 MS. KOVNER: That --
- 9 JUSTICE BREYER: Any other?
- 10 MS. KOVNER: Your Honor, that's a
- 11 significant practical problem that's going to introduce
- 12 widespread variation in the deportability of people who
- 13 have committed crimes involving Federally controlled
- 14 substances.
- 15 JUSTICE KAGAN: But -- but as Ms. -- as
- 16 Justice Sotomayor suggested, it's a significant
- 17 practical problem that's implicated in the current
- 18 practice of the BIA.
- 19 MS. KOVNER: I -- I'm -- I don't think
- 20 that's correct. We think the current BIA precedent is
- 21 quite ambiguous on the possession point and we think
- 22 that --
- 23 JUSTICE KAGAN: It at least might be
- 24 implicated in the current practice of the BIA.
- 25 MS. KOVNER: We think that the BIA's

- 1 precedent on this point is unclear.
- 2 But, Justice Breyer, our argument isn't just
- 3 about the practical consequences. It's also about the
- 4 best reading of this text. We don't think this text
- 5 is -- is ambiguous. It talks about violations of laws
- 6 relating to --
- 7 JUSTICE BREYER: You have to choose. As you
- 8 well know, the problem you just mentioned is a problem
- 9 that we're just having a terrible time with in respect
- 10 to the violence add-ons. And it's -- stems from the
- 11 fact that State laws differ one from the other
- 12 enormously. So we either have that problem or we have
- 13 the problem of you have a general statute and which does
- 14 it apply more to and so forth. Or you have the problem
- of do you look -- as I think Justice Kagan's approach --
- 16 do you -- you look at the individual facts of the case
- 17 and require them to prove it out again. I -- I don't
- 18 see how we escape one serious problem or another.
- 19 MS. KOVNER: I agree. And let me propose
- 20 that there are -- there's difficulties under either
- 21 approach -- approach. Let me tell you why I think this
- is the best approach here.
- 23 The first is I think the text signal that
- 24 Congress chose our approach here. And the text is
- 25 different from any other similar provisions. The second

- 1 is that there's --
- 2 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: It's -- it's exactly
- 3 like it. When Congress intended to say -- and I can
- 4 point to at least three provisions -- when it wanted to
- 5 say any controlled substance without reference to -- to
- 6 802, it said, any controlled substance. And when it
- 7 wanted to limit it to 802, it defined the controlled
- 8 substance as being listed in 802.
- 9 MS. KOVNER: Your Honor --
- 10 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: So it knows how to
- 11 differentiate the two.
- 12 MS. KOVNER: The -- the textual contrast that
- 13 we find most revealing here is that there are provisions
- of the INA that talk about being removable for a crime
- 15 related to controlled substances, and then you would do
- 16 the categorical approach just as you're proposing. But
- 17 let me just mention the practical reason why we think
- 18 our approach is preferable, Justice Breyer, and why we
- 19 think that Congress chose it, which is that Congress
- 20 acted against the backdrop of State drug laws like
- 21 Kansas's, which -- which weren't States just enacting
- 22 random lists of substances as their controlled substances.
- 23 These laws are designed, as -- as Congress put it, as an
- 24 interlocking trellis to closely relate to Federal law.
- 25 So Congress wanted --

- 1 JUSTICE KAGAN: But, Ms. Kovner, I would
- 2 think that the history works against you in the
- 3 following way: Because the prior statute here was a
- 4 statute that listed all these Federally controlled
- 5 substances. And that eventually got to be impractical,
- 6 there were too many of them, they kept changing and so
- 7 Congress went to this approach. But it was clear in the
- 8 old statute that the only way that you could be held
- 9 deportable was if you had been convicted of an offense,
- 10 you know, possession or distribution or whatever, with a
- 11 Federally controlled substance. And there's no reason
- 12 to think that in enacting this statute that -- that
- 13 Congress meant to do something broader than that.
- 14 There's every reason to think it wanted to do the exact
- 15 same thing. If you're convicted of a controlled
- 16 substance -- of possession of a controlled substance,
- 17 you are deportable. If you're not, if it's only
- 18 Sudafed, you're not.
- 19 MS. KOVNER: Your Honor, I don't think
- 20 that's correct. Congress, in the prior versions of the
- 21 statute, did specify particular acts that your conduct
- 22 had to involve and also specified a narrower list of
- 23 substances that your conduct had to relate to. But I
- 24 don't think it's clear that Congress believed -- there's
- 25 nothing in the legislative history or other documents to

- 1 suggest that Congress believed that "relating to"
- 2 language meant involving --
- 3 JUSTICE KAGAN: No. But the question is,
- 4 when Congress makes a change like that, which we know is
- 5 a change for a particular reason because the list of
- 6 substances was getting out of control -- it's very much
- 7 like yesterday's case; I don't know if you're familiar
- 8 with that -- but Congress makes a change for one reason,
- 9 suggests -- does not make any -- any suggestion that
- 10 this change is supposed to do something else and
- 11 something much bigger, which is extend this
- 12 deportability provision to controlled substances that
- 13 aren't part of the Federal list, and there's just no
- 14 reason to think that Congress did that in making this
- 15 change.
- 16 MS. KOVNER: Your Honor, the -- the
- 17 "relating to" language, which is very broad language, is
- 18 within the prior statute, and it's within the statute
- 19 now. We don't think there's an indication that Congress
- 20 read that statute narrowly in the prior versions. We
- 21 think the plain meaning of that -- that language is
- 22 quite broad.
- 23 Your Honor, let me just mention. There is a
- 24 second reason that we've talked principally about the
- 25 first one, but the BIA was also entitled to Chevron

- 1 deference for its separate reasoning pertaining to
- 2 paraphernalia. The BIA has for many, many years
- 3 reasoned that there are some crimes that are related to
- 4 the drug trade in general, not necessarily to any
- 5 individual substance. And the earliest case on this was
- 6 a case about --
- 7 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: Espinoza came out when?
- 8 MS. KOVNER: The case I'm thinking of is
- 9 Martinez-Gomez from 1972, which talks about opening a
- 10 drug -- essentially, opening a drug den, and they say
- 11 that's a crime that doesn't necessarily relate just to
- 12 any individual substance; it bears a relationship to all
- 13 substances. And then in Martinez Espinoza, more
- 14 recently, um the Court --
- 15 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: That was a Federal
- 16 crime, though. It had to relate to a controlled
- 17 substance on the Federal list, to all drugs on the
- 18 Federal list.
- 19 MS. KOVNER: Your Honor, the reasoning of
- 20 Martinez-Gomez and then the reasoning of Martinez
- 21 Espinoza is that these are crimes that don't necessarily
- 22 have to bear a relationship to a single substance. For
- 23 instance, drug paraphernalia are tools that can be used
- 24 with multiple substances. So you might possess, you
- 25 know, scales and baggies for the purpose of packaging a

- 1 particular drug on one occasion, but those items can
- 2 just as easily facilitate those activities with respect
- 3 to --
- 4 JUSTICE GINSBURG: But a -- a sock. I mean,
- 5 one of the strange things about this case is you have a
- 6 disjunction. A sock doesn't count as drug paraphernalia
- 7 under the Federal law, but it does under the State law;
- 8 it means any container. And then to take that State
- 9 law -- I mean, suppose we -- we have a conviction for
- 10 one of those drugs that's not on the Federal list, just
- 11 for possession of that drug, and then we have another
- 12 conviction where that drug is inside a sock and it's for
- 13 drug paraphernalia.
- 14 So in the one case you would say not
- 15 removable, if it's just the substance itself, and in the
- other case, because of the sock, it becomes removable?
- 17 MS. KOVNER: Your Honor, I agree that I
- 18 think a strange feature of this case is that it involves
- 19 an item that's not usually thought of as drug
- 20 paraphernalia. I think the classic paraphernalia items
- 21 and the ones you see most often prosecuted in Kansas and
- 22 in other States are things like hyperdermic needles and
- 23 scales and substances that are used to mix with drugs
- 24 before sale, and I think it's easiest to see in that
- 25 case why the BIA's reasoning makes sense, which is,

- 1 those items, when they're possessed by somebody in
- 2 connection, even with a State-controlled drug, are
- 3 tools --
- 4 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: I don't think that's the
- 5 important point that Justice Ginsburg's making. She's
- 6 saying under Federal law, this person can't be convicted
- 7 for that drug -- that's not a drug on the Federal
- 8 list -- but it can -- or the State list -- but can be
- 9 convicted, under your theory, for possessing the sock
- 10 and that non-illicit drug in the sock.
- 11 MS. KOVNER: For possessing the sock. And I
- 12 think it's easiest --
- 13 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: With the -- with that
- 14 particular unscheduled item.
- MS. KOVNER: And I think it's easiest to see
- 16 why the BIA drew this conclusion when you talk about the
- 17 more classical tools of paraphernalia, which is, if
- 18 somebody possesses scales and distribution baggies and
- 19 cut in connection with a State-controlled substance --
- 20 say it's synthetic marijuana, an item that's not
- 21 Federally controlled at the time -- those are tools that
- 22 could be used in connection with a Federal drug as well.
- 23 And so this -- the BIA reasoned that there are certain
- 24 crimes that -- that involve conduct that could
- 25 facilitate the distribution of one drug just as easily

- 1 as another.
- 2 JUSTICE ALITO: Do we -- do we even know
- 3 that this is a -- a proper conviction under Kansas law,
- 4 that the Kansas statute actually means what it's been
- 5 interpreted here to mean? The Petitioner pled guilty to
- 6 this, I think, because he got a break, because he could
- 7 have been charged with something -- if, in fact, he had
- 8 Adderall, which is a Federally controlled substance --
- 9 he could have been charged with something more serious.
- 10 So he pled to this misdemeanor. But it's really hard to
- 11 believe that the Kansas statute actually regards as drug
- 12 paraphernalia anything that is used at any time to
- 13 contain a controlled substance.
- 14 Suppose somebody buys marijuana or some
- other drug and it's in a plastic bag. So the plastic
- 16 bag is -- that's one violation. The person puts it in a
- 17 pocket; that's another violation. The pocket is -- is
- 18 drug paraphernalia. Takes it out of the pocket and puts
- 19 it in the glove compartment of a car; that's a third
- 20 violation. The car is equipment that's used to store
- 21 it. Takes it out of that, puts it in something -- it --
- 22 it can't really mean this, but we don't have State court
- 23 interpretations.
- MS. KOVNER: That's right. And if I could
- 25 just make two brief points about that.

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1 You're right that this was a result of a
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- 2 plea, and as a result, we don't know exactly what Kansas
- 3 courts would say about this application, which is a very
- 4 unusual application. But I think that illustrates,
- 5 Justice Alito, I think, the bad consequences of
- 6 Petitioner's view, which is, for Petitioner, even if it
- 7 was cocaine that was stored in the sock, if he pleads
- 8 guilty to the paraphernalia offense, the BIA will lack
- 9 any ability to take enforcement action against him,
- 10 because he's convicted of a paraphernalia crime, and the
- 11 nature of the substance doesn't --
- 12 JUSTICE KAGAN: If he had cocaine in his
- 13 sock, he would probably be convicted of possession of
- 14 cocaine.
- 15 MS. KOVNER: But --
- 16 JUSTICE KAGAN: He was convicted of
- 17 paraphernalia here because he had four pills of
- 18 Adderall, which if you go to half the colleges in
- 19 America, people -- you know, and just randomly pick
- 20 somebody, there would be a decent chance --
- 21 (Laughter.)
- 22 MS. KOVNER: I think -- I think Justice
- 23 Alito's explanation of this case explains why that's not
- 24 so. In a plea bargain, prosecutors may be willing to
- 25 let somebody plead to a drug paraphernalia offense in

- 1 lieu of a possession offense, and Congress did not want
- 2 the fact that a State or local prosecutor allows that
- 3 kind of plea bargain to mean that immigration
- 4 authorities lack the ability to remove somebody
- 5 convicted of a crime that relates to a controlled
- 6 substance.
- 7 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Well, I would have
- 8 thought the opposite inference. If it's not such a big
- 9 deal that the State is willing to let him cop a plea to
- 10 drug paraphernalia, why should that be the basis for
- 11 deportation under Federal law?
- MS. KOVNER: Your Honor, we don't think that
- 13 Congress viewed drug crimes that way. The way it wrote
- 14 this removal provision was to say that any crime
- 15 relating to controlled substances permits the BIA to
- 16 seek removal. And that's because, we think, Congress
- 17 saw drug crimes as quite serious. This Court has
- 18 recognized that, and Congress has essentially said so in
- 19 other statutes. So we --
- 20 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Well, but, I mean,
- 21 the only -- it's because you give "relating to" such a
- 22 broad construction that you get the -- what I think is
- 23 the unusual situation that I talked about, which is that
- 24 the State thinks it's a very minor offense and yet it
- 25 can become so significant that the person's deported.

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1 MS. KOVNER: But Petitioner's approach is a
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- 2 poor way of reading a crime severity distinction into
- 3 the statute. We don't think that's what the language
- 4 allows, for minor drug crimes to be set aside as a basis
- 5 for --
- 6 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: Why is it a poor way? I
- 7 mean, the drugs that the Federal government believes are
- 8 the most serious are listed in 802. And so if you have
- 9 to prove, under the modified categorical approach, that
- 10 one of those drugs was the intended use, what is so
- 11 horrible and -- and dissonant about affecting the intent
- 12 based on the drugs Congress has chosen to list?
- 13 MS. KOVNER: Your Honor, it's a bad way
- 14 because serious drug crimes involving Federally
- 15 controlled substances will not be removable under
- 16 Petitioner's view. And to get --
- 17 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: No, no, no, no, no. We
- 18 -- I know that you keep saying "for many years," but
- 19 it's not that many years. And the BIA has routinely
- 20 required in distribution and possession cases that you
- 21 identify the drug.
- 22 MS. KOVNER: Your --
- 23 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: And so they haven't
- 24 found it impossible in thousands of those cases. It may
- 25 be more difficult in the drug paraphernalia case because

- 1 Justice Kagan was right. They're minor offenses; often,
- 2 States won't bother with pleas that are very lengthy or
- 3 very complex. But that's a happenstance. That's not --
- 4 MS. KOVNER: It would --
- 5 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: Does it call for
- 6 changing the natural reading of the sentence?
- 7 MS. KOVNER: No. We -- Your Honor, we're
- 8 seeking the application of what we think is the best
- 9 reading of the sentence. Your Honor, I think if you
- 10 look at the BIA cases that we cite on Page 31, they show
- 11 that Petitioner's approach will prevent the removal of
- 12 aliens committing crimes involving Federally controlled
- 13 substances in many cases because the conviction records
- 14 aren't going to specify the drug involved.
- 15 Thank you.
- 16 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Thank you, counsel.
- 17 Mr. Laramore, you have four minutes left.
- 18 REBUTTAL ARGUMENT OF JON LARAMORE
- 19 ON BEHALF OF THE PETITIONER
- 20 MR. LARAMORE: First, the BIA's position is
- 21 not unclear or in flux.
- The BIA reaffirmed in a case called Ferreira
- 23 last year, cited on page 22 of our reply brief, its
- 24 position, just as Justice Sotomayor said, that the
- 25 substance has to be identified in um possession and sale

- 1 cases and it has to be an 802 substance. That's a
- 2 system that has been in place for decades. It has
- 3 worked. It has allowed the deportation of drug
- 4 criminals. It doesn't need to be changed.
- 5 I'd ask the Court to focus on -- on
- 6 something that -- that Ms. Kovner raised, which is what
- 7 Congress intended and knew about when it enacted this
- 8 version of the statute in 1996, and -- I'm sorry, 1986.
- 9 And she said that they knew about the Uniform Controlled
- 10 Substances Act and that may have had an influence,
- 11 although there's nothing that shows in the legislative
- 12 history that it did.
- But Congress also knew about the categorical
- 14 approach when it put the word "convicted" into the
- 15 statute at that time. And it knew that the categorical
- 16 approach and the modified categorical approach would be
- 17 used when it -- when it invoked the word "convicted."
- 18 And that's what we're asking the Court to reaffirm now.
- 19 The word "law" that we've talked about so
- 20 much that's in the sentence, or "law and regulation,"
- 21 is necessary in the statute to support what -- another
- 22 thing that Congress tried to do in that law, in that
- 23 statute, which was to clearly invoke States' authority
- 24 and foreign countries' authority to convict -- to allow
- 25 those convictions to support deportation. And if --

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1 there's -- it was a convenient way to insert that
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- 2 concept into the statute.
- 3 I would also point out that the
- 4 underpinnings of the Martinez Espinoza case, which is
- 5 the one that they rely on now -- this is the so-called
- 6 drug trade exception, this -- which is really just a
- 7 drug paraphernalia exception -- are not nearly as
- 8 strong as the government suggests.
- 9 Martinez-Gomez is a case about -- I'm not
- 10 quite sure what you call it -- a drug house, a place
- 11 where drugs are commonly used. But there was no
- 12 indication in Martinez-Gomez that it necessarily
- involved any substances that were not Section 802
- 14 substances.
- 15 It's not very strong support for this
- 16 creation out of really whole cloth a drug trade
- 17 exception.
- 18 Thank you.
- 19 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Thank you, counsel.
- The case is submitted.
- 21 (Whereupon, at 11:10 a.m., the case in the
- 22 above-entitled matter was submitted.)

23

24

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