## SUPREME COURT OF THE UNITED STATES

IN THE SUPREME COURT OF THE	UNITED STATES
	-
JAMES J. THOLE, ET AL.,	)
Petitioners,	)
v.	) No. 17-1712
U.S. BANK, N.A., ET AL.,	)
Respondents.	)
	_

Pages: 1 through 72

Place: Washington, D.C.

Date: January 13, 2020

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5	v.	) No. 17-1712
6	U.S. BANK, N.A., ET AL.,	)
7	Respondents.	)
8		
9	Washington, D.C	
10	Monday, January 13	, 2020
11		
12	The above-entitled matt	er came on for oral
13	argument before the Supreme Co	urt of the United
14	States at 11:09 a.m.	
15		
16	APPEARANCES:	
17	PETER K. STRIS, Los Angeles, C	alifornia;
18	on behalf of the Petitione	rs.
19	SOPAN JOSHI, Assistant to the	Solicitor General,
20	Department of Justice, Was	hington, D.C.;
21	for the United States, as	amicus curiae,
22	supporting the Petitioners	
23	JOSEPH R. PALMORE, Washington,	D.C.;
24	on behalf of the Responden	ts.
25		

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1	PROCEEDINGS
2	(11:09 a.m.)
3	CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: We'll hear
4	argument next this morning in Case 17-1712,
5	Thole versus United States Bank.
6	Mr. Stris.
7	ORAL ARGUMENT OF PETER K. STRIS
8	ON BEHALF OF THE PETITIONERS
9	MR. STRIS: Thank you, Mr. Chief
10	Justice, and may it please the Court:
11	My clients are beneficiaries of a
12	pension trust. We allege that the trustees,
13	through disloyalty and imprudence, caused the
14	trust to lose \$750 million. The suit presents a
15	justiciable case or controversy for three
16	reasons:
17	First, my clients have an equitable
18	interest in all assets of their pension trust.
19	That is a property interest. And when \$750
20	million of that property was lost, my clients
21	suffered a concrete injury.
22	Respondents are between a rock and a
23	hard place. They can't argue that participants
24	have an equitable interest in only some of the
25	trust corpus, because the trust is unsegregated

- 1 and undivided. So they're forced to take the
- 2 incredible position, to quote their brief, that
- 3 defined-benefit plan participants have no
- 4 interest in plan assets.
- 5 If Respondents were right, no one
- 6 would have an equitable interest in any of the
- 7 trust's assets. But a trust can't exist unless
- 8 someone holds equitable title to its assets, and
- 9 that someone here can only be the participants.
- 10 Second, and independently, my clients
- 11 have a right to loyal stewardship of their
- 12 retirement savings. When Respondents engaged in
- 13 self-dealing, my clients suffered a concrete
- 14 injury. Under the centuries-old "no further
- inquiry" rule, beneficiaries could sue even when
- there was no conceivable possibility of a
- financial loss. The breach itself gives rise to
- 18 a case or controversy.
- In any event, and third, my clients
- 20 have representational standing to vindicate
- 21 injury to their plan. Since before the
- founding, when a trustee was unwilling to sue,
- equity courts allowed beneficiaries to do so on
- 24 behalf of the trust.
- 25 And so I'd like to begin with our

- 1 property injury. A defined-benefit plan under
- 2 ERISA is a private exchange of services.
- 3 Workers forgo wages in exchange for a promise of
- 4 a future payment secured by trust property.
- 5 This is critical because there is an
- 6 unsegregated, undivided pool of assets, the
- 7 trust, that pays the pension of all the
- 8 beneficiaries. So plan participants, like my
- 9 clients, have an equitable interest in those
- 10 assets.
- 11 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Does your
- 12 argument depend upon a forward-looking theory of
- injury? In other words, it's -- if -- it's one
- 14 thing to have a -- a conflict of interest or all
- 15 the other things you allege that lead to a
- 16 situation that causes you no direct financial
- harm, but is your theory that, well, because
- 18 they did that in this situation, and even if
- 19 that didn't hurt us, somebody like that is
- 20 likely to do it again and that might hurt us?
- 21 Or is it purely the fact of -- retrospective,
- this person did something that under common
- trust law would be regarded as a bad thing, and
- under the no inquiry rule, that's enough, so you
- 25 shouldn't worry about the fact that it didn't

- 1 harm us at all?
- 2 MR. STRIS: So the answer to that
- 3 question is we have multiple concrete injuries
- 4 here. And the things that we're seeking flow
- 5 from the particular injuries, right?
- 6 So what I'm talking about right now is
- our property injury. If we're right that we
- 8 have an equitable interest in the assets, that
- 9 theory depends on a diminution in the value of
- 10 the trust assets. So I don't know -- I wouldn't
- 11 call that prospective; I would say the trust
- 12 lost \$750 million, and so --
- 13 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: But what did
- 14 your clients lose? I mean, your friend on the
- other side says they get nothing. They're in
- 16 the same position if you win or if you lose.
- 17 MR. STRIS: Well, so I mean I -- I
- 18 couldn't disagree with that more. There's
- 19 always risk. Pension plans fail. Businesses
- 20 fail. In 2008, AIG had \$100 billion until they
- 21 didn't. And so --
- 22 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Well, those
- 23 are other situations. They say in this case --
- 24 well, just look at it abstractly. You know, say
- you need \$600 million in your fund so everybody

- 1 will feel comfortable your clients are going to
- get everyone's benefits, and, you know, there
- 3 are \$8 million in the fund and there's some
- 4 fraud that reduces it to -- 800 million to -- to
- 5 700 million. Do you think you could sue on that
- 6 -- that misconduct by the trustee?
- 7 MR. STRIS: Well, if -- if the assets
- 8 of the trust are -- are lost and there's been a
- 9 breach, yes. I don't think it's abstract at
- 10 all. If I loan -- if I loan Bill Gates money
- 11 and take -- and I take a security interest, and
- 12 he destroys the secured property, he encumbers
- it, he burns it down, I can still sue him even
- if he makes every progress payment and happens
- to have \$100 million in assets because we
- 16 recognize that having a security interest in
- 17 something is concrete.
- 18 Our core position --
- 19 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: But I
- 20 understood -- I meant my hypothetical to suppose
- 21 that the -- your property is -- is secure, your
- 22 -- your -- your client's property, the
- 23 beneficiaries' property is completely secure.
- In the Gates hypothetical, I thought you were
- 25 suggesting -- you seem to be suggesting the

- 1 security that -- that protected the -- the
- 2 interest of your -- your loan was -- was
- 3 destroyed.
- 4 MR. STRIS: Oh, but --
- 5 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: But in my
- 6 hypothetical -- it may not be your case -- but
- 7 -- but in the abstract, what's alleged to have
- 8 been wrongfully done doesn't affect the
- 9 financial security of your defined-benefit plan.
- 10 You can still sue --
- MR. STRIS: So --
- 12 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: -- because the
- person's a bad guy?
- MR. STRIS: No. You can still sue,
- but not because the person is a bad guy, but
- 16 because your property interest has been
- impaired. I want to be very clear about this.
- To have an equitable interest -- this
- 19 has been the case since the 15th century. To
- 20 have an equitable interest in trust assets, a
- 21 beneficiary has never had to show that she's
- 22 likely to receive the trust assets. As long as
- 23 she has the possibility of benefiting from the
- assets, she has a present property right to
- 25 prevent others from damaging them. That's the

Т	lesson from the contingent and discretionary
2	JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: But would they
3	CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: But what's the
4	
5	JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: say
6	MR. STRIS: cases.
7	CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: But what's the
8	lesson from Article III? There has to be a
9	tangible injury to the plaintiff. And under my
10	hypothetical, if 600 million's enough to secure
11	them against anything, and the trust corpus goes
12	from 800 million to 700 million, how are they
13	injured in the terms of Article III?
14	MR. STRIS: In the same way that if I
15	own property and you come and you put your toe
16	on it, even though I never saw you, you didn't
17	step on my tulips, you didn't upset me in any
18	way, you impaired my property right.
19	JUSTICE GORSUCH: What if what if,
20	counsel I mean, just to put the Chief's point
21	in a in a finer light even than he has, which
22	I think he has done an admirable job of, let's
23	say this were a defined benefits plan rather
24	than a defined contribution plan. And let's say
25	that sorry, this were a defined contribution

- 1 plan rather than a defined benefits plan. And
- 2 -- and the menu of options is varied. Most of
- 3 them are clean. But there is one option that's
- 4 dirty. Okay? But your client didn't invest in
- 5 that.
- 6 MR. STRIS: Sure.
- 7 JUSTICE GORSUCH: Would you -- could
- 8 you still sue?
- 9 MR. STRIS: I don't think -- I don't
- 10 think --
- JUSTICE GORSUCH: I mean, even in the
- 12 law of trusts way back to the 15th century,
- 13 there was a remoteness limitation --
- MR. STRIS: Well --
- 15 JUSTICE GORSUCH: -- on how far
- someone could sue, wasn't there?
- MR. STRIS: Well, so, Justice Gorsuch,
- 18 I think there wouldn't be standing but it would
- 19 have nothing to do with -- with remoteness. And
- 20 here's why: In a defined contribution plan, the
- 21 assets are -- are unsegregated, just as in a
- 22 defined benefit plan. That's true. But they're
- 23 not undivided.
- So the proper analogue there would be
- 25 -- and this happened a lot -- you had a trust,

- 1 it held the deed to Whiteacre. It held the deed
- 2 to Blackacre. We don't suggest that the person
- 3 who had the beneficial interest in Blackacre
- 4 could sue for a restoration of losses to
- 5 Whiteacre. That's the case in a defined
- 6 contribution plan.
- 7 JUSTICE GORSUCH: Okay. So there are
- 8 Article III limits, then, on how far the
- 9 standing -- whatever is provided for by the
- 10 statute here.
- 11 MR. STRIS: Well, there are many
- 12 limits, just to be clear about the modesty of
- our position. First of all, from a historical
- 14 standpoint, this is probably -- this -- what
- we're describing here in terms of the property
- 16 interests impairment has more of -- at least as
- much of a historical pedigree as qui tam suits
- 18 in Vermont Agency. And this Court has said time
- 19 and time again that if suits existed at the time
- of the founding, it fit the definition of case
- 21 or controversy from a constitutional
- 22 perspective.
- JUSTICE BREYER: If we do that -- I
- don't remember the 15th century, surprisingly,
- 25 but, nonetheless --

1	(Laughter.	)
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- 2 JUSTICE BREYER: We did look up some
- 3 things. And my -- at least a quick research
- 4 suggests that -- that there are different
- 5 duties, fiduciary duties. One is the duty of
- 6 loyalty. Another is the duty of prudence.
- 7 And in respect to loyalty, yes, what
- 8 you say, I think, shows pretty accurate, people
- 9 with an interest in trust, like beneficiary can
- 10 sue the trustee for breach of the loyalty where
- 11 he may be invested in a great investment for
- them, but he shouldn't have, because it helped
- 13 him too.
- But there was a duty of prudence,
- which seems what you're really interested in.
- 16 And there you couldn't. That is to say, they
- said that a -- that a life beneficiary could sue
- 18 for loss of income but if there is no risk of
- 19 loss of income, he can't sue.
- 20 A remainderman could sue to injuries
- 21 to the principal of the trust, but that's all he
- has an interest in. And as long as that's safe,
- 23 he can't sue.
- Now if that's the right analogy, I
- 25 would draw from that, yeah, you can sue for

- duties of breach of loyalty, but not for duties
- of a breach of prudence.
- 3 MR. STRIS: So a few responses,
- 4 Justice Breyer.
- 5 So loyalty is our second injury. I
- 6 haven't gotten to that yet. The property injury
- 7 is prudence. That is what I'm talking about.
- 8 JUSTICE BREYER: And there the
- 9 remainderman could not sue, it says.
- MR. STRIS: We're -- absolutely.
- 11 We're not a remainderman.
- 12 JUSTICE BREYER: Oh, you aren't? What
- is your interest in the money -- in the trust
- 14 that is any greater since it's fully funded and
- everything and has many, many sources, that was
- 16 greater than the remainderman's interest in the
- income that's being paid out of a body -- a
- 18 corpus, which you will eventually get, which
- 19 isn't hurt?
- MR. STRIS: The answer is, we have an
- interest in a promise of future payments secured
- 22 by the entirety of the trust corpus.
- 23 And let me tell you about history. So
- 24 the rule for a present beneficiaries with a
- 25 contingent interest has been settled since at

- 1 least 1808, according to the English Courts of
- 2 Chancery. I would point your attention to Allen
- 3 versus Allen. This is 33 English Reporter 704.
- 4 Here's what the English Courts of Chancery said
- 5 and it is followed through in every case that I
- 6 have seen.
- 7 A present interest, the enjoinment of
- 8 which may depend upon the most remote and
- 9 improbable contingency, is nevertheless a
- 10 present estate.
- 11 JUSTICE BREYER: Yes, that's -- you're
- 12 talking about a contingent interest. A
- 13 contingent interest is an interest in a certain
- 14 set of -- a certain property, a certain body of
- 15 money. A remainderman had no interest.
- MR. STRIS: That's right. We had --
- 17 JUSTICE BREYER: But he would receive
- 18 not a contingent interest. He had no interest
- in anything except the body of --
- MR. STRIS: Where the --
- JUSTICE BREYER: -- and -- and what --
- 22 it's hard to see a difference between that
- remainderman and the interest of a beneficiary.
- 24 MR. STRIS: Here's the difference.
- JUSTICE BREYER: Go ahead.

1 MR. STRIS: The difference comes both

- 2 from the plan document in this case and ERISA.
- 3 Let's start with the plan document.
- 4 It's pages 60 to 61 of the Joint Appendix.
- 5 Here's what it says. And this is representative
- 6 of every defined-benefit plan I've seen.
- 7 It says, "All of the plan assets," and
- 8 that's not a contract, that's stocks, bonds,
- 9 investments, "shall be held in a trust fund
- separate from the bank's assets." It says, "the
- 11 trust assets can only be used to benefit the
- 12 participants, except as permitted by ERISA and
- 13 the tax code."
- 14 ERISA and the tax code are very clear,
- they prohibit taking or wasting any of the trust
- 16 assets, including the surplus. So the point
- 17 that's being made here to -- to -- to what I
- 18 believe you were asking, Mr. Chief Justice,
- 19 which is a fair point is, well, you may not need
- the surplus, so how do you have an interest?
- 21 And -- and our core submission is that
- 22 since the 15th century, the way trust law has
- worked is, it has -- it has conferred a property
- interest in the corpus without any case-by-case
- 25 assessment. But --

- JUSTICE ALITO: But you -- you have
  some strong arguments. I -- I want to get this
  one question in before your time is up.
- 4 And you have arguments based on of
- 5 Congress having granted a right to sue, and you
- 6 have arguments based on the -- the -- the
- 7 analogy between trust law and ERISA, but an
- 8 ERISA plan is not a trust in the normal sense of
- 9 the word. But put all of that aside. I want to
- 10 hear about practicalities.
- 11 So let's say a beneficiary of a
- 12 defined-benefit plan comes to you and says: I
- don't know anything about ERISA, I don't even
- 14 know what it means, I don't know anything about
- 15 trust law or the 15th century, anything like
- 16 that.
- 17 What I want you to tell me is, what is
- 18 the practical chance -- this is the beneficiary
- 19 of this plan -- that I'm not going to get paid
- 20 my benefits? What do you tell that person?
- MR. STRIS: So that -- that's a --
- 22 a -- a totally fair question, and let me answer
- 23 it in the context of this case. And I mean this
- 24 very seriously.
- 25 If you look at our complaint, Joint

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1 Appendix page 90, paragraph 167, we pled,
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- 2 because we believe that there was a substantial
- 3 increased risk of default here, there was \$750
- 4 million less.
- 5 JUSTICE ALITO: But you pled --
- 6 MR. STRIS: In answering the --
- JUSTICE ALITO: You pled that, but
- 8 compliance with Article III has to be reassessed
- 9 at different stages of the -- of the proceeding.
- 10 Is there any -- is the risk greater than the
- 11 risk of being hit by a meteorite?
- MR. STRIS: This is my core point,
- 13 Justice Alito. As -- I think the best example
- of this is the Pension Rights Center's brief.
- 15 They explain, based up on their experience that
- 16 the swings in funding and -- of -- of
- 17 defined-benefit plans changes incredibly
- 18 quickly. The Harley case out of the Eighth
- 19 Circuit. In one year, there was a \$600 million
- 20 contribution but the plan was 800 billion --
- 21 \$800 billion dollars underfunded.
- 22 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Well, that --
- MR. STRIS: Because of --
- 24 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: I'm sorry, go
- ahead.

1	MR. STRIS: Because of that, the
2	the Congress exercised their judgment to say
3	we are going to confer a property interest in
4	the entirety of the trust corpus so we don't
5	have to do a case-by-case assessment. The
6	JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: But Congress made
7	clear that not only the plan but the employer
8	and then the PBGC, which you haven't mentioned
9	at all, is in play here. And the combination of
LO	the plan, the employer, and the PBGC, doesn't
L1	that make the practical answer to Justice
L2	Alito's question
L3	MR. STRIS: Well, I don't think
L4	that's a fair point. I don't think so at all.
L5	The PBGC, which has its own solvency issues
L6	JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: It does, but it's
L7	backed by the United States Government.
L8	MR. STRIS: Not the full faith and
L9	credit of the government. It's what happens
20	is there are premium payments so it doesn't
21	function that way. But more importantly, the
22	PBGC doesn't fund anything above a minimum set
23	of benefits. The core here's the answer to
24	the core practical question.
25	JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: But they exceed

- 1 the benefits of your clients in this case.
- 2 MR. STRIS: There -- there are two
- 3 things going on here right now. I want to be
- 4 very --
- 5 JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: Is that --
- 6 MR. STRIS -- clear --
- 7 JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: Is that yes?
- 8 MR. STRIS: Yes, my two clients, yes.
- 9 But there's two things going on here, Justice
- 10 Kavanaugh, and it's really important to separate
- 11 them out: What matters for standing and what --
- 12 why we care practically. I am answering the
- 13 latter one.
- 14 And what I'm saying is, in any
- individual case, you don't know whether you're
- 16 going to need the surplus until it's gone. I
- 17 think if -- if the financial collapse in AIG and
- 18 Lehman tells us anything, it's that.
- 19 So if I am right that Congress said,
- in exchange for a tax benefit, you have to put
- 21 all of these assets in trust, you have to confer
- 22 a property interest in the full -- the full
- 23 trust, I have -- I'm right on standing and
- 24 there's -- there's an Article III injury, you
- don't have to inquire into the risk, but I also

- 1 have a practical answer that doesn't matter for
- 2 standing but, so that you don't have heartburn,
- 3 you can see why a sensible policy-maker would
- 4 make that decision. That's precisely what they
- 5 did.
- 6 And that's precisely how many types of
- 7 analogous trusts worked in an unbroken line of
- 8 cases since the 15th century.
- 9 JUSTICE GINSBURG: Before you -- you
- 10 finish, can you clarify the precise actions of
- 11 the fiduciary that you are assailing in this
- 12 case?
- MR. STRIS: Yes.
- 14 JUSTICE GINSBURG: First the district
- 15 court said that to challenge to the 100 percent
- 16 equity investment is off the table because it's
- 17 time-barred. So I think that that's out of the
- 18 case.
- 19 MR. STRIS: I -- I don't agree.
- JUSTICE GINSBURG: All right. Then
- 21 tell -- tell me -- and then as far as the
- 22 bank-affiliated funds, they say that they -- the
- 23 bank says you long ago got rid of all of them.
- MR. STRIS: So here's what happened,
- 25 Justice Ginsburg, and this is critical of the

1	procedural posture.
2	May I answer, Your Honor?
3	CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Briefly.
4	MR. STRIS: I'll be I'll be brief.
5	The the first claim, the equities,
6	was dismissed on statute of limitations grounds
7	prior to this Court's decision in Tibble. We
8	appealed. The court never the court of
9	appeals never reached the question because it
10	held that we have no standing.
11	So you don't assume in doing the
12	standing analysis that that claim is gone. The
13	only reason that it's gone is because we weren't
14	able to appeal it. Based on this Court's
15	decision in Tibble, it will clearly be reversed.
16	CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Thank you,
17	counsel.
18	Mr. Joshi.
19	ORAL ARGUMENT OF SOPAN JOSHI
20	FOR THE UNITED STATES, AS AMICUS CURIAE,
21	SUPPORTING THE PETITIONERS
22	MR. JOSHI: Mr. Chief Justice and may
23	it please the Court:
24	When a trustee breaches his fiduciary

duties and causes losses to the trust, real

- 1 money losses, the beneficiary always has been
- 2 able to sue the trustee for the breach of trust.
- 3 It's been the law for hundreds of years of trust
- 4 law and it's expressly in ERISA's text as well.
- 5 And that rule makes really good sense.
- The beneficiaries are the ones who are
- 7 getting paid out of the trust. The
- 8 beneficiaries are the ones, as this Court
- 9 recognized in Russell, who have an interest in
- 10 the financial integrity of the trust. And the
- 11 beneficiaries are in the best position to
- 12 monitor and police the trustee for breaches of
- 13 trust.
- And that's why the traditional rule,
- as my friend mentioned earlier, is that even
- 16 contingent beneficiaries could sue a trustee.
- 17 But the rule goes even further than that. If
- 18 you read the treatises, even discretionary
- 19 beneficiaries could sue a trustee for breach of
- 20 trust. These are beneficiaries who have
- 21 absolutely no entitlement to any trust assets,
- 22 except those that the trustee in his own
- 23 discretion will give to the beneficiary.
- 24 Nevertheless, a breach of trust would allow the
- 25 beneficiary to sue that very trustee.

1	That history, I think, decides this
2	case. We
3	JUSTICE GORSUCH: Let me propose a
4	hypothetical then about the defined contribution
5	plans. Let's say the trustee is left with
6	discretion. After everybody is paid, if there's
7	extra, you can throw it to somebody, even though
8	it's not in their own contribution plan.
9	So I think you would say the result
10	would be that every single beneficiary could
11	sue, even if all of their investments are clean,
12	for somebody else's defined contribution plan
13	where the where the where the plan might
14	be dirty; is that right? Does that follow?
15	MR. JOSHI: I I think that might
16	follow, and I think it might I I do
17	think it might and I think that comes from not
18	only our our you know, the positions we've
19	laid out in the case in trust law and the
20	undifferentiated assets but also from this
21	Court's decision in LaRue.
22	In LaRue, of course, this Court held
23	that the plaintiff, who was suing over harms to
24	his own account, nevertheless could maintain a
25	suit under 502(a)(2) for harm to the entire

- 1 trust because the trust included the account,
- 2 the account was part of the trust.
- 3 So I think on that theory, then, if
- 4 you just extend it, that would have to be the
- 5 logic. My answer would have to be yes. But --
- 6 I want to --
- 7 JUSTICE GORSUCH: Everybody could sue
- 8 for everything.
- 9 MR. JOSHI: -- I want to hasten to add
- 10 that, as a practical matter, these cases,
- 11 especially in the posture you just mentioned,
- 12 are -- are going to arise in the class context,
- and I think it would be perfectly reasonable for
- 14 a court to look at that and --
- 15 JUSTICE GORSUCH: What about -- what
- 16 about Justice Alito's meteor, the likelihood of
- 17 getting a discretionary benefit from the trustee
- 18 might be less than the chance of being hit by a
- 19 meteor? Would Article III have something to say
- 20 there? Or are you saying -- suggesting now,
- 21 everybody can sue for everything anyway?
- MR. JOSHI: So, historically, trust
- law has allowed the beneficiary to sue the
- trustee, a discretionary beneficiary to do so.
- 25 And one might imagine when you sue the trustee,

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1 he's probably not likely to exercise his
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- discretion in your favor; but, nevertheless, you
- 3 were allowed to sue.
- 4 What Article III has to say about
- 5 it -- and -- and I know there's a lot of
- 6 doctrine around Article III, but I think the key
- 7 point, and -- and Spokeo reiterated it and 50
- 8 years of case law has reiterated it, it comes
- 9 from the words "cases and controversies" in the
- 10 text of the Constitution. And the meaning of
- 11 those words at a minimum includes the cases and
- 12 controversies heard in the courts of Westminster
- 13 and in the colonies at the --
- 14 JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: But isn't that --
- MR. JOSHI: -- time of the founding.
- 16 JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: -- the -- I'm
- 17 sorry. The tension in this case as I see it,
- 18 and I think it's a close case, is the history is
- 19 strong but the answer to the question -- it's
- 20 99.99 percent certain that the benefits promised
- 21 are going to be there. And how do we resolve
- 22 what I see as that tension? Because it -- it
- 23 would be odd for us to grant standing in a case
- 24 where the -- the chances are so small.
- On the other hand, you're right about

- 1 the history. I mean, you make a good point
- 2 about the history.
- 3 MR. JOSHI: Yeah, I -- I -- I think
- 4 the answer really is the history, but to the
- 5 extent, you know, there's a chance, I guess I
- 6 have two answers to that. One is this Court has
- 7 and -- and certainly the "no further inquiry"
- 8 cases made clear that even when the trust
- 9 benefits from a particular breach of duty, you
- 10 still have standing, if you will, to sue.
- 11 And, you know, one case out of many
- 12 that we cited is Magruder against Drury. That's
- 13 a decision of this Court in which the trustee
- 14 was making loans on trust notes and allowing the
- 15 trust to -- to acquire those notes, and it was
- on -- there was no question that it was on
- 17 beneficial terms and there was no question that
- 18 the trust benefited because it could make these
- 19 reinvestments and save brokerage fees. That --
- 20 those are in the facts of -- of the decision of
- 21 this Court. Nevertheless, the Court said that,
- you know, not only did the beneficiaries have
- 23 standing to sue -- it didn't discuss standing --
- 24 but they -- they were entitled to recover. So
- that's one answer.

1	The other answer to your to your
2	question is, no matter how low the risk might be
3	as my friend mentioned PBGC tells me that
4	plans that are highly overfunded the next year
5	become underfunded. So as a practical matter,
6	you don't know and, more importantly
7	JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: What is what is
8	the role I'm sorry to interrupt, but the
9	PBGC, how should we think about that, if we get
LO	away from the history at all, its role and how
L1	it guarantees a back stop?
L2	MR. JOSHI: I I don't think it
L3	matters at all. No one ever suggested that the
L4	mere fact that you might have insurance means
L5	you don't have standing to sue someone for the
L6	harms
L7	JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: It's the
L8	MR. JOSHI: they've caused.
L9	JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: It's the
20	combination of the plan plus the employer plus
21	the PBGC would all have to
22	MR. JOSHI: You the fact that there
23	may be many layers of insurance, if you will,
24	doesn't change the fact that when a trustee
25	breaches his fiduciary duties, you can sue. And

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1 then --
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- 2 JUSTICE ALITO: And how -- how far
- 3 with you push the analogy to trust law in this?
- 4 Since -- it -- was there a trust where the
- 5 settlor of the trust had an obligation to step
- 6 in and increase the amount of money in the trust
- 7 in order to -- to ensure that beneficiaries
- 8 would be paid?
- 9 MR. JOSHI: Not -- not to my
- 10 knowledge. And --
- 11 JUSTICE ALITO: I mean, that's the big
- 12 difference between the situation here and trust
- law, right?
- MR. JOSHI: I -- I don't think it's
- 15 different. I don't think it's a distinction
- 16 that -- that makes any practical difference, at
- 17 least for Article III. It is an additional
- 18 protection that the drafters of ERISA wanted to
- 19 make, in addition to making the plan its own
- 20 entity. Those are all additional protections
- 21 for beneficiaries, precisely because in
- 22 Congress's judgment, as this Court laid out in
- 23 footnote 8 of Russell, trust law was not
- 24 protective enough of beneficiaries.
- 25 And -- and here's is the point -- and

- 1 this is to finish my answer to -- to your
- 2 question, Justice Kavanaugh -- to merely say
- 3 it's highly likely you're going to get your
- 4 money back is -- you might say that if, for
- 5 example, to -- to pick up on my friend's
- 6 analogy, you know, you were to loan money to
- 7 Bill Gates. You're pretty sure he's going to be
- 8 able to repay your money, but the difference
- 9 between having the repayment or the -- the money
- 10 you're entitled to come as a result of a
- 11 contract and come as a result of a trust is very
- 12 different.
- 13 You get a very meaningful benefit from
- 14 having your money come from a trust. And that
- is it's managed by a fiduciary --
- 16 JUSTICE BREYER: All right. Can you
- just give me -- do you want to finish? Go
- ahead.
- 19 MR. JOSHI: Yeah. Sure.
- 20 JUSTICE BREYER: All right. Just
- 21 don't spend more than 15 seconds. But what in
- 22 the law -- see, the stock market goes up and
- down. And every time it goes down, it's
- 24 underfunded. Every time it goes up, it's
- overfunded. Okay? Once it's overfunded,

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1 everybody's just as well off as they were
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- 2 before.
- Now, that happens probably quite a
- 4 lot. Now, if we -- if you -- what in the law
- 5 prevents a class action every time it goes down
- 6 and then it goes back up and they're better off,
- 7 and you say, well, now we're talking about
- 8 yesterday? What prevents -- something should
- 9 prevent that. Now, what is it that prevents
- 10 that?
- 11 MR. JOSHI: Well, I -- I'm not certain
- 12 what context you're talking about.
- JUSTICE BREYER: I'm just saying the
- standing thing might be one of the things that
- 15 prevents that because -- I mean, I -- and you
- can say, well, they have to have a good case,
- 17 dah-dah-dah. All right, I understand that.
- 18 But, what -- is there anything else in the law
- 19 that, except this standing business, that can
- 20 protect against that?
- MR. JOSHI: If you have suffered an
- injury of a peppercorn, you have standing to
- 23 sue. Now, you -- there might not be --
- JUSTICE BREYER: But that's --
- MR. JOSHI: But the other thing is

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1 that --
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- JUSTICE BREYER: -- of course, I want
- 3 to say, okay, your answer is nothing protects in
- 4 the law.
- 5 MR. JOSHI: Well, again, it -- it's
- 6 hard to answer that question in the abstract.
- 7 What I do know is that, in this particular
- 8 context, there are trust duties that are set
- 9 forth in the law --
- JUSTICE BREYER: I know --
- 11 MR. JOSHI: -- of trust --
- 12 JUSTICE BREYER: -- there's some, but
- this is a duty of prudence, which means you made
- 14 a bad investment that -- and you do make bad
- investments and you say, well, the trustees say
- 16 dah-dah-dah. Okay. But I wonder if there is
- anything that prevents against the roller
- 18 coaster which would mean many, many suits, even
- 19 though the beneficiaries are even better off
- 20 sometimes after the stock market's finished its
- 21 little roller coaster. So you're saying
- 22 nothing? Okay. I got the answer.
- MR. JOSHI: Well --
- JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: Aren't you
- 25 saying --

1	MR. JOSHI: What I'm
2	JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: I'm sorry, aren't
3	you saying the deference afforded to the plan
4	administrators on the merits is
5	MR. JOSHI: That that's
6	JUSTICE BREYER: That's one.
7	JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: If properly
8	applied?
9	JUSTICE BREYER: That's one.
10	MR. JOSHI: That's exactly right. And
11	I think to to if you just look at it, you
12	know, the the funding rules in 303
13	JUSTICE BREYER: Yeah.
14	MR. JOSHI: and the fiduciary rules
15	in 404 and 406, Congress did not make these
16	JUSTICE BREYER: Okay, all on the
17	merits
18	MR. JOSHI: to be exclusive.
19	They
20	JUSTICE BREYER: I I I
21	MR. JOSHI: they all apply at all
22	times. It's
23	JUSTICE BREYER: I see.
24	CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: I'm not sure
25	you're giving adequate weight to the when

- 1 you're looking at the history, the significance
- of Article III to our role in the separation of
- 3 powers.
- 4 The requirement to decide an actual
- 5 case or controversy is the only thing that gives
- 6 us authority to do what we do. And so the fact,
- 7 well, you say in history in, you know, 14
- 8 whatever you didn't need to show that, well,
- 9 that doesn't necessarily take into account how
- 10 Article III works today under the Constitution.
- 11 MR. JOSHI: That may be right, but as
- 12 I said, the Magruder case and many others that
- we've cited in the briefs do recognize this
- 14 principle of trust law. And I'd also point out
- that nobody disputes that if the allegations are
- 16 true, that the plan's loss of \$748 million -- if
- 17 I may finish -- is a injury to the plan and the
- 18 plan itself would have standing to sue. But, of
- 19 course, the plan's not a human being. Someone
- 20 has to sue on behalf of it.
- 21 And when the trustee's the one that
- caused that loss, the one person who's going to
- 23 step into the shoes to sue for the plan's injury
- is the beneficiary.
- 25 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Thank you,

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1	counsel.
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- 2 Mr. Palmore.
- ORAL ARGUMENT OF JOSEPH R. PALMORE
- 4 ON BEHALF OF THE RESPONDENTS
- 5 MR. PALMORE: Thank you, Mr. Chief
- 6 Justice, and may it please the Court:
- 7 There is no ERISA exception to Article
- 8 III. Like all plaintiffs in federal court,
- 9 those with ERISA claims must demonstrate injury.
- 10 Neither Petitioner here can do that.
- 11 This month, Petitioner James Thole
- will receive a pension payment of \$2,198.38,
- just as he has every month since his retirement
- 14 from U.S. Bank. And Petitioner Sherry Smith
- will receive the same \$42.26 payment she has
- 16 received since her retirement.
- 17 If this Court affirms dismissal of all
- of their claims, it is undisputed that those
- 19 payments will be exactly the same every month
- 20 for the rest of their lives, not one penny less.
- 21 If, on the other hand, this Court were
- to reverse, this case were to be litigated to
- judgment in favor of plaintiffs and they were to
- 24 receive every single form of relief they demand,
- 25 those payments would also be exactly the same,

- 1 not one penny more.
- 2 Federal courts are not available to
- 3 adjudicate claims like this that do not matter
- 4 to the plaintiffs. Whether viewed as a matter
- 5 of Article III or statutory standing, none of
- 6 Petitioners' arguments solve that fundamental
- 7 problem with their case.
- First, at trust law, beneficiaries
- 9 could sue to challenge fiduciary breaches only
- 10 when they affected their interests, unharmed
- 11 beneficiaries could not sue.
- 12 Second, Petitioners lack any property
- interest in the trust underlying this
- defined-benefit pension plan. That is because,
- 15 as this Court explained in Hughes Aircraft,
- their level of benefits is unconnected with the
- value of the assets in the trust corpus.
- 18 U.S. Bank, not a participant, bears
- 19 the risk of loss from poor performance and U.S.
- Bank, not a participant, benefits from plan
- 21 overfunding.
- Third, Petitioners cannot sue in a
- 23 representational capacity on behalf of the plan
- 24 unless they have their own injury. In fact, for
- 25 the reasons just stated, they don't.

1 Mr. Stris started off by saying they 2 have a property interest in the plan, but under 3 the structure of ERISA and under Hughes Aircraft, they don't. The trustee owns legal 4 5 title of the plan and owns -- and the equitable interest in the plan is -- is the plan itself 6 7 holds the equitable interest in the plan. 8 The -- and this -- the fact that they 9 have no right to sue over the fluctuations, the 10 ups and downs in the value in the trust corpus 11 is actually entirely consistent with the history 12 at trust law. They don't have a contingent 13 interest in the plan in the sense of if A 14 happens, they may inherit all of the trust 15 corpus or if B happens, their benefits may get 16 up -- may -- may qo up. 17 They have no such interest. And at 18 trust law, a plaintiff or a beneficiary whose 19 interest was completely unconnected to the value 2.0 of the trust could not sue. And we've cited the 21 -- Bogert, section 871 for that proposition, the 22 restatement second on torts, section 214, 23 comment B, all stand for that proposition. That's -- it's a different situation 24 if you have a contingent beneficiary situation 25

- 1 where there are two beneficiaries --
- 2 JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: Can you imagine a
- 3 -- a situation in which a participant in a
- 4 defined-benefit plan would have standing? And
- 5 can you describe the particular line that would
- 6 separate that from this case?
- 7 MR. PALMORE: Yes, Your Honor. I
- 8 think a -- a participant in a defined-benefit
- 9 plan would have standing consistent with normal
- 10 black letter Article III principles if they
- 11 could show that there was a risk to their
- 12 benefits.
- JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: And how would they
- 14 show that? How would they show that?
- MR. PALMORE: Well, they could show,
- 16 A, I'm not getting paid what I was promised.
- 17 JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: Okay. Put aside
- 18 the not getting paid. But if they're still
- 19 getting paid --
- MR. PALMORE: Right.
- 21 JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: -- how would they
- show what are the particulars that you think
- would be necessary?
- MR. PALMORE: Well, I think -- you
- 25 know, I don't think -- first of all, I would

just preface my remarks by saying I don't think

- 2 this case calls for --
- 3 JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: I understand that.
- 4 MR. PALMORE: -- the Court to opine on
- 5 that because they've said that there's no risk
- 6 at all that's required.
- 7 But I think this Court -- I think it
- 8 would be simple factual application of Clapper
- 9 where the Court talked about imminent risk or a
- 10 substantial risk.
- 11 JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: Right. I know the
- 12 terms. I'm just trying to figure out how --
- MR. PALMORE: Well, I think --
- JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: -- to assess --
- 15 MR. PALMORE: -- and I think those
- 16 terms are flexible enough to take into account
- 17 the long-term time horizon of a pension plan.
- 18 So I don't think you'd have to show that the
- 19 plan was going to fail tomorrow, but I think
- 20 it's not -- wouldn't be enough to show that the
- 21 plan was simply underfunded. The Fifth Circuit
- 22 --
- JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: Well, let me pause
- there. What's the delta between you can take
- 25 into account the long-term likelihood --

1 MR. PALMORE: Well, I think you have

- 2 to look --
- JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: -- and
- 4 underfunded. It seems like pleading. I guess
- 5 my point is pleading what you think is necessary
- 6 won't be as big a hurdle as you're really
- 7 implying, I don't think.
- 8 MR. PALMORE: Well, I think you would
- 9 have to plead not only was the plan at risk but
- 10 that the employer either could not or would not
- 11 fulfill its legal obligation to make up any
- 12 deficit in the plan.
- 13 So the Fifth Circuit's case in Lee
- 14 versus Verizon is instructive here. That was
- 15 post-Spokeo, that was a GVR case in which the --
- 16 that -- the Verizon pension plan was actually
- only 66 percent funded. But what the Fifth
- 18 Circuit said was that the plaintiffs there
- 19 hadn't adequately alleged injury because they
- 20 hadn't alleged that Verizon, one of the biggest
- 21 companies in the country, would be unable to
- 22 fulfill its legal obligations to make up that
- 23 deficit and to --
- 24 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Well, we've
- 25 had --

1	MR. PALMORE: make good on their
2	payments.
3	CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: In the not too
4	far off past, there have been situations where
5	people were surprised of some of the companies
6	that turned out not to have enough money to go
7	forward.
8	And it let's say that the a
9	person running the trust or the, you know,
LO	running the company loses \$100 million in the
L1	first month and 100 in the second and 100 in the
L2	third, and although there is no significant harm
L3	to the beneficiaries in the terms that you've
L <b>4</b>	discussed it, they look and say: Well, this guy
L5	is going to continue to lose a lot of money and
L6	can you can they bring a suit in that case?
L7	MR. PALMORE: If they could show he's
L8	going to continue to lose a lot of money and it
L9	will result in an impairment of their only
20	interest, which is the stream of payments from
21	the pension plan, then yes, they can bring a
22	suit and they can get an injunction to have him
23	removed.
24	JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: So, I've

MR. PALMORE: Here, they've --

1	JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: I've
2	MR. PALMORE: never they've
3	never established that or claimed that here.
4	JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: I'm sorry. I
5	don't know why we need all that, meaning there
6	is a simple two simple claims here. One, a
7	breach of loyalty that they invested in in a
8	vehicle that cost more money than was needed,
9	and it was self-dealing, so trust law has always
10	said, you can't self-deal. You can't make money
11	off of the assets of the plan.
12	So whether or not they get something
13	or don't, trust law has been clear forever that
14	that belongs to the trust and the plan
15	participants have trustees who are self-dealing,
16	they're not going to sue for themselves, we can
17	sue for that self-dealing.
18	Secondly, the plan lost 750-odd
19	billion dollars or whatever the money was,
20	millions, in imprudent investment. Now, whether
21	we lose money or not, the plan lost money. It
22	lost \$753 million or whatever the figure was.
23	And, in fact, until you contributed 311 million
24	of that 753, the plan was underfunded.
25	You then came along and said: Well,

- 1 we'll give that much, a part of that loss but
- 2 not the whole. And so if the trustees are not
- 3 going to give the whole amount because it's not
- 4 in their best interests, but it's in the plan's
- 5 best interests, what does it matter whether the
- 6 participants get a piece of that or not? The
- 7 plan gets it and they're representing the plan.
- 8 So I -- I guess what I'm having
- 9 trouble with in this case is that they're right,
- whether they have a property interest or they
- 11 have a representational interest, they still
- 12 have standing.
- 13 MR. PALMORE: Your Honor, first of
- 14 all, they don't have a property interest for the
- 15 reasons I stated --
- JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: So, why?
- 17 MR. PALMORE: -- and as the reasons
- 18 this Court stated in Hughes Aircraft, they don't
- 19 have a property interest.
- 20 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: Let's remember the
- 21 following in Hughes. They were seeking a
- 22 distribution of a surplus that the court said
- they couldn't seek.
- 24 MR. PALMORE: And the reason --
- 25 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: But here --

1	MR.	PALMORE:	Yes.

- JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: -- they're not
- 3 asking for a distribution to themselves of a
- 4 surplus. They are asking for a payment to the
- 5 plan.
- 6 MR. PALMORE: Right. But Hughes
- 7 rejected that claim on the merits because of the
- 8 structure of defined-benefits plan.
- 9 But if I can move to the
- 10 representational standing question that you
- 11 asked, a party can sue on behalf of another only
- if that party has their own injury. That's
- 13 Perry versus Hollingsworth. That's -- there are
- many such cases.
- So in a qui tam case, the relator will
- 16 personally recover and get money. In a
- derivative action, that the plaintiff owns a
- share of the corporation so any benefit to the
- 19 corporation will flow down and -- and they will
- get a minute part of it. And if they don't,
- 21 this Court explained in Gollust versus Mendell,
- there's an Article III problem.
- 23 With respect to the first part of your
- question, which is the no further inquiry rule,
- 25 I think it is critical to understand there are

- 1 two separate questions: How is harm
- 2 established, and then who has the relevant
- 3 injury to sue to remedy that harm.
- 4 The "no further inquiry" rule went
- 5 only to that first question. It said that if
- 6 the trust engaged in a transaction that was
- 7 inconsistent with the duty of loyalty or was
- 8 otherwise prohibited, there would be a
- 9 presumption of harm to the trust and, therefore,
- 10 that transaction could be rescinded.
- 11 But there is always -- they don't need
- 12 the presumption here. They have alleged harm to
- 13 the trust. There's always a separate question
- of whose interest is implicated by harm to the
- 15 trust.
- JUSTICE GORSUCH: Counsel, on that,
- 17 what if Congress had in its statute -- I know
- 18 you would disagree that it did this -- what if
- 19 it had said that every beneficiary has a
- 20 property interest or a private right to a
- 21 completely clean trustee. Would that suffice
- 22 for standing in your view?
- MR. PALMORE: I don't think so, Your
- 24 Honor. Of course, I don't think you have to
- 25 address that question. But as Spokeo explained,

- 1 there are limits on Congress's ability to
- 2 provide causes of action and to identify
- 3 injuries and make violation of them concrete.
- 4 JUSTICE GORSUCH: This isn't creating
- 5 a cause of action. I agree with you about all
- 6 of that. I understand your point. But say you
- 7 actually have a right, a legal right, creating a
- 8 new -- and we know this is new, we admit it's
- 9 new --
- 10 MR. PALMORE: Yeah.
- 11 JUSTICE GORSUCH: -- but we think it's
- important, because whatever -- whatever good
- policy reasons, some of which we have heard
- 14 articulated here.
- MR. PALMORE: Well, I think this Court
- 16 would look to the substance of it. I think if
- 17 they just labeled it a property interest, I
- 18 don't think that would be good enough. If they
- 19 somehow tied the level of benefits to the value
- in the trust corpus, this would be a whole
- 21 different ball game, and they clearly would have
- 22 standing.
- But like we talked earlier about the
- 24 questions about the contingent beneficiaries, if
- you had two beneficiaries at common law, they

- 1 each had a 50 percent chance of getting the
- 2 trust corpus, yes, they had standing at common
- 3 law, because they did have an equitable interest
- 4 in the trust corpus. They might get all of it.
- 5 Here we're not talking about
- 6 50 percent. We're talking about zero percent.
- 7 These Petitioners will never get any of this
- 8 money.
- 9 JUSTICE KAGAN: Mr. Palmore,
- 10 regardless of whether it's zero or 50, if I
- 11 understand your argument, you are acknowledging
- that if they have an equitable interest, then
- they have standing; is that correct?
- MR. PALMORE: If they had a property
- 15 interest in --
- 16 JUSTICE KAGAN: An equitable interest
- 17 --
- MR. PALMORE: -- the trust corpus --
- 19 JUSTICE KAGAN: -- in the trust
- 20 corpus.
- 21 MR. PALMORE: An equitable -- an
- 22 equitable property interest, then, yes, a -- a
- loss of a dollar from the trust corpus is loss
- of a dollar to them, but they don't. That's the
- 25 critical point.

1	JUSTICE KAGAN: So but that's what
2	everything depends on in your view. I mean,
3	your argument just falls apart if we look at
4	ERISA and we say that's exactly what Congress
5	did here, was to give all of the beneficiaries
6	and participants an equitable interest in the
7	integrity of the trust.
8	MR. PALMORE: And I don't want to
9	quibble over terminology, but I would say an
LO	equitable property interest, if if they did
L1	
L2	JUSTICE KAGAN: That's what I
L3	MR. PALMORE: in the real. Yes
L4	JUSTICE KAGAN: We're not talking
L5	about
L6	MR. PALMORE: then perhaps, but
L7	they didn't. The plan is has the equitable
L8	interest and the fiduciary duties run to the
L9	plan. And, moreover
20	JUSTICE KAGAN: And where do you
21	MR. PALMORE: what they are
22	entitled
23	JUSTICE KAGAN: get that from?
24	What does that mean, that the plan has the

equitable interest? I mean, the plan is the

- thing that there's an interest in, isn't there?
- 2 MR. PALMORE: No, Your Honor. This is
- 3 -- the structure of an ERISA plan, you have a --
- 4 legal title is owned by the trustee. And the
- 5 trustee holds legal title for the benefit of the
- 6 plan itself.
- 7 And this Court explained in Russell
- 8 that the fiduciary duties run to -- for plan
- 9 asset management, run to the plan, but even if
- 10 you don't agree with that, I think the history
- 11 here is still critical because at common law, a
- 12 remainderman couldn't sue -- and this is Terry
- versus Allen, it's the -- it's the Connecticut
- 14 Supreme Court case that we cite, Justice Breyer,
- the remainderman who had an interest in only the
- trust principal was a beneficiary but could not
- 17 sue, didn't have standing to sue for
- 18 mismanagement of that trust corpus because a
- 19 bond protected his only interest, which was a
- 20 certain payment.
- Here U.S. Bank is the bond. We're
- talking about one of the best capitalized banks
- 23 in the country. There is no risk that this plan
- 24 was not going to be able to make good on the
- 25 stream of payments to these plaintiffs and that

1 is their only legal interest. It's getting that

- 2 check every month.
- Now if they take --
- 4 JUSTICE ALITO: Do you think that -- I
- 5 didn't quite understand your answer. Do you
- 6 think that Article III is satisfied whenever
- 7 Congress puts the label "property interest" or
- 8 "equitable interest" on something?
- 9 MR. PALMORE: No, Your Honor, I didn't
- 10 -- didn't mean to suggest that. I don't think
- 11 the label would matter. I was trying to suggest
- 12 that if it -- if it were substantively a
- 13 property interest --
- 14 JUSTICE ALITO: What does that mean
- for it to be substantively a property interest?
- 16 MR. PALMORE: I think if their
- 17 benefits were tried to the value of the trust
- 18 corpus, then they would have standing. But if
- 19 their benefits are fixed, as these benefits are,
- 20 then -- and they can't show that any harm to the
- 21 trust corpus actually jeopardized that stream of
- 22 payments, then they don't have standing, just
- 23 like the remainderman in Terry versus Allen --
- JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: It's a little --
- MR. PALMORE: -- didn't have standing.

1	JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: different
2	though. I'm sorry to interrupt. It's a little
3	different because we're talking about a
4	predictive judgment, right? And the plaintiffs
5	are going to say there's an increased risk of
6	harm. And, of course, in regulatory cases that
7	we've done, we've confronted that issue.
8	And how much of an increased risk of
9	harm that they won't receive the payments is
10	necessary, and isn't that just going to be a
11	pleading exercise that prevents presents a
12	whole new collateral set of cases trying to
13	figure out have you pled exactly enough,
14	increased risk of harm here?
15	And I guess the bottom line is is that
16	worth the candle? I guess, summarizing, if we
17	don't have clarity on the line, is it worth the
18	candle of trying to draw a line rather than just
19	going with the historical approach advocated by
20	the other side?
21	MR. PALMORE: Well, Your Honor, first
22	just to put a footnote on it, I disagree that
23	the history is on their side.
24	JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: Right.
25	MR. PALMORE: But I think it is worth

- 1 the candle because Article III requires it,
- 2 right? So Article III and Iqbal and Twombly
- 3 would require proper pleadings. So here they
- 4 said --
- 5 JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: I obviously agree
- 6 with that --
- 7 MR. PALMORE: Yeah.
- 8 JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: -- but you've been
- 9 referring to these old cases, which kind of said
- 10 you're out. And you're not saying you're out if
- 11 you're a participant in a defined-benefit plan.
- 12 You're in, so long as you can allege a
- 13 sufficiently increased risk of harm that my
- 14 benefits won't be paid.
- 15 And then the question becomes: What
- do you have to allege to that? Well, it's
- 17 underfunded and, therefore -- and the company
- may go belly up and, therefore, that's enough.
- 19 MR. PALMORE: Yeah, I think if it --
- 20 if it was significantly underfunded and the
- 21 company was struggling or was distressed and
- 22 didn't have adequate assets --
- JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: That's just going
- to be a whole mess, isn't it?
- MR. PALMORE: But that's required in

- 1 order to show --
- JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: Okay.
- 3 MR. PALMORE: -- that you have a
- 4 injury. So I don't think it's a whole mess.
- 5 There's a -- there's a ton of information
- 6 available here.
- 7 So you look at the facts of Clapper,
- 8 those plaintiffs had literally no ability to
- 9 demonstrate that their calls were being --
- 10 JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: Right.
- 11 MR. PALMORE: -- surveilled.
- 12 Here pension plans file annual reports
- with the Department of Labor, that's the Form
- 14 5500. There's ample public information about
- 15 publicly-traded companies. There's a lot of
- 16 information out there. And that information
- 17 here showed that even at the time this plan was
- 18 modestly underfunded, U.S. Bank had \$86 billion
- 19 in liquid assets.
- JUSTICE BREYER: But -- but --
- 21 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: There's a
- 22 standard -- Article III, there's a lot of case
- law about what standard the injury has to
- 24 satisfy. And if you're analyzing this under
- 25 Article III, that's not an open issue.

- 1 Concrete, particularized, and so on and so forth
- 2 that it has come -- developed through all sorts
- of cases where there's a challenge to the nature
- 4 of the injury.
- 5 MR. PALMORE: No, that's absolutely
- 6 right, so I think it really would be a
- 7 fact-bound application of -- of -- of Clapper,
- 8 of the imminent harm standard in Clapper or the
- 9 substantial risk standard in Clapper, which --
- 10 which the Court talked about, but what's --
- 11 JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: But, but -- sorry
- to prolong it, but it's bothering me. If you
- just allege that it's underfunded significantly,
- 14 and therefore in the complaint it says and there
- is therefore a substantially increased risk of
- harm I won't receive my promised benefits, is
- 17 that enough?
- 18 MR. PALMORE: That wouldn't be enough.
- 19 JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: Okay. What more
- is needed?
- 21 MR. PALMORE: I think -- and this,
- 22 again, would be the Fifth Circuit's decision in
- 23 Lee, which I would commend to the Court.
- 24 JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: So you agree with
- 25 -- I just want to make sure, you agree with the

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1 Fifth Circuit's formulation?
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- 2 MR. PALMORE: We do. So underfunded
- 3 isn't enough because of the way that ERISA is
- 4 structured that the employer is always on the
- 5 hook to make up any deficit in that plan. So
- 6 you've got -- it would have to allege both
- 7 underfunding and an employer who was unwilling
- 8 or unable --
- 9 JUSTICE BREYER: That's -- that's --
- 10 MR. PALMORE: -- to remedy the
- 11 problem.
- 12 JUSTICE BREYER: -- that's in a -- I
- 13 agree with the Chief Justice that I've seen
- 14 numerous cases. And whenever it's a question of
- standing and it's a money case, which this is,
- 16 you have to have some injury to money. All
- 17 right.
- 18 But we have two things: One, at least
- 19 as to the duty of loyalty, the history seems to
- 20 show that those were fairly typical trust cases
- 21 brought, although there was no injury to the
- individual beneficiary or trustee beneficiary,
- 23 who could have -- that's true of the duty of
- loyalty.
- Under the -- that's -- we've looked at

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1 the cites and they seem to say that.
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- 2 MR. PALMORE: I respectfully disagree
- 3 with that but let's --
- 4 JUSTICE BREYER: All right.
- 5 MR. PALMORE: -- continue.
- JUSTICE BREYER: I want to know that.
- 7 MR. PALMORE: Okay.
- 8 JUSTICE BREYER: But the other is
- 9 this: There are exceptions to this harm
- 10 business quantitatively. The Sierra Club, I
- 11 mean, their members can sue. And I agree that
- the members have to have once taken a, you know,
- a look around Yellowstone or something, but, I
- 14 mean, it's pretty minimal.
- 15 And here Congress has tried to create
- 16 an organization that involves pensions and, you
- 17 know, the members that they list in the statute
- as being able to sue. So why isn't that good
- 19 enough? Why isn't it good enough that -- that
- 20 Congress has created something like an
- 21 association, associational members do have the
- right to sue, even though there's nothing more
- 23 than their belonging to an association that --
- that suffered? Shouldn't that be an analogy?
- Why not?

1	MR	PALMORE:	Nο	Your	Honor
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- 2 JUSTICE BREYER: So I am interested in
- 3 both of those.
- 4 MR. PALMORE: Sure. First of all,
- 5 under Rings v. Bird, the simple conferral of a
- 6 cause of a cause of action is not enough to
- 7 confer standing. And then what you were
- 8 alluding to in 502(a)(2) and (a)(3), is simply a
- 9 bare cause of action. That's not enough. There
- 10 has to be an invasion of statutorily protected
- 11 right and there has to be a concrete injury.
- 12 JUSTICE KAGAN: At the very least,
- though, Mr. Palmore, that suggests who Congress
- 14 thought the fiduciary obligations ran to. In
- other words, this -- this goes back to this
- 16 question of: Who really owns this thing
- 17 equitably?
- 18 Is it the plan or is it the
- 19 beneficiaries and participants? And in creating
- those causes of action, Congress essentially,
- 21 you know, indicated that it thought that the
- 22 obligations ran to the beneficiaries and the
- 23 participants, meaning that it's the
- 24 beneficiaries and the participants who have the
- 25 equitable ownership stake in the financial

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1 integrity of the fund.
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- 2 MR. PALMORE: Your Honor, I -- I read
- 3 this Court's decision in Russell to -- to be --
- 4 say exactly the opposite. So 502(a)(2), which
- 5 goes to claims for fiduciary breach involving
- 6 plan asset management, which is what we have
- 7 here, the Court was quite clear that those
- 8 fiduciary duties run to the plan, not to
- 9 individual --
- 10 JUSTICE KAGAN: But even Russell --
- 11 MR. PALMORE: -- beneficiaries.
- 12 JUSTICE KAGAN: -- said that
- 13 beneficiaries have a stake in the financial
- integrity of the plan and then you have Harris
- 15 Trust, which says that ERISA gives a fiduciary
- 16 -- it makes clear that the fiduciary duty goes
- 17 to the beneficiaries.
- MR. PALMORE: Your Honor, what this
- 19 Court said -- has -- has said in subsequent
- 20 cases after Russell was that there are -- there
- 21 are other kinds of fiduciary duties which may
- 22 run directly to a beneficiary, so, for instance,
- 23 the right to receive truthful information, but
- 24 the Court reiterated in verity that the -- that
- 25 the fiduciary duty with respect to plan asset

- 1 management runs to the trust.
- 2 But even if you don't --
- JUSTICE KAGAN: I mean, isn't that a
- 4 fairly odd thing to say the that fiduciary
- 5 obligations runs to an abstract plan rather than
- 6 the beneficiaries and the participants who are
- 7 supposed to benefit from it?
- 8 MR. PALMORE: No, Your Honor, because
- 9 ERISA was an innovation in that it created the
- 10 plan as an actual legal entity with -- and a
- 11 heavily regulated one, at trust -- at common
- law, the trust itself wasn't the legal entity.
- 13 It was just a series of relationships between
- 14 individuals.
- So -- so ERISA was an innovation. But
- 16 even if you don't agree with me on that, this
- 17 question would still remain, even if the
- 18 fiduciary duties flow to the individuals, can
- 19 they sue if they are not harmed?
- 20 So at the contingent beneficiary
- analogy that we have been talking about, if you
- 22 have two contingent beneficiaries, either of
- whom could receive 50 -- might have a 50 percent
- 24 shot at getting the trust corpus, here it's a
- 25 zero percent shot. None of these -- these

- 1 Petitioners is going to get that trust corpus.
- 2 And again, the -- Justice Breyer going
- 3 back to your question, the no further inquiry
- 4 rule involved only how you establish harm to the
- 5 trust itself, to the trust corpus.
- 6 In not one of their cases do they cite
- 7 an example of a beneficiary whose concrete
- 8 financial interest were not tied to the value of
- 9 assets in the trust corpus, in not one of their
- 10 cases was that beneficiary able to --
- JUSTICE BREYER: But if you don't --
- if you don't have to assess injury to the trust
- where there is no injury to the trust, how could
- there be any injury to a beneficiary of the
- 15 trust?
- MR. PALMORE: Because there was
- 17 presumed under the no further inquiry rule,
- 18 there was presumed injury to the trust.
- 19 JUSTICE BREYER: It means sometimes
- 20 you presume that there is injury to the trust --
- MR. PALMORE: Yes.
- JUSTICE BREYER: -- when there isn't.
- 23 All right, focus on those.
- MR. PALMORE: Correct.
- JUSTICE BREYER: In that set of cases,

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1 there is no injury to the trust. And,
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- 2 therefore, a fortiori, there is no injury to the
- 3 beneficiary.
- 4 MR. PALMORE: I would -- I would
- 5 change your wording slightly. There is a
- 6 presumed injury to the trust.
- 7 JUSTICE BREYER: Well -- I know --
- 8 MR. PALMORE: There is a conclusive --
- 9 JUSTICE BREYER: -- we're saying the
- 10 same thing.
- 11 MR. PALMORE: -- presumption of harm
- 12 --
- JUSTICE BREYER: On the duty of --
- MR. PALMORE: -- to the trust.
- 15 JUSTICE BREYER: On the duty of
- 16 loyalty --
- 17 MR. PALMORE: Yes.
- 18 JUSTICE BREYER: -- there is a
- 19 presumed injury to the beneficiary.
- 20 MR. PALMORE: To the -- to the trust.
- 21 JUSTICE BREYER: Oh, there's a --
- MR. PALMORE: To the trust. And then
- 23 any beneficiary with an interest in the trust
- 24 could then sue. So if it was the remainderman
- who had only an interest in the principal, like

- 1 the plaintiff in Terry versus Allen --
- 2 JUSTICE BREYER: I see your point.
- 3 MR. PALMORE: -- and that that
- 4 interest was fully protected, that plaintiff
- 5 couldn't sue, right? So there -- it's critical
- 6 to keep those two separate questions in mind,
- 7 how is harm established, is it either proved or
- 8 conclusively presumed under the "no further
- 9 inquiry" rule but there was always the second
- 10 question, and this is Bogert 871, restatement
- 11 214, comment B, there was always a second
- 12 question of who can sue to remedy that harm to
- 13 the trust. And there the trust law is quite
- 14 clear that that "who" is someone whose actual
- 15 concrete interests were affected.
- JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: Can I go back to
- 17 the particulars of your theory of what would be
- 18 sufficient?
- MR. PALMORE: Yes.
- 20 JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: You said if the
- 21 plan -- if you allege that the plan is
- 22 underfunded and you allege that the employer is
- unwilling or unable to meet the obligations, I
- 24 think you said.
- MR. PALMORE: Yes.

Т	JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: Let's put aside
2	unwilling for a second. In alleging that an
3	employer is unable to meet the obligations, how
4	would you allege that? What do you think would
5	be necessary?
6	MR. PALMORE: I think you would have
7	to look at their you know, their publicly
8	disclosed financial information and show that
9	they that this was a seriously underfunded
10	plan and that this was a distressed company and
11	it was going to be unable to to put in
12	adequate money or unable to comply with the
13	minimum funding requirements that ERISA places
14	
15	JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: And if that's
16	MR. PALMORE: on them.
17	JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: alleged, how
18	can that be disputed at the pleadings stage or
19	what do you envision what kind of process do
20	you envision for disputing an allegation to that
21	effect in a complaint?
22	MR. PALMORE: Well, I don't I mean,
23	I think if it's if it's alleged with
24	sufficient particularity, then then they've
25	properly alleged standing and then there would

- 1 be a factual question --
- 2 JUSTICE ALITO: Yeah, but then you
- 3 would --
- 4 MR. PALMORE: -- down the road.
- 5 JUSTICE ALITO: Then it's a question
- 6 of subject matter jurisdiction under Article
- 7 III. So it's not like Iqbal and Twombly where
- 8 it's failure to -- a question of whether it
- 9 stated a claim.
- 10 Wouldn't you immediately file a motion
- 11 to dismiss for lack of subject matter
- 12 jurisdiction? And that wouldn't be -- the
- determination of that would not be based solely
- on the pleadings.
- MR. PALMORE: Exactly right, Your
- 16 Honor. And that's actually what happened here.
- We dismissed under 12(b) -- we moved to dismiss
- under 12(b)(6). That was denied. I think that
- 19 was incorrect but it was denied.
- 20 And then we made a motion under
- 21 12(b)(1) and the district court actually engaged
- in fact finding and found as as a matter of fact
- 23 that there were -- there was no risk to these --
- 24 to the --
- JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: That's what I was

- 1 getting at.
- 2 MR. PALMORE: Because the plan was
- 3 actually overfunded, right?
- 4 JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: I think that's
- 5 right. You have a separate factual proceeding
- on whether the allegation that the employer
- 7 wouldn't be able to meet the obligations.
- 8 MR. PALMORE: Exactly. And that's
- 9 actually what happened here. The plan then was
- 10 overfunded and the overfunding line, that's the
- 11 line that Congress has -- has drawn, it says if
- 12 you meet that level of funding in the plan,
- there's enough there to pay all the future
- benefits, so this plan at the relevant time was
- 15 overfunded. That was the basis for the
- 16 dismissal here.
- 17 And I think that --
- 18 JUSTICE KAGAN: And Mr. Palmore --
- 19 MR. PALMORE: Yes?
- JUSTICE KAGAN: -- what do you do
- 21 about the fact that these plans can be
- 22 underfunded in January and overfunded in
- 23 February and underfunded in March again?
- 24 And what do you do about the fact that
- the health of even, you know, secure companies,

- if you're in 2008, all of a sudden it turns out
- they're not so secure after all.
- 3 MR. PALMORE: Well, Your Honor, I
- 4 think that's why the -- the -- I think if a plan
- 5 is overfunded, I think that's sufficient to
- 6 defeat standing. I don't think it's actually
- 7 necessary.
- 8 And -- and I think for the reasons
- 9 that you state, if something is toggling between
- 10 overfunded and underfunded, there isn't going to
- 11 be standing unless the critical second step of
- the inquiry can be alleged or factually
- determined at a -- at the 12(b)(1) stage that
- the employer won't be able to meet its legal
- obligations to make the minimum funding
- 16 contributions to make sure there's enough money
- in that plan to insure the stream of benefits.
- 18 But just kind of speculation about AIG
- 19 and maybe there will be another market meltdown,
- 20 that's clearly not enough under -- under Article
- 21 III. You -- and especially -- and if that's
- their theory, they picked the wrong defendant
- 23 because there were, you know, \$86 billion in
- 24 liquid assets at --
- JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: Under your theory

1	
2	MR. PALMORE: the time.
3	JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: the PBGC
4	doesn't matter, correct?
5	MR. PALMORE: I think the PBGC does
6	does does matter. It's
7	JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: You did not you
8	did not articulate that when you articulated
9	MR. PALMORE: Yeah. Well, we
10	articulated that in our brief and the courts of
11	appeals cases that are all on our side do
12	articulate that as well. That's the ultimate
13	backstop. And that's funded through insurance
14	premiums paid by the employer.
15	So it's not what what my friend on
16	the other side said, that the beneficiaries
17	somehow had their own insurance that would cover
18	the loss.
19	This is part of the employer's
20	obligation to pay these premiums so that there
21	is an ultimate backstop.
22	JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: Wouldn't

- 23 wouldn't that theory, taken to its logical
- conclusion, mean that a participant could never
- sue, a defined-benefit participant or

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1 beneficiary could never sue?
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- MR. PALMORE: No, Your Honor, because
- 3 the PBGC guarantees benefits only up to a
- 4 certain level.
- 5 JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: Anyone whose
- 6 benefits are under that limit, they can never
- 7 sue, is that your theory?
- 8 MR. PALMORE: That -- it --
- 9 that would be a theory, Your Honor. I don't
- 10 think --
- JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: Is it your theory?
- MR. PALMORE: Yeah, it is my theory.
- 13 I don't think you need to adopt that theory here
- 14 because U.S. Bank by itself was fully
- 15 sufficient. But to the extent, again, that
- 16 there -- and to the extent that that's no
- 17 employee or defined-benefit -- beneficiary whose
- 18 benefits are at risk and there -- so therefore
- 19 wouldn't have standing.
- 20 First of all, that's not a reason to
- 21 find that they're standing because there are
- other enforcers -- the Department of Labor,
- 23 co-fiduciaries -- but that's actually a good
- 24 thing, not a bad thing.
- It means that the employer stands

1	ready to make good on the pension payments just
2	as
3	JUSTICE GINSBURG: We're told
4	MR. PALMORE: the rest of the
5	JUSTICE GINSBURG: You went quickly
6	JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: I'm having a very
7	
8	JUSTICE GINSBURG: You went quickly
9	over the Department of Labor, but we've heard
10	from the Department of Labor, they can't do this
11	job. It has to be someone who is able to sue.
12	And it's not going to be the trustee because the
13	trustee is the one who has alleged to engaged in
14	imprudent or impermissible transactions.
15	So the only one possible is the plan
16	participant. So the government itself is
17	telling us Congress set this thing up knowing
18	depending on the participant's ability to sue,
19	because the Department of Labor just doesn't
20	have the resources to do the job.
21	MR. PALMORE: May I answer?
22	CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Yes.
23	MR. PALMORE: The Department of Labor
24	has the legal authority to bring to bring an
25	action. Co-fiduciaries have a a legal

- 1 have a legal authority to bring an action.
- 2 Trustees can bring an action. You have to look
- 3 no further than this Court's own cases. Harris
- 4 Trust. It's called Harris Trust because the
- 5 plaintiff there was the trustee that was suing
- 6 to rescind a transaction.
- 7 And in this very case, there was an
- 8 early claim about a securities lending program
- 9 that fell out because U.S. Bank had taken action
- 10 against an employee who had committed misconduct
- and had recovered that money for the plan.
- 12 So there are plenty of other tools
- available, other than fiduciary lawsuits brought
- 14 by uninjured parties.
- 15 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Thank you,
- 16 counsel.
- 17 Three minutes, Mr. Stris.
- 18 REBUTTAL ARGUMENT OF PETER K. STRIS
- 19 ON BEHALF OF THE PETITIONERS
- 20 MR. STRIS: Thank you. Three brief
- 21 points. The first two have a lot to do, I
- think, with question begging.
- So the first is we have a concrete
- 24 property interest. If we lose that argument, we
- lose, but saying that we're uninjured doesn't do

- 1 the work.
- 2 Justice Alito, you, I think, asked a
- 3 question that's very important. You said, well,
- 4 can Congress put a property label on anything?
- 5 And I think that goes to the heart of this case
- 6 because they can't and they didn't.
- 7 Here's what happens in an ERISA plan:
- 8 Private parties make a bargain with real private
- 9 interests and real money. A worker gives up
- 10 wages in exchange for a promise to be paid in
- 11 the future with money put in a trust as
- 12 security. That's all fact. No one can dispute
- 13 that.
- 14 The question is do we have a -- an
- interest, my clients in the trust, and what is
- 16 that interest? So let's sweep aside the
- 17 question begging and get to the main issue.
- 18 Our point is it's always been the case
- 19 since the 15th century that we have an interest.
- 20 At first, my friend doesn't dispute this. Look
- 21 at page 25 of their brief. He says in the 15th
- 22 century, chancellors began to recognize the
- 23 beneficiaries' interest as a form of ownership,
- 24 protecting it much like the common law treated
- 25 the legal interest in property.

	1	This	is	why	he	spends	much	of	hi
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- 2 brief and he gets up here today and he says:
- 3 Ah, the participants, the beneficiaries, they're
- 4 not actually the beneficiaries. The plan is the
- 5 beneficiary.
- If he's right, we lose. But he's
- 7 obviously wrong, because the beneficiaries are
- 8 the beneficiaries. To your questions earlier,
- 9 Justice Kagan, you don't need to look any
- 10 further than the congressional statements of
- 11 purpose. Everything in ERISA says that to
- 12 protect the interest of these individuals, we're
- 13 putting the money in the trust.
- So that's the property interest.
- There's nothing abstract about it. That's how
- it's been for a while and for good reason.
- 17 Okay.
- I'm going to take my points out of
- 19 order. The second one is the practical
- 20 concerns. What is the good reason? Because I
- 21 think there's a reason why the United States
- 22 Government across a number of -- of
- 23 administrations have endorsed this position of
- 24 standing. It's because -- Justice Breyer, you
- 25 say imprudence cases. Well, maybe standing

Т	should be a gatekeeper, because can people sue
2	in every case, like when there's been a loss
3	I get it. That's a concern. I don't think it
4	should inform the standing inquiry. Think of
5	the flip side.
6	The flip side is if their rule is
7	correct, you will have to have, to figure out if
8	there's an injury, a battle of experts in every
9	case about the level of risk and potentially
10	throughout the case about the level of risk.
11	Entirely unworkable. Again, this shouldn't
12	drive standing, but if it's the elephant in the
13	room. And in situations of catastrophe like AIG
14	and Enron, there's no solution. We ask that you
15	reverse.
16	CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Thank you,
17	counsel. The case is submitted.
18	(Whereupon, at 12:11 p.m., the case
19	was submitted.)
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