SUPREME COURT OF THE UNITED STATES

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DONALD	J.	TRUN	ΜP,)			
			Pe	etit	cione	er,)			
		v.) No	. :	23-9	39
UNITED	STA	ATES,	,)			
			Re	espo	onder	nt.)			
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Pages: 1 through 178

Place: Washington, D.C.

Date: April 25, 2024

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1	IN THE SUPREME COURT OF THE UNITED STATES
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3	DONALD J. TRUMP,)
4	Post 11 Long Co.
5	Petitioner,) v.) No. 23-939
6	UNITED STATES,)
7	Respondent.)
8	
9	
10	Washington, D.C.
11	Thursday, April 25, 2024
12	
13	The above-entitled matter came on for
14	oral argument before the Supreme Court of the
15	United States at 10:00 a.m.
16	
17	APPEARANCES:
18	D. JOHN SAUER, ESQUIRE, St. Louis, Missouri; on behalf
19	of the Petitioner.
20	MICHAEL R. DREEBEN, Counselor to the Special Counsel,
21	Department of Justice, Washington, D.C.; on behalf
22	of the Respondent.
23	
24	
25	

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1	PROCEEDINGS
2	(10:00 a.m.)
3	CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: We will hear
4	argument this morning in Case 23-939, Trump
5	versus United States.
6	Mr. Sauer.
7	ORAL ARGUMENT OF D. JOHN SAUER
8	ON BEHALF OF THE PETITIONER
9	MR. SAUER: Mr. Chief Justice, and may
10	it please the Court:
11	Without presidential immunity from
12	criminal prosecution, there can be no presidency
13	as we know it. For 234 years of American
14	history, no president was ever prosecuted for
15	his official acts. The Framers of our
16	Constitution viewed an energetic executive as
17	essential to securing liberty.
18	If a president can be charged, put on
19	trial, and imprisoned for his most controversial
20	decisions as soon as he leaves office, that
21	looming threat will distort the president's
22	decision-making precisely when bold and fearless
23	action is most needed. Every current president
24	will face de facto blackmail and extortion by
25	his political rivals while he is still in

- 1 office.
- 2 The implications of the Court's
- 3 decision here extend far beyond the facts of
- 4 this case. Could President George W. Bush have
- 5 been sent to prison for obstructing an official
- 6 proceeding or allegedly lying to Congress to
- 7 induce war in Iraq? Could President Obama be
- 8 charged with murder for killing U.S. citizens
- 9 abroad by drone strike? Could President Biden
- someday be charged with unlawfully inducing
- immigrants to enter the country illegally for
- 12 his border policies?
- The answer to all these questions is
- 14 no. Prosecuting the president for his official
- 15 acts is an innovation with no foothold in
- 16 history or tradition and incompatible with our
- 17 constitutional structure. The original meaning
- of the Executive Vesting Clause, the Framers'
- 19 understanding and intent, an unbroken historical
- 20 tradition spanning 200 years, and policy
- 21 considerations rooted in the separation of
- 22 powers all counsel against it.
- I welcome the Court's questions.
- JUSTICE THOMAS: Mr. Sauer, to -- to
- 25 your last point, could you be more precise as to

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1 the source of this immunity?
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- 2 MR. SAUER: The source of the immunity
- 3 is principally rooted in the Executive Vesting
- 4 Clause of Article II, Section 1.
- 5 JUSTICE THOMAS: And how does that
- 6 happen?
- 7 MR. SAUER: That -- that it -- the
- 8 source of it, Justice Thomas, I think is, as you
- 9 described in your separate opinion in
- 10 Zivotofsky, for example, that the Executive
- 11 Vesting Clause does not include only executive
- 12 powers laid out explicitly therein but
- encompasses all the powers that were originally
- 14 understood to be included therein.
- 15 And Marbury against Madison itself
- 16 provides strong evidence of this kind of
- immunity, a broad principle of immunity that
- 18 protects the president's official acts from
- 19 scrutiny, direct -- sitting in judgment, so to
- 20 speak, of the Article III courts, it -- that
- 21 that matches the original understanding of the
- 22 Executive --
- JUSTICE THOMAS: So how --
- MR. SAUER: -- Vesting Clause.
- 25 JUSTICE THOMAS: -- how exactly would

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1 we determine what the -- what an official act
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- 2 is?
- 3 MR. SAUER: I'd say -- I'd point the
- 4 Court to two cases for that. Obviously,
- 5 Fitzgerald against Nixon is the best guidance
- 6 that the Court gives where it -- of course, the
- 7 Court adopted the outer perimeter test, and this
- 8 Court engaged in analysis -- analysis there
- 9 that's very instructive here, where it looked at
- 10 the level of specificity at which the acts are
- 11 described, in -- in -- in that case, a civil
- 12 case. Here, it would be the indictment. And --
- 13 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Well, what if
- 14 you have -- let's say the official act is
- appointing ambassadors, and the president
- appoints a particular individual to a country,
- 17 but it's in exchange for a bribe. Somebody
- 18 says, I'll give you a million dollars if I'm
- 19 made the ambassador to whatever.
- How do you analyze that?
- 21 MR. SAUER: That, I think, would fall
- 22 under this Court's discussion in Brewster, where
- 23 the Court held with respect to legislative acts
- that bribery is not an official act, which also
- 25 matches the court -- common law background.

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1
                So I -- the way that this Court in
 2
      Brewster kind of sliced at the joint was to say
 3
      accepting the bribe and the agreement to accept
      the bribe are not official acts. That's private
 4
      conduct --
 5
 6
                CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS:
                                        Okay.
                                               It's
 7
     not --
               MR. SAUER: -- where a subsequent
 8
      appointment would not be -- would be essentially
 9
      an unrestrictable power of this Court that
10
11
      Congress couldn't directly regulate.
12
                CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: It's not --
      accepting a bribe isn't an official act, but
13
14
      appointing an ambassador is certainly within the
15
      official responsibilities of the president.
16
                So how -- how could you -- how -- how
17
      does your official acts or the official acts
18
     border, boundary come into play when it's going
19
      to be official, assuming that the president is
20
      innocent, but the whole question is whether he's
      going to be found innocent or guilty?
21
2.2
                MR. SAUER: Again, it -- I -- I think
23
      Brewster and Johnson do address that or very
24
     persuasively at least in a slightly different
25
      context. Brewster and Johnson say the
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1 indictment has to be expunged of all the immune
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- 2 official acts, so there has to be a
- 3 determination what's official, what's not
- 4 official, and --
- 5 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Well, you
- 6 expunge the official. You say, okay, we're
- 7 prosecuting you because you accepted a million
- 8 dollars. They're supposed to say -- not say
- 9 what it's for because the what's for part is
- 10 within the president's official duties?
- 11 MR. SAUER: There -- there has to be,
- we would say, an independent source of evidence
- 13 for that. And keep in mind that this indictment
- 14 charges what this Court has described as
- 15 unrestrictable powers of the president. So the
- 16 premise, the logical premise, of this indictment
- is that Congress, by passing vague and general
- 18 criminal statutes, has purported to directly
- 19 regulate the president's exercise of things like
- 20 the exercise of the employment and removal
- 21 power, things like his ability to speak directly
- 22 to the American public, core exercises of his
- 23 authority under the Recommendations Clause to
- recommend to Congress, members of Congress, the
- 25 measures he thinks necessary and expedient.

1	So	you	have	а	indictment	in	this	case

- 2 that goes right to the heartland of the
- 3 president's powers, that alleges a whole series
- 4 of official acts and tries to tie them together
- 5 by saying, well, there's a private aim or a
- 6 private purpose in that case. And that's a
- 7 situation which, of course, could be alleged in
- 8 virtually any indictment.
- 9 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: Counsel, it can be
- 10 alleged, but it has to be proven. Malum in se
- is a concept long viewed as appropriate in law,
- 12 that there are some things that are so
- 13 fundamentally evil that they have to be
- 14 protected against.
- Now I think -- and -- and your answer
- 16 below, I'm going to give you a chance to say if
- 17 you stay by it. If the president decides that
- 18 his rival is a corrupt person and he orders the
- 19 military or orders someone to assassinate him,
- 20 is that within his official acts that -- for
- 21 which he can get immunity?
- MR. SAUER: It would depend on the
- 23 hypothetical. But we can see that could well be
- 24 an official act.
- 25 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: It could, and why?

- 1 Because he's doing it for personal reasons.
- 2 He's not doing it, at -- like President Obama is
- 3 alleged to have done it, to protect the country
- 4 from a terrorist. He's doing it for personal
- 5 gain. And isn't that the nature of the
- 6 allegations here, that he's not doing them --
- 7 doing these acts in furtherance of an official
- 8 responsibility; he's doing it for personal gain?
- 9 MR. SAUER: I -- I agree with that
- 10 characterization of the indictment. And that
- 11 confirms immunity because the characterization
- 12 is that there's a series of official acts that
- 13 were done for an unlawful or improper --
- JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: No, because --
- MR. SAUER: -- purpose.
- JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: -- immunity says,
- even if you did it for personal gain, we won't
- 18 hold you responsible. What do you -- how could
- 19 that be?
- 20 MR. SAUER: That's an extremely strong
- 21 doctrine in this Court's case law in cases like
- 22 Fitzgerald, the heartland, Johnson and supports
- 23 --
- JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: Well, we go back
- to Justice Thomas's question, which was, where

- 1 does that come from?
- 2 There are amici here who tell us that
- 3 the Founders actually talked about whether to
- 4 grant immunity to the president. And, in fact,
- 5 they -- had state constitutions that granted
- 6 some criminal immunity to governors.
- 7 And yet they didn't take it up.
- 8 Instead, they find -- they pass an impeachment
- 9 clause that basically says you can't remove the
- 10 president from -- from office except by a trial
- in the Senate, but you can impeach him after.
- 12 So -- or you can impose criminal liability.
- We would be creating a situation in
- 14 which we would be saying is -- this is what
- 15 you're asking us to say -- which is that a
- 16 president is entitled not to make a mistake but
- 17 more than that. A president is entitled for
- total personal gain to use the trappings of his
- office -- that's what you're trying to get us to
- 20 hold -- without facing criminal liability.
- 21 MR. SAUER: Your Honor, I -- I would
- 22 say three things in response to that.
- First, the doctrine that immunity does
- 24 not turn on the allegedly improper motivation or
- 25 purpose is something that this Court has

- 1 reaffirmed in at least nine or ten cases.
- JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: That's absolute
- 3 immunity. But qualified immunity does say that
- 4 whatever act you take has to be within what a
- 5 reasonable person would do. I'm having a hard
- 6 time thinking that creating false documents,
- 7 that submitting false documents, that ordering
- 8 the assassination of a rival, that accepting a
- 9 bribe, and countless other laws that could be
- 10 broken for personal gain, that anyone would say
- 11 that it would be reasonable for a president or
- 12 any public official to do that.
- MR. SAUER: Your Honor, as this Court
- said very persuasively in Fitzgerald, that the
- 15 allegation that this particular act would be
- done for an unlawful purpose or was unlawful
- 17 could be made in every case, and, therefore, if
- 18 that were the doctrine, that the allegation of
- 19 improper purpose is what deprives the objective
- 20 acts of their immunity, then the immunity would
- 21 have no purchase. And that's reflected in many
- of the other Court's cases.
- JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: So --
- JUSTICE JACKSON: Isn't -- isn't the
- work, though, of the improper motive at least in

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1 the absolute immunity context to tell us what
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- 2 are official acts and what are not? I mean, I
- 3 had understood that even in the -- first of all,
- 4 your ask is absolute immunity, isn't it? I
- 5 mean, that's --
- 6 MR. SAUER: That's our principal
- 7 position, yes.
- 8 JUSTICE JACKSON: -- that's your --
- 9 your position is you want the same kind of
- doctrine that we've applied in other contexts
- 11 when we say an official has absolute immunity.
- 12 And my understanding is that when we
- 13 say that, we mean for their official acts. Is
- 14 that right?
- 15 MR. SAUER: Yes.
- 16 JUSTICE JACKSON: Okay. So any
- official acts. But then, in that world, the
- 18 real decision-making from the Court's standpoint
- is whether or not something is an official act
- 20 or not, correct?
- 21 MR. SAUER: That is an important
- 22 determination by all means.
- JUSTICE JACKSON: I mean, that's the
- 24 determination in the absolute immunity world
- 25 because, if you determine that it's an official

- 1 act, then the principle is that you get immunity
- 2 for it, correct?
- 3 MR. SAUER: That is correct.
- 4 JUSTICE JACKSON: All right. So my
- 5 question -- and I think the Chief Justice may
- 6 have asked this at the beginning -- is how do
- 7 you determine what -- or maybe Justice Thomas --
- 8 how do you determine what is an official act?
- 9 And when we're talking about the kinds
- of scenarios that Justice Sotomayor brought up,
- one could say that when the president is using
- 12 the trappings of his office to achieve a
- personal gain, then he's actually not acting
- officially, even if the doctrine was absolute
- immunity. So what do you say about that?
- MR. SAUER: Two things in response to
- 17 that.
- 18 First, to the last point, that
- 19 allegation that this was really motivated by an
- 20 improper private purpose could be made in every
- 21 single case.
- 22 JUSTICE JACKSON: No, I understand
- 23 that, but -- but -- but it would have to be made
- 24 -- I'm -- I'm just trying to assess. Even if we
- 25 had the Doctrine of Absolute Immunity, that same

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1 allegation and the facts related to it would
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- 2 come in because the person would be arguing that
- 3 he was not acting in his official capacity. He
- 4 wasn't doing something official. He was doing
- 5 it personal, correct?
- 6 MR. SAUER: If he -- I agree, the --
- 7 the objective -- or I'm not sure I agree, but --
- 8 but the point I would make in response to that
- 9 is, in Fitzgerald against Nixon, this Court
- 10 emphasized that that would result in an
- 11 intrusive discussion or determination of the
- 12 president's personal motives for every official
- 13 act. And, again, this is not just in the case
- of the presidency. It's for virtually every --
- 15 JUSTICE JACKSON: All right. Can I
- just ask you another -- another quick question
- 17 before my colleagues take it over here?
- 18 At the beginning of your analysis,
- when you were giving your opening statements,
- 20 you were talking about, you know -- the -- you
- 21 suggested that the lack of immunity and the
- 22 possibility of prosecution in the presidential
- 23 context is like an innovation.
- 24 And I understood it to be the status
- 25 quo. I mean, I -- I understood that every

- 1 president from the beginning of time essentially
- 2 has understood that there was a threat of
- 3 prosecution if for no other reason than the --
- 4 the Constitution suggests that they can be
- 5 prosecuted after impeachment, that, you know,
- 6 the Office of Legal Counsel has said forever
- 7 that presidents are amenable to a threat of
- 8 prosecution and they have continued to function
- 9 and do their jobs and do all the things that
- 10 presidents do.
- 11 So it seems to me that you are asking
- 12 now for a change in what the law is related to
- immunity.
- 14 MR. SAUER: I would quote from what
- 15 Benjamin Franklin said at the Constitutional
- 16 Convention, which I think reflects best the
- 17 Founders' original understanding and intent
- here, which is, at the Constitutional
- 19 Convention, Benjamin Franklin said: History
- 20 provides one example only of a chief magistrate
- 21 who is subject to public justice, criminal
- 22 prosecution. And everybody cried out against
- 23 that as a --
- JUSTICE JACKSON: No, I understand.
- 25 But, since Benjamin Franklin, everybody has

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1 thought, including the presidents who have held
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- 2 the office, that they were taking this office
- 3 subject to potential criminal prosecution, no?
- 4 MR. SAUER: I don't -- I see the
- 5 opposite. I see all the evidence going the
- 6 other way. Marbury against Madison, Mississippi
- 7 against Johnson discussed this broad immunity
- 8 principle that naturally extends to the --
- 9 JUSTICE JACKSON: So what -- what was
- 10 up with the pardon -- what was up with the
- 11 pardon for President Nixon?
- 12 MR. SAUER: I think that --
- JUSTICE JACKSON: I mean, if everybody
- thought that presidents couldn't be prosecuted,
- 15 then what -- what was that about?
- MR. SAUER: Well, he was under
- investigation for both private and public
- 18 conduct at the time, official acts and private
- 19 conduct.
- 20 And I think everyone has properly
- 21 understood that the president -- since, like,
- 22 President Grant's carriage-riding incident,
- everyone has understood that the president could
- 24 be prosecuted at least for things like private
- 25 conduct.

1	JUSTICE	GORSUCH:	Counsel,	on -	o	n
			-			

- on that score, you -- there does seem to be some 2
- 3 common ground between the -- you and your
- colleague on the other side that no man's above 4
- the law and that the president can be prosecuted 5
- after he leaves office for his private conduct. 6
- 7 Is that right?
- MR. SAUER: We agree with that. 8
- 9 JUSTICE GORSUCH: And then the
- 10 question becomes, as we've been exploring here
- today a little bit, about how to segregate 11
- 12 private from official conduct that may or may
- not enjoy some immunity, and we -- I'm sure 13
- 14 we're going to spend a lot of time exploring
- 15 that.

- 16 But the D.C. Circuit in Blassingame,
- 17 the chief judge there, joined by the panel,
- 18 expressed some views about how to segregate
- 19 private conduct for which no man is above the
- law from official acts. 20
- 21 Do you have any thoughts about the
- 2.2 test that they came up with there?
- MR. SAUER: Yes. We think, in the 23
- 24 main, that test, especially if it's understood
- 25 through the lens of Judge Katsas' separate

- opinion, is a very persuasive test. It would be
- 2 a great source for this Court to rely on in
- 3 drawing this line. And it emphasizes the
- 4 breadth of that test.
- It talks about how actions that are,
- 6 you know, plausibly connected to the president's
- 7 official duties are official acts. And it also
- 8 emphasizes that if it's a close case or it
- 9 appears there's considerations on the other
- 10 side, that also should be treated as immune.
- 11 Those are the -- the aspects of that
- that we'd emphasize as potentially guiding the
- 13 Court's discretion.
- 14 JUSTICE GORSUCH: And that left open
- in that case the possibility of further
- 16 proceedings and trial.
- 17 MR. SAUER: Exactly right. And -- and
- 18 that would be a very natural course for this
- 19 Court to take. In this place, the Court can and
- 20 should reverse the categorical holding of the
- 21 D.C. Circuit that there's no such thing as
- official acts, especially when it comes to --
- JUSTICE GORSUCH: But you'd agree
- 24 further proceedings would be required?
- 25 MR. SAUER: That is correct. There

- 1 would have to be -- and -- and I would point the
- 2 Court to Anderson against Creighton, where the
- 3 Court said there would be kind of two stages of
- 4 these further proceedings. There's looking at
- 5 the indictment itself or, in that case, it was
- 6 a -- you -- you know, a complaint, but look at
- 7 the charging document itself and see whether on
- 8 the face of it this is alleging official acts.
- 9 And if not or it can't be determined, then there
- 10 would be a factual proceeding.
- 11 And all of that under Mitchell against
- 12 Forsyth and so forth would have to occur before
- any other proceedings in the District.
- JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: Can you --
- JUSTICE BARRETT: Counsel, speaking of
- 16 --
- 17 JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: -- you tell us --
- JUSTICE ALITO: Mr. Sauer, you --
- JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: -- what the -- go
- ahead.
- 21 JUSTICE ALITO: Mr. Sauer, you began
- 22 by explaining why you believe that immunity from
- 23 criminal prosecution is essential for the proper
- 24 functioning of the presidency.
- But my question is whether the very

- 1 robust form of immunity that you're advocating
- 2 is really necessary in order to achieve that
- 3 result. So just to take one possible
- 4 alternative, suppose the rule were that a former
- 5 president cannot be prosecuted for official acts
- 6 unless no plausible justification could be
- 7 imagined for what the president did, taking into
- 8 account history and legal precedent and the
- 9 information that was provided to the president
- 10 at the time when the act was taken.
- 11 Would that be sufficient? Or, if it
- is insufficient, why would it be insufficient?
- 13 MR. SAUER: That might be a much
- 14 better rule than what emerged in the lower
- 15 courts here. We think it would be insufficient
- 16 because, again, that long line of cases talking
- about using the president's motives and the
- 18 intrusive sort of consideration of the
- 19 president's motives as transforming acts to
- 20 official and unofficial would be -- would come
- 21 into play.
- 22 And, of course, once you can make that
- allegation, all of a sudden you've opened the
- 24 door. You no longer have a per se clear
- 25 bright-line rule. You have a -- a determination

- in every single case, a case by case.
- 2 JUSTICE ALITO: But what if it were
- 3 not -- what if it did not involve any subjective
- 4 element, it was purely objective? You would
- 5 look objectively at the various relevant
- 6 factors?
- 7 MR. SAUER: That sounds to me a lot
- 8 like Blassingame and especially viewed through
- 9 the lens of Judge Katsas' separate opinion, and
- 10 that may not be different than what we're
- 11 proposing to the Court today.
- 12 JUSTICE ALITO: Well, Blassingame had
- 13 to do with the difference between official
- 14 conduct and private conduct, right?
- MR. SAUER: That's correct. I --
- 16 sorry -- I understood the Court to be asking
- 17 that.
- 18 JUSTICE ALITO: No. This -- this
- 19 would apply -- and it's just a possibility. I
- 20 don't know whether it's a good idea or a bad
- 21 idea or whether it can be derived from the
- 22 structure of the Constitution or the Vesting
- 23 Clause or any other source. But this would be
- 24 applied in a purely objective -- on -- on purely
- 25 objective grounds when the president invokes an

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1 official power in taking the action that is at
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- 2 issue?
- 3 MR. SAUER: Yes, I believe -- the
- 4 reason I think of Blassingame is because it
- 5 talks about an objective context-specific
- 6 determination to winnow out what's official and
- 7 what is purely private conduct, and, again, in a
- 8 -- with -- with a strong degree of deference to
- 9 what --
- 10 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: I -- I'm sorry. I
- 11 -- if I understood Justice Alito, he's
- 12 suggesting not that. He's suggesting whether --
- even if it is an official act, whether you still
- 14 grant immunity if that act is not plausibly
- viewed as within the realm of law, of -- he can
- 16 correct me if I'm wrong. He's not --
- 17 JUSTICE ALITO: No, that's -- that --
- 18 that was the question.
- 19 MR. SAUER: That, I think, would be a
- 20 superior rule than what -- than the categorical
- 21 denial that emerged in the trial court here. I
- 22 do think it would kind of be --
- JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: I -- I'm not --
- I'm not quite sure why he used the word
- 25 "plausible," because that seems to negate --

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1 might as well give absolute if you're saying
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- 2 plausible because anybody could argue
- 3 plausibility. We don't even require plausible.
- 4 We require reasonable in qualified immunity. So
- 5 --
- JUSTICE ALITO: Well, I mean, one
- 7 might argue that it isn't plausibly legal to
- 8 order SEAL Team 6 -- and I -- I -- I don't
- 9 want to slander SEAL Team 6 --
- 10 (Laughter.)
- JUSTICE ALITO: -- because they're --
- 12 no, seriously, they're honorable. They're
- 13 honorable officers, and they are bound by the
- 14 Uniform Code of Military Justice not to obey
- 15 unlawful orders.
- 16 But no one -- I think one could say
- 17 it's not plausible that that is legal, that that
- 18 action would be legal. And -- and I'm sure
- 19 you've thought -- I've thought of lots of
- 20 hypotheticals, I'm sure you've thought of lots
- of hypotheticals, where a president could say,
- 22 I'm using an official power, and yet the
- 23 president uses it in an absolutely outrageous
- 24 manner.
- MR. SAUER: That, if it were an

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1 objective determination, may well be a -- an
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- 2 interesting approach to take in this case.
- 3 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: So apply it to the
- 4 allegations here. What is plausible about the
- 5 president insisting in creating a -- a
- 6 fraudulent slate of electoral candidates?
- 7 Assuming you accept the facts of the complaint
- 8 on their face, is that plausible that that would
- 9 be within his right to do?
- 10 MR. SAUER: Absolutely, Your Honor.
- 11 The -- we have the historical precedent we cite
- in the lower courts of President Grant sending
- 13 federal troops to Louisiana and Mississippi in
- 14 1876 to make sure that the Republican electors
- got certified in those two cases, which
- delivered the election to Rutherford B. Hayes.
- 17 The notion that it's completely implausible I
- think just can't be supported based on the face
- 19 of this indictment or even really --
- 20 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: Knowing that the
- 21 slate is fake? Knowing that the slate is fake,
- that they weren't actually elected, that they
- 23 weren't certified by the state, he knows all
- those things?
- 25 MR. SAUER: The indictment itself

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1 alleges -- I dispute that characterization. The
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- 2 -- the indictment affixes the word -- label to
- 3 the so-called fraudulent electors -- it affixes
- 4 the word "fraudulent." But that's a complete
- 5 mischaracterization. On the face of the
- 6 indictment, it appears that there was no deceit
- 7 about who had emerged from the relevant state
- 8 conventions, and this was being done as an
- 9 alternative basis.
- 10 But I want to address a more
- 11 higher-level point, a fundamental point, which
- is that, as Justice Alito's question indicated,
- there's a whole series of structural checks
- 14 other than criminal prosecution that are
- designed to deter these kind of, you know,
- 16 outlandish scenarios or extraordinarily
- 17 obviously illegal things, and that's been viewed
- in this Court's opinions going all the way back
- 19 to at least Martin against Mott.
- 20 JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: Where -- where do
- 21 you think the D.C. Circuit went wrong in how it
- 22 determined what was official versus what's
- 23 personal?
- 24 MR. SAUER: Well, I read -- I read the
- 25 -- the opinion below in this particular case as

- 1 adopting a categorical view. It does not
- 2 matter, is the -- the logic of their -- their
- 3 opinion because there is no immunity for
- 4 official acts and, therefore, you know, that's
- 5 the end of the story.
- I don't really think they went wrong
- 7 in Blassingame in the civil context when they
- 8 engaged in the same determination with respect
- 9 to what's official and what isn't official.
- 10 There, we agree with most of what that opinion
- 11 said.
- 12 JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: And for some
- official acts that are not within the Article II
- 14 exclusive power, okay, so official acts but not
- within the Article II exclusive power, even for
- 16 those, I assume you would think that a clear
- 17 statement has to be required, a clear statement
- in the statute covering the president, if the
- 19 president's official acts are going to be
- 20 criminalized?
- 21 MR. SAUER: Absolutely. Obviously,
- the issue is, you know, at the highest possible
- level when it comes to the unrestrictable powers
- like, as in this indictment, the allegation
- about the performance clause.

- 1 JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: Well, I'm assuming
- 2 the exclusive powers are walled off and can't be
- 3 prosecuted before -- there's a lot of official
- 4 powers that are not exclusive to the president
- 5 under his Article II authority, but for those, I
- 6 understood you to be saying, at a minimum, there
- 7 would need to be a clear statement in the
- 8 statute referencing the president so that the
- 9 president's on notice and can conduct himself or
- 10 herself accordingly.
- 11 MR. SAUER: That's absolutely correct,
- 12 and that would be consistent both with Franklin
- and Public Citizen and cases -- a long series of
- 14 other clear statement rule cases.
- JUSTICE JACKSON: Can I follow up on
- 16 that because I --
- 17 JUSTICE BARRETT: Can I ask you -- go
- 18 ahead.
- 19 JUSTICE JACKSON: Go ahead.
- JUSTICE BARRETT: So you concede that
- 21 private acts don't get immunity?
- MR. SAUER: We do.
- JUSTICE BARRETT: Okay. So, in the
- 24 Special Counsel's brief on pages 46 and 47, he
- 25 urges us, even if we assume that there was --

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1 even if we were to decide or assume that there
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- 2 was some sort of immunity for official acts,
- 3 that there were sufficient private acts in the
- 4 indictment for the trial to go -- for the case
- 5 to go back and the trial to begin immediately.
- 6 And I want to know if you agree or
- 7 disagree about the characterization of these
- 8 acts as private. "Petitioner turned to a
- 9 private attorney who 'was willing to spread
- 10 knowingly false claims' of election fraud to
- 11 spearhead his challenges to the election
- 12 results." Private?
- MR. SAUER: As alleged. I mean, we
- 14 dispute the allegation, but --
- 15 JUSTICE BARRETT: Of course.
- MR. SAUER: -- that sounds private to
- 17 me.
- 18 JUSTICE BARRETT: Sounds private?
- 19 "Petitioner conspired with another
- 20 private attorney who caused the filing in court
- of a 'verification' signed by Petitioner that
- 22 contained false allegations to support a
- 23 challenge." Private?
- MR. SAUER: That also sounds private.
- JUSTICE BARRETT: "Three private

- 1 actors, two attorneys, including [those]
- 2 mentioned above, and a political consultant --
- 3 helped implement a plan to submit fraudulent
- 4 slates of presidential electors to obstruct the
- 5 certification proceeding, and Petitioner and a
- 6 co-conspirator attorney directed that effort."
- 7 MR. SAUER: You read it quickly. I
- 8 believe --
- 9 JUSTICE BARRETT: Yeah.
- 10 MR. SAUER: -- that's private. I
- 11 don't want to --
- 12 JUSTICE BARRETT: So those acts, you
- would not dispute those were private, and you
- wouldn't raise a claim that they were official?
- MR. SAUER: As characterized. We
- 16 would say -- Your Honor, if I may?
- 17 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Sure.
- 18 MR. SAUER: What we would say is
- 19 official is things like meeting with the
- 20 Department of Justice to deliberate about who's
- 21 going to be the acting attorney general of the
- 22 United States.
- JUSTICE BARRETT: Sure.
- 24 MR. SAUER: Communicating with the
- 25 American public, communicating with Congress

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1 about matters of enormous federal concern.
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- 2 JUSTICE BARRETT: Thank you. Thank
- 3 you.
- 4 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Thank you,
- 5 counsel.
- And what is the consequence in terms
- 7 of going forward with your acknowledgment that
- 8 those are private acts as opposed to official
- 9 acts?
- 10 MR. SAUER: If you look at the -- if
- 11 you look at the -- the indictment here, there's
- 12 a bunch of acts that we think are just clearly
- official. There may be allegations that mostly
- 14 relate to what the government has described here
- as private aim or private end. And the Court
- 16 should remand or -- or address itself but remand
- 17 for a Brewster-like determination, which is
- 18 what's official and what's private. The
- 19 official stuff has to be expunged completely
- 20 from the indictment before the case can go
- 21 forward, and there has to be a determination at
- 22 least on remand of what's official -- a
- two-stage determination of what's official and
- 24 what's private.
- 25 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Well, if you

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1 expunge the official part from the indictment,
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- 2 how do you -- I mean, that's like a -- a -- a
- 3 one-legged stool, right? I mean, giving
- 4 somebody money isn't bribery unless you get
- 5 something in exchange, and if what you get in
- 6 exchange is to become the ambassador to a
- 7 particular country, that is official, the
- 8 appointment. It's within the president's
- 9 prerogatives. The unofficial part is I'm going
- 10 to get a million dollars for it.
- 11 So, if you say you have to expunge the
- official part, how does that go forward?
- 13 MR. SAUER: In this particular
- indictment, where we say virtually all the overt
- 15 conduct is official, we don't believe it would
- 16 be able to go forward. I mean, there could be a
- 17 case where it would, but if you look at -- even
- 18 the government's brief in this case divides up
- 19 the indictment into things that, other than the
- 20 electors allegations, don't really -- are --
- 21 they haven't disputed that they are official
- 22 acts. But what they do is say, well, we tie it
- 23 all together by characterizing it as done -- and
- these are the allegations that the Court just
- 25 referred to -- by an improper private aim or

- 1 private end. Again, that's their words.
- 2 And that just runs loggerheads, you
- 3 know, dead-set against this Court's case law
- 4 saying you don't look at, what immunity
- 5 determinations, the -- the motive --
- 6 improper motivation or purpose.
- 7 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Thank you.
- 8 Justice Thomas?
- 9 JUSTICE THOMAS: Mr. Sauer, in
- 10 assessing the official acts of a president, do
- 11 you differentiate between the president acting
- 12 as president and the president acting as
- 13 candidate?
- MR. SAUER: Yes, we do. And -- and we
- don't dispute essentially the Blassingame
- 16 discussion of that.
- 17 JUSTICE THOMAS: Okay. Now --
- MR. SAUER: But, of course, that has
- 19 to be done by objective determinations, not by
- 20 looking at what was the purpose of what you did
- 21 this, and that's the most important point there.
- JUSTICE THOMAS: Did you, in this
- 23 litigation, challenge the appointment of special
- 24 counsel?
- MR. SAUER: Not directly. We have

- done so in the Southern District of Florida
- 2 case, and we totally agree with the analysis
- 3 provided by Attorney General Meese and Attorney
- 4 General Mukasey. And -- and it points to a very
- 5 important issue here because one of their
- 6 arguments is, of course, that, you know, we
- 7 should have this presumption of regularity.
- 8 That runs into the reality that we have here an
- 9 extraordinary prosecutorial power being
- 10 exercised by someone who was never nominated by
- 11 the president or -- or -- or confirmed by the
- 12 Senate at any time.
- So we agree with that position. We --
- we hadn't raised it yet in this case when this
- 15 case went up on appeal.
- 16 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Justice Alito?
- 17 JUSTICE ALITO: When you say that the
- 18 official acts should be expunged from the
- indictment, that in itself would not achieve
- 20 very much unless evidence of those official acts
- 21 were precluded at trial.
- So is that what you're saying, that
- 23 the prosecution should not be permitted at trial
- 24 to prove the official acts as part of the
- conspiracies that are alleged?

1 MR. SAUER:	Absolutely.	And we	think
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- 2 that's just the clear implications of Brewster
- 3 and Johnson and their discussion of this in a
- 4 very analogous context.
- 5 JUSTICE ALITO: Thank you.
- 6 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Justice
- 7 Sotomayor?
- JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: I -- I'm a little
- 9 bit confused by that. If you have a scheme to
- defraud or a scheme to accept bribery, there's
- 11 evidence from which you can infer that scheme,
- and one of it is that the appointment actually
- 13 happened. It's an official act.
- 14 You wouldn't expunge that as evidence.
- You would instruct the jury that there's no
- liability for the actual appointment, that the
- 17 liability is for accepting the bribe.
- 18 Similarly here, I don't think the
- indictment is charging that the obstruction
- 20 occurred solely because of conversations with
- 21 the Justice Department. They're saying you look
- 22 at all of the private acts and you look in the
- 23 context of some of the public acts and you can
- infer the intent, the private intent, from them.
- So I'm not sure that I understand why

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1 your problems couldn't be taken care of at trial
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- 2 with an instruction if we believe -- if the
- 3 Court were to find -- I'm not even sure how they
- 4 could -- but if it were to find that some public
- 5 acts could not be the basis of criminal
- 6 liability.
- 7 MR. SAUER: I -- I think the best
- 8 thing I can say to that is -- and I think this
- 9 ties into the Chief Justice's question about a
- 10 one-legged stool. Brewster and Johnson and
- 11 subsequent cases like Helstoski versus Meanor
- 12 essentially say that, that this is a one-legged
- 13 stool problem. It will be difficult for some of
- these prosecutions to proceed. And that is the
- implications of official immunity, which is
- 16 dictated in the Constitution here by the
- 17 Executive Vesting Clause.
- 18 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Justice Kagan?
- 19 JUSTICE KAGAN: Can I continue on
- 20 in -- in Justice Barrett's vein a little bit and
- 21 ask you about some of the allegations of the
- 22 indictment and whether they're official acts or
- 23 not in your view.
- 24 So the defendant signed a verification
- 25 affirming false election fraud allegations made

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on his behalf and a lawsuit filed in his name
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- 2 against the Georgia government -- governor.
- 3 MR. SAUER: I don't think we've
- 4 disputed that that's official. I -- I'm sorry,
- 5 that that is unofficial.
- 6 JUSTICE KAGAN: That that's
- 7 unofficial.
- 8 Same for the defendant called the
- 9 chairwoman of the Republican National Committee,
- 10 asked her to gather electors, and targeted
- 11 states falsely represented to her that such
- 12 electors' votes would be used only if ongoing
- 13 litigation in one of the states changed the
- 14 results in the defendant's favor.
- MR. SAUER: We have taken the position
- 16 that that is official.
- 17 JUSTICE KAGAN: That's official?
- 18 MR. SAUER: Yes.
- 19 JUSTICE KAGAN: Why would that be
- 20 official?
- MR. SAUER: Because the organization
- of alternate slates of electors is for -- based
- on, for example, the historical example of
- 24 President Grant as something that was done
- 25 pursuant to and ancillary and preparatory to the

- 1 exercise of the core Recommendation Clause
- 2 power.
- 3 So, when President Trump was --
- 4 JUSTICE KAGAN: Couldn't -- couldn't
- 5 he have taken this action just in the status of
- 6 a candidate?
- 7 MR. SAUER: The fact that he could
- 8 have done so doesn't demonstrate that he did do
- 9 so in this case. And based on the allegations,
- 10 we think it's clear he did not, that this was
- 11 done in an official capacity.
- 12 JUSTICE KAGAN: The defendant asked
- 13 the Arizona house speaker to call the
- 14 legislature into session to hold a hearing based
- on their claims of election fraud.
- 16 MR. SAUER: Absolutely an official act
- 17 for the president to communicate with state
- 18 officials on a matter of enormous federal
- interest and concern, attempting to defend the
- 20 -- the integrity of a federal election, to
- 21 communicate with state officials and urge them
- 22 to view what he views as their job, under state
- law and federal law, that's an official act.
- 24 JUSTICE KAGAN: Well, attempting to
- 25 defend the integrity of the election, I mean,

- 1 that's the defense. The allegation is that he
- 2 was attempting to overthrow a -- an election.
- 3 MR. SAUER: Essentially exactly right.
- 4 And neither allegation of what the purpose is
- 5 should make a determination -- should make a
- 6 difference as to whether it's immune. That is
- 7 extremely strong precedent from this Court.
- 8 JUSTICE KAGAN: Does it -- does it
- 9 strike you as odd that your understanding of
- 10 immunity goes way beyond what OLC has ever
- 11 claimed for the -- a former president?
- 12 MR. SAUER: I -- I view the OLC
- opinions here as strongly supporting us because
- 14 anytime a congressional statute basically got
- anywhere near touching the president's
- prerogatives, they've said, oh, we're going to
- interpret the statute narrowly to avoid that.
- 18 So we have --
- 19 JUSTICE KAGAN: Well, that's a
- 20 different question. I mean, what OLC has always
- 21 said is that sitting presidents get immunity,
- 22 but former presidents? No.
- Now there might be a different
- 24 argument made about whether a statute or whether
- 25 a statute as applied to particular conduct is --

- 1 is -- is properly available against the
- 2 president, but that's a very different argument
- 3 than the immunity claim that you're making here,
- 4 which OLC has definitively not supported.
- 5 MR. SAUER: I don't -- I don't know if
- 6 I'd put it that way. I don't recall an opinion
- 7 directly addressing it, but more fundamental to
- 8 us, Your Honor, is, in fact, the language of
- 9 cases like Marbury and statements like made by
- 10 Benjamin Franklin at the Constitutional
- 11 Convention, statements of George Washington
- 12 talking about the massive risk of factional
- 13 strife and how that could destroy the Republic
- 14 and erect a new government on the ruins of
- 15 public liberty.
- That's what we rely on principally
- 17 here. I cite the OLC opinions -- because, of
- 18 course, what you see there is a very strong
- 19 trend that if there's any statute that might
- trench in any way on the president's
- 21 prerogatives, which they -- they adopt -- they
- 22 interpret it to avoid that.
- JUSTICE KAGAN: If a president sells
- 24 nuclear secrets to a foreign adversary, is that
- 25 immune?

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1 MR. SAUER: That sounds like, similar
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- 2 to the bribery example, likely not immune. Now,
- 3 if it's structured as an official act, he would
- 4 have to be impeached and convicted first
- 5 before --
- JUSTICE KAGAN: What does that mean,
- 7 if it's structured as an official act?
- 8 MR. SAUER: Well, I don't know in the
- 9 hypothetical whether or not that would be an
- official act. You'd probably have to have more
- 11 details to apply the Blassingame analysis or
- even the Fitzgerald analysis that we've been
- 13 talking about.
- 14 JUSTICE KAGAN: How about if a
- president orders the military to stage a coup?
- 16 MR. SAUER: I -- I think that, as the
- 17 Chief Justice pointed out earlier, where there's
- 18 a whole series of, you know, sort of guidelines
- 19 against that, so to speak, like the UCMJ --
- 20 prohibits the military from following a
- 21 plainfully unlawful act, if one adopted Justice
- 22 Alito's test, that would fall outside.
- Now, if one adopts, for example, the
- 24 Fitzgerald test that we advance, that might well
- be an official act and he would have to be, as

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1 I'll say in response to all these kinds of
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- 2 hypotheticals, has to be impeached and convicted
- 3 before he can be criminally prosecuted.
- But I emphasize to the Court that --
- 5 JUSTICE KAGAN: Well, he's gone.
- 6 Let's say this president who ordered the
- 7 military to stage a coup, he's no longer
- 8 president, he wasn't impeached, he couldn't be
- 9 impeached. But -- but he ordered the military
- 10 to stage a coup. And you're saying that's an
- 11 official act?
- MR. SAUER: I think it would depend on
- 13 --
- 14 JUSTICE KAGAN: That's immune?
- MR. SAUER: I think it would depend on
- 16 the circumstances whether it was an official
- 17 act. If it were an official act, again, he
- would have to be impeached and convicted.
- 19 JUSTICE KAGAN: Well, what does that
- 20 mean, depend on the circumstances? He was the
- 21 president. He is the commander in chief. He
- 22 talks to his generals all the time. And he told
- 23 the generals: I don't feel like leaving office,
- 24 I want to stage a coup.
- Is -- is -- is that immune?

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1 MR. SAUER: If -- if it's an official
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- 2 act, there needs to be impeachment and
- 3 conviction beforehand because the Framers viewed
- 4 the risk -- that -- that kind of very low risk
- 5 --
- 6 JUSTICE KAGAN: If it's an official
- 7 act, is it an official act?
- 8 MR. SAUER: If it's an official act,
- 9 it's impeaching --
- 10 JUSTICE KAGAN: Is it an official act?
- MR. SAUER: On -- on the way you've
- described that hypothetical, it could well be.
- 13 I -- I just don't know. You'd have to -- again,
- it's a fact-specific, context-specific
- determination that it's contemplating.
- 16 JUSTICE KAGAN: That answer sounds to
- me as though it's like, yeah, under my test,
- it's an official act, but that sure sounds bad,
- 19 doesn't it?
- MR. SAUER: Well, it certainly sounds
- 21 very bad, and that's why the Framers have -- and
- that's why the Framers have a whole series of
- 23 structural checks that have successfully for the
- last 234 years prevented that very kind of
- 25 extreme hypothetical.

1	And that is the wisdom of the Framers.
2	What they viewed as the risk that needed to be
3	guarded against was not the fact the notion
4	that the president might escape, you know,
5	criminal prosecution for something, you know,
6	sort of very, very unlikely in these unlikely
7	scenarios. They viewed much more likely and
8	much more destructive to the Republic the risk
9	of factional strife discussed by George
10	Washington
11	JUSTICE KAGAN: The Framers did not
12	put an immunity clause into the Constitution.
13	They knew how to. There were immunity clauses
14	in some state constitutions. They knew how to
15	give legislative immunity. They didn't provide
16	immunity to the president.
17	And, you know, not so surprising, they
18	were reacting against a monarch who claimed to
19	be above the law. Wasn't the whole point that
20	the president was not a monarch and the
21	president was not supposed to be above the law?
22	MR. SAUER: I would say two things in
23	response to that. Immunity they did put an
24	immunity clause in in a sense. They put in the
25	Executive Vesting Clause, which was originally

- 1 understood to -- to adopt a broad immunity
- 2 principle that's set forth in the very broad
- 3 language of Marbury against Madison.
- 4 And also, they did discuss and
- 5 consider what would be the checks on the
- 6 presidency. And they did not say, oh, we need
- 7 to have criminal prosecution. Right there at
- 8 the Constitutional Convention, Benjamin Franklin
- 9 says, we don't have that. That's not an option.
- 10 Everybody cried out against that as
- 11 unconstitutional. The structural check we're
- 12 adopting is impeachment. And they're very clear
- on that in pages 64 to 69 of the second volume
- of Farent.
- 15 JUSTICE KAGAN: Thank you.
- 16 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Justice
- 17 Gorsuch?
- JUSTICE GORSUCH: Just returning to
- 19 the Chief Justice's hypothetical about the
- 20 ambassador sale and bribery, Congress has a
- 21 statute that specifically names the president
- and says he can be criminally prosecuted for
- 23 bribery, presumably after he leaves office.
- Outside the core areas that -- that
- Justice Kavanaugh was talking about, when

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1 Congress speaks clearly, couldn't a statute like
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- 2 that -- Congress provide a statute like that
- 3 that would allow all manner of evidence to come
- 4 in to prove the case?
- 5 MR. SAUER: I think our position is
- 6 that would have to be an unofficial act, purely
- 7 private conduct, for that prosecution to go
- 8 forward.
- 9 JUSTICE GORSUCH: All right. But --
- 10 but outside the core areas of executive power,
- 11 if there is a clear statement from Congress that
- 12 something is unlawful and it applies to the
- 13 president, I -- I'm struggling to see why in
- that case perhaps the evidence could come in.
- MR. SAUER: Yeah. The strongest
- 16 possible case in our view is what you've
- described as kind of the core executive powers,
- the unrestrictable powers within the meaning of
- 19 Seila Law. But, again, the holding of, for
- 20 example, Brewster and Johnson that we've relied
- on doesn't turn on how central it is of -- of a
- 22 legislative act. It just says, if it's an
- official act, which, here, we would say is --
- 24 applies basically the outer perimeter test of
- 25 Fitzgerald against Nixon. That doesn't come in.

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1 JUSTICE GORSUCH: What -- what would
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- 2 happen if presidents were under fear -- fear
- 3 that their successors would criminally prosecute
- 4 them for their acts in office, whether it's --
- 5 whether they've engaged in drone strikes -- all
- 6 the hypotheticals. I'm not going to go through
- 7 them. It seems to me like one of the incentives
- 8 that might be created is for presidents to try
- 9 to pardon themselves.
- Do you have any thoughts about that?
- 11 MR. SAUER: That is -- I didn't think
- 12 of that until Your Honor asked it. That is
- 13 certainly one incentive that might be created.
- 14 What we think is most important is --
- JUSTICE GORSUCH: I mean, we've never
- answered whether a president can do that.
- 17 Happily --
- 18 MR. SAUER: And the --
- JUSTICE GORSUCH: Happily, it's never
- 20 been presented to us.
- 21 MR. SAUER: And if -- if the doctrine
- of immunity remains in place, that's likely to
- 23 remain the case for those very issues. As
- 24 Fitzgerald, I think, very powerfully emphasized,
- 25 the real concern here is, is there going to be

- 1 bold and fearless action? Is the president
- 2 going to have to make a controversial decision
- 3 where his political opponents are going to come
- 4 after him the minute he leaves office? Is that
- 5 going to unduly deter, is that going to dampen
- 6 the ardor of that president to do what our
- 7 constitutional structure demands of him or her,
- 8 which is bold and fearless action in the face of
- 9 controversy?
- 10 JUSTICE GORSUCH: And perhaps, if he
- 11 feels he has to, he'll pardon himself every --
- 12 every -- every four years from now on.
- MR. SAUER: But that, as the Court
- 14 pointed out, wouldn't provide the security
- because the legality of that is something that's
- 16 never been addressed.
- 17 JUSTICE GORSUCH: Now one of the
- 18 checks and balances in addition to impeachment
- 19 that you've discussed is subordinate liability.
- 20 You don't contest that everybody
- 21 following an unlawful order beneath the
- 22 president of the United States can be
- immediately prosecuted, do you?
- 24 MR. SAUER: I'm sorry. If -- if the
- 25 Court is asking whether they could be --

- 1 JUSTICE GORSUCH: If the president
- 2 gives an unlawful order, call in the troops,
- 3 what -- all the examples we've heard, it --
- 4 every subordinate beneath him faces criminal
- 5 prosecution, don't they?
- 6 MR. SAUER: That is what Gouverneur
- 7 Morris said explicitly at the Constitutional
- 8 Convention, that his co-agitators could be
- 9 prosecuted. There is an important caveat
- 10 because, of course, there would have to be a --
- 11 a statute that would govern that for them to be
- 12 prosecuted to that extent.
- JUSTICE GORSUCH: Oh, we've got lots
- of statutes. The criminal law books are -- are
- 15 replete. But -- I mean, do you agree, is that
- one check that's available?
- 17 MR. SAUER: Absolutely. And, again,
- 18 the only caveat that I was making is, if that
- 19 statute was doing what Marbury says you can't
- do, which is going after the subordinates to
- 21 restrict, for example, a core executive
- 22 function, the Franklin clear statement rule
- 23 might be triggered, and -- you might not be able
- 24 to go after that president.
- So I don't think Congress can say,

- well, we can't go after the president directly,
- 2 but we're going to criminalize the way that the
- 3 president speaks to Congress under the exercise
- 4 of the Recommendations Clause, and, therefore,
- 5 we're going to put in a criminal statute that
- 6 says, if you provide false information to
- 7 Congress in -- in carrying out the president's
- 8 recommendation powers, you -- you can be
- 9 immediately prosecuted. That would at least be
- 10 a very difficult question.
- 11 But the fundamental point of drawing
- that distinction between the president himself
- and his co-agitators, in the word of Gouverneur
- 14 Morris at the Constitutional Convention, is an
- 15 excellent distinction.
- 16 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Justice
- 17 Kavanaugh?
- JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: Just to follow up
- on the OLC opinions question, as you read them
- 20 and I think I read them, they articulate a clear
- 21 statement rule, as do this Court's cases for
- 22 covering official acts. And your point, I
- think, but I just want to underscore this, is
- that none of the statutes alleged here or cited
- 25 here have a clear statement covering the

- 1 president, therefore, meaning that the president
- 2 can't be charged for any official acts under
- 3 this -- under these statutes.
- 4 MR. SAUER: That's absolutely correct.
- 5 They're extended way beyond. I mean, this is --
- 6 JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: Now that's
- 7 separate from the question of what's official
- 8 versus what's personal. But, for that bucket
- 9 that is official, there's no clear statement,
- 10 period?
- 11 MR. SAUER: That's right. And as to
- 12 purely private conduct, we don't think the clear
- 13 statement rule would be invoked. But, as to
- official acts, these statutes, the ones charged
- in the indictment, are just way far afield from
- 16 purporting to criminalize in clear terms the
- 17 president's official acts.
- JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: And then your --
- 19 just to clarify this, the -- the president's not
- above the law, the president's not a king, the
- 21 Founders thought that. I think your point in
- 22 response to that is the president is subject to
- 23 prosecution for all personal acts, just like
- 24 every other American for personal acts. The
- 25 question is acts taken in an official capacity.

1	MR. SAUER: That's correct. And even
2	those, of course, if there was impeachment and
3	conviction, could be prosecuted on our view.
4	And we'd emphasize the whole series of
5	structural checks in addition to that which
6	deter those kind and have successfully
7	deterred presidential misfeasance for 234 years.
8	JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: Then, on the
9	source of immunity, it's not explicit in the
10	Constitution, but also executive privilege is
11	not explicit in the Constitution, yet in United
12	States versus Nixon, the Court unanimously said
13	that the Article II executive power in the
14	Constitution encompassed executive privilege.
15	And the same principle presumably would apply to
16	executive immunity being encompassed within that
17	executive power as historically understood.
18	MR. SAUER: That's absolutely correct.
19	And there's a very telling passage in Free
20	Enterprise Fund where this Court talked about
21	how there's a letter from James Madison to
22	Thomas Jefferson at the time of the founding
23	where Madison said, hey, the as to the
24	removal power, they did not expressly take this
25	away, so the 1789 Congress understood that it

- 1 was left in place.
- 2 So, if the original understanding of
- 3 the Executive Vesting Clause is broad enough to
- 4 encompass that, it would have to be expressly
- 5 taken away, which is the opposite of the
- 6 presumption that they're advancing here.
- JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: And then, lastly,
- 8 I think you've acknowledged in response to
- 9 others' questions that some of the acts in the
- 10 indictment are private and your view is that
- 11 some are official. Is it your position then
- that that analysis of which is which should be
- 13 undertaken in the first instance by the D.C.
- 14 Circuit or the district court?
- MR. SAUER: Most likely the district
- 16 court under the logic of Anderson.
- 17 JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: Thank you.
- 18 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Justice
- 19 Barrett?
- JUSTICE BARRETT: So, Mr. Sauer,
- 21 you've argued that the Impeachment Clause
- 22 suggests or requires impeachment to be a gateway
- 23 to criminal prosecution, right?
- MR. SAUER: Yes. I think that's the
- 25 plain meaning of that second phrase in the

- 1 clause.
- 2 JUSTICE BARRETT: Okay. So there are
- 3 many other people who are subject to
- 4 impeachment, including the nine sitting on this
- 5 bench, and I don't think anyone has ever
- 6 suggested that impeachment would have to be the
- 7 gateway to criminal prosecution for any of the
- 8 many other officers subject to impeachment.
- 9 So why is the president different when
- 10 the Impeachment Clause doesn't say so?
- 11 MR. SAUER: Someone very important has
- made the opposite suggestion as to the president
- himself, which is Solicitor General Bork, which
- is reaffirmed in the OLC opinions on this, where
- 15 the -- where Solicitor General Bork, in 1973, as
- 16 to the issue of the vice president, reviewed the
- 17 historical materials, and he said the sequence
- is mandatory only as to the president.
- 19 That is DOJ's view of the original
- 20 understanding of the Impeachment Judgment
- 21 Clause, which is exactly our position. The
- 22 sequence is mandatory only as to the president.
- 23 Keep in mind that the criminal prosecution of a
- 24 president -- president prior to impeachment
- contradicts, in our view, the plain language of

- 1 the Constitution but also hundreds of years of
- 2 history and what DOJ admits is the Framers'
- 3 intent.
- 4 And so we say that that practice,
- 5 whatever its validity, should not be extended to
- 6 this novel context, where it clashes with the
- 7 constitutional structure.
- 8 JUSTICE BARRETT: What if the criminal
- 9 conduct isn't discovered until after the
- 10 president is out of office, so there was no
- 11 opportunity for impeachment?
- 12 MR. SAUER: We say the Framers assumed
- 13 the risk that -- of under-enforcement by
- 14 adopting these very structural checks. As
- Justice Scalia said in Morrison against Olson,
- 16 the separation of powers prevents us from
- 17 righting every wrong, but it does so that we do
- 18 not lose liberty.
- 19 JUSTICE BARRETT: Okay. And -- and
- 20 the Special Counsel makes a point that I think
- is a pretty compelling one. You admit that if
- the president were successfully impeached that
- 23 he could be criminally prosecuted after
- impeachment, right?
- MR. SAUER: Assuming the prosecution

- 1 was for the same conduct of which he was
- 2 convicted, not impeached. He must be convicted.
- 3 That word "conviction" is right there in the
- 4 clause.
- 5 JUSTICE BARRETT: Okay. Okay.
- 6 Granted. But you also say that these criminal
- 7 statutes, unless they explicitly mention the
- 8 president, don't apply to him. So how can you
- 9 say that he would be subject to prosecution
- 10 after impeachment while at the same time saying
- 11 that he's exempt from these criminal statutes?
- 12 MR. SAUER: Well, there are statutes,
- as they concede, where a president -- Congress
- 14 has purported to do so.
- 15 JUSTICE BARRETT: A few. Two or
- 16 three.
- 17 MR. SAUER: They haven't done a
- 18 comprehensive review. I think it -- this looks
- 19 like all they did was text search for
- 20 "president" in 18 U.S. Code. Again, under
- 21 Franklin, that's a very telling indication that
- the word "president" is not in the statute isn't
- 23 necessarily a -- a -- a magic word requirement,
- 24 so to speak.
- 25 But more fundamentally than that --

- 1 more fundamentally than that, they concede there
- 2 are statutes that exist. In addition to that,
- 3 much impeachment could occur as a result of
- 4 private conduct.
- 5 So the Impeachment Judgment Clause
- 6 does do significant work by authorizing the
- 7 subsequent prosecution of a president there
- 8 because of what the Framers, if you look at what
- 9 they're discussing in the thing, is -- or in the
- 10 Constitutional Convention, is principally
- 11 concerns about private conduct, which, of
- 12 course, we concede are not immune.
- JUSTICE BARRETT: Okay. So just to
- 14 pick up Justice Kagan's example of a president
- who orders a coup, let's imagine that he is
- impeached and convicted for ordering that coup.
- 17 And let's just accept for the sake of argument
- 18 your position that that was official conduct.
- 19 You're saying that he couldn't be
- 20 prosecuted for that, even after a conviction and
- 21 an impeachment proceeding, if there was not a
- 22 statute that expressly referenced the president
- and made it criminal for the president?
- 24 MR. SAUER: There would have to be
- 25 a -- a statute that made a clear statement that

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1 Congress purported to regulate the president's
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- 2 conduct.
- JUSTICE BARRETT: Okay. Thank you.
- 4 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Justice
- 5 Jackson?
- 6 JUSTICE JACKSON: So I think I now
- 7 understand better your position. In -- in your
- 8 discussions with Justice Kavanaugh, it became
- 9 clear that you are saying that for the private
- 10 acts of a president, there's no immunity, but
- 11 for the official acts of the president, there is
- 12 immunity.
- 13 Is that your position?
- MR. SAUER: I agree with that.
- 15 JUSTICE JACKSON: All right. So one
- thing that occurs to me is that this sort of
- 17 difficult line-drawing problem that we're having
- 18 with all of these hypotheticals, is this a
- 19 private act or a public act, is being
- 20 necessitated by that assumption, because, of
- 21 course, if official acts didn't get absolute
- immunity, then it wouldn't matter. We wouldn't
- 23 have to identify which are private and which are
- 24 public, correct?
- MR. SAUER: That, in fact, is the

- 1 approach of the D.C. Circuit. There's no
- 2 determination that needs to be made --
- JUSTICE JACKSON: Right. But I'm
- 4 just -- I'm just making -- so, to the extent
- 5 we're worried about, like, how do we figure out
- 6 whether it's private or public, we have to -- we
- 7 have to understand that we're only doing that
- 8 because of an underlying assumption that the
- 9 public acts get immunity. So let me explore
- 10 that assumption.
- 11 Why is it as a matter of theory -- and
- 12 I'm hoping you can sort of zoom way out here --
- 13 that the president would not be required to
- 14 follow the law when he is performing his
- 15 official acts?
- 16 Everyone else -- everyone else, there
- are lots of folks who have very high-powered
- jobs, who make a lot of consequential decisions,
- 19 and they do so against the backdrop of potential
- 20 criminal prosecution if they should break the
- 21 law in that capacity.
- 22 And we understand and we know as a
- 23 matter of fact that the president of the United
- 24 States has the best lawyers in the world. When
- 25 he's making a decision, he can consult with

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1 pretty much anybody as to whether or not this
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- 2 thing is criminal or not.
- 3 So why would we have a situation in
- 4 which we would say that the president should be
- 5 making official acts without any responsibility
- 6 for following the law?
- 7 MR. SAUER: I respectfully disagree
- 8 with that characterization. The president
- 9 absolutely does have responsibility. He
- 10 absolutely is required to follow the law in all
- of his official acts, but the remedy for that is
- the question, could he be subject to personal
- 13 vulnerability, sent to prison --
- JUSTICE JACKSON: But --
- MR. SAUER: -- for making a bad
- 16 decision after he leaves office.
- 17 JUSTICE JACKSON: But -- but other
- 18 people who have consequential jobs and who are
- 19 required to follow the law make those
- 20 determinations against the backdrop of that same
- 21 kind of risk. So what is it about the president
- 22 -- I mean, I've heard you say it's because the
- 23 president has to be able to act boldly, do --
- you know, make kind of consequential decisions.
- I mean, sure, but, again, there are

- lots of people who have to make life-and-death
- 2 kinds of decisions and yet they still have to
- follow the law, and if they don't, they could be
- 4 sent to prison, et cetera, et cetera. So --
- 5 MR. SAUER: I'd say two things in
- 6 response to that --
- 7 JUSTICE JACKSON: Yes.
- 8 MR. SAUER: -- both from Fitzgerald.
- 9 That's the very sort of inference or reasoning
- 10 that this Court rejected in Fitzgerald.
- 11 JUSTICE JACKSON: No, but let me just
- 12 -- Fitzgerald was a civil situation in which the
- 13 president actually was in a different position
- 14 than other people because of the nature of his
- job, the high-profile nature and the fact that
- 16 he touches so many different things, when you're
- 17 talking about private civil liability, you know,
- anybody on the street can sue him, we could see
- 19 that the president was sort of different than
- 20 the ordinary person when you say should he be
- 21 immune from civil liability from anybody who
- 22 wants to sue him.
- But, when we're talking about criminal
- 24 liability, I don't understand how the president
- 25 stands in any different position with respect to

- 1 the need to follow the law as he is doing his
- 2 job than anyone else.
- 3 MR. SAUER: He -- he is required to
- 4 follow the law. And what Fitzgerald said is
- 5 that the --
- 6 JUSTICE JACKSON: But he's not if
- 7 there's no criminal -- if there's no threat of
- 8 criminal prosecution, what prevents the
- 9 president from just doing whatever he wants?
- 10 MR. SAUER: All the structural checks
- 11 that are identified in Fitzgerald and a whole
- 12 series of this Court's cases that go back to
- Martin against Mott, for example, impeachment,
- oversight by Congress, public oversight.
- 15 There's a long series.
- 16 And Fitzgerald directly addresses this
- in the civil context, and we think --
- JUSTICE JACKSON: Well, I'm not sure
- 19 --
- 20 MR. SAUER: -- that language naturally
- 21 imports to the criminal context.
- JUSTICE JACKSON: -- I'm not sure
- that's -- that that's much of a backstop. And
- 24 what I'm, I guess, more worried about, you seem
- 25 to be worried about the president being chilled.

1	I think that we would have a really
2	significant opposite problem if the president
3	wasn't chilled. If someone with those kinds of
4	powers, the most powerful person in the world
5	with the greatest amount of authority could go
6	into office knowing that there would be no
7	potential penalty for committing crimes, I'm
8	trying to understand what the disincentive is
9	from turning the Oval Office into, you know, the
LO	the the the seat of criminal activity
L1	in this country.
L2	MR. SAUER: I don't think there's any
L3	allegation of that in this case. And what
L4	George Washington said is what Benjamin
L5	Franklin said is we view the prosecution of a
L6	chief executive as something that everybody
L7	cried out against as unconstitutional.
L8	And what George Washington said is
L9	we're worried about factional strife which
20	will bring the Republic
21	JUSTICE JACKSON: No. I'm so let
22	me let me let me put this worry on the
23	table. If the potential for criminal liability
24	is taken off the table, wouldn't there be a
25	significant risk that future presidents would be

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1 emboldened to commit crimes with abandon while
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- 2 they're in office?
- 3
 It's right now the fact that we're
- 4 having this debate because OLC has said that
- 5 presidents might be prosecuted. Presidents from
- 6 the beginning of time have understood that
- 7 that's a possibility. That might be what has
- 8 kept this office from turning into the kind of
- 9 crime center that I'm envisioning.
- But, once we say no criminal
- 11 liability, Mr. President, you can do whatever
- 12 you want, I'm worried that we would have a worse
- 13 problem than the problem of the president
- 14 feeling constrained to follow the law while he's
- 15 in office.
- MR. SAUER: I respectfully disagree
- 17 with that because it -- the -- the regime you've
- described is the regime we've operated under for
- 19 234 years. There has not been an expectation
- 20 based on 234 years of unbroken political --
- 21 JUSTICE JACKSON: All right. Let me
- 22 ask you another question that --
- MR. SAUER: -- or legal tradition that
- 24 that might occur.
- JUSTICE JACKSON: -- let me ask you

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1 another question about this clear statement line
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- 2 of questioning.
- First of all, I -- I didn't see you
- 4 argue that below. I don't know -- I -- I
- 5 understand that you had that set of in your
- 6 briefs here, but did you argue before the D.C.
- 7 Circuit something about a clear statement with
- 8 respect to the statutes?
- 9 MR. SAUER: Yes. In our separately
- 10 filed motion for -- motion to dismiss based on
- 11 statutory grounds, we extensively argued not
- 12 just this clear statement rule but a whole
- 13 panoply of clear statement rules --
- 14 JUSTICE JACKSON: Right. But that's
- 15 not -- that's not the question presented in this
- 16 case. The question presented in this case comes
- out of your motion for immunity. So, to bring
- in now an argument that you didn't raise below,
- it seems to me you forfeited it, no?
- 20 MR. SAUER: I -- I believe it's fairly
- 21 included within the question presented,
- 22 especially --
- JUSTICE JACKSON: Why?
- MR. SAUER: Especially because the
- 25 Court expanded the question presented from what

- 1 either of the parties submitted to discuss here.
- 2 JUSTICE JACKSON: But not to statutory
- 3 interpretation.
- 4 MR. SAUER: I think --
- 5 JUSTICE JACKSON: I mean, that -- that
- 6 argument goes to statutory avoidance, you know,
- 7 constitutional avoidance, statutory
- 8 interpretation. You asked for immunity, which
- 9 is a totally different thing.
- 10 MR. SAUER: I think they're very
- 11 closely related logically. The question is --
- is does immunity exist and to what extent does
- 13 it. And the argument is immunity at least
- 14 exists to the extent that it raises a grave
- 15 constitutional question, and that triggers the
- 16 clear statement rule. That's a really tight
- 17 logical relationship.
- JUSTICE JACKSON: But that's totally
- 19 circular. You're -- you -- you use that
- 20 argument to avoid constitutional questions. You
- 21 are asking us a constitutional question here.
- 22 So it doesn't even make sense to talk about
- 23 clear statement in -- rule the way that it's
- come up in the context of an immunity question.
- 25 But let me just -- let me ask you this

- 1 about it. I had one more question. Yeah. So
- 2 what -- what is the argument that the president
- 3 of the United States, who you say is bound by
- 4 the law, is not on notice that he has to do his
- 5 job consistent with the law?
- I mean, to the extent that the clear
- 7 statement rule comes in at all, it's about the
- 8 person not being on notice. So I -- I guess I
- 9 don't understand why Congress in every criminal
- 10 statute would have to say and the president is
- 11 included. I thought that was the sort of
- 12 background understanding that if they're
- 13 enacting a generally applicable criminal
- statute, it applies to the president just like
- 15 everyone else.
- 16 So -- so what is the clear statement
- 17 that would have to be made in this context?
- 18 MR. SAUER: Under Franklin and under
- 19 Public Citizen, Congress has to speak clearly
- 20 before it interferes with the president's
- 21 powers, and we have here an indictment that
- 22 seeks to criminalize objective conduct that
- 23 falls within the heartland of core executive
- 24 authority.
- JUSTICE JACKSON: Thank you.

Т	CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Thank you,
2	counsel.
3	Mr. Dreeben.
4	ORAL ARGUMENT OF MICHAEL R. DREEBEN
5	ON BEHALF OF THE RESPONDENT
6	MR. DREEBEN: Mr. Chief Justice, and
7	may it please the Court:
8	This Court has never recognized
9	absolute criminal immunity for any public
LO	official. Petitioner, however, claims that a
L1	former president has permanent criminal immunity
L2	for his official acts, unless he was first
L3	impeached and convicted. His novel theory would
L4	immunize former presidents from criminal
L5	liability for bribery, treason, sedition,
L6	murder, and, here, conspiring to use fraud to
L7	overturn the results of an election and
L8	perpetuate himself in power.
L9	Such presidential immunity has no
20	foundation in the Constitution. The Framers
21	knew too well the dangers of a king who could do
22	no wrong. They therefore devised a system to
23	check abuses of power, especially the use of
24	official power for private gain.
25	Here, the executive branch is

- 1 enforcing congressional statutes and seeking
- 2 accountability for Petitioner's alleged misuse
- 3 of official power to subvert democracy. That is
- 4 a compelling public interest.
- 5 In response, Petitioner raises
- 6 concerns about potential abuses. But
- 7 established legal safeguards provide layers of
- 8 protections, with the Article III courts
- 9 providing the ultimate check. The existing
- 10 system is a carefully balanced framework. It
- 11 protects the president but not at the high
- 12 constitutional cost of blanket criminal
- immunity.
- 14 That has been the understanding of
- 15 every president from the framing through
- 16 Watergate and up to today. This Court should
- 17 preserve it.
- I welcome the Court's questions.
- JUSTICE THOMAS: Mr. Dreeben, does the
- 20 president have immunity, or are you saying that
- there's no immunity, presidential immunity, even
- 22 for official acts?
- MR. DREEBEN: Yes, Justice Thomas, but
- 24 I think that it's important to put in
- 25 perspective the position that we are offering

- 1 the Court today. The president, as the head of
- 2 the Article II branch, can assert as-applied
- 3 Article II objections to criminal laws that
- 4 interfere with an exclusive power possessed by
- 5 the president or that prevent the president from
- 6 accomplishing his constitutionally assigned
- 7 functions.
- 8 That is the constitutional doctrine
- 9 that currently governs the separation of powers.
- 10 What Petitioner is asking for is a broad blanket
- immunity that would protect the president, a
- 12 former president, from any criminal exposure
- 13 absent impeachment and conviction, which has
- 14 never happened in our history.
- And we submit that is not necessary in
- order to assure that the president can perform
- 17 all of the important tasks that the Constitution
- 18 reposes in him.
- 19 JUSTICE THOMAS: Over -- over in the
- 20 not so distant past, the presidents or certain
- 21 presidents have engaged in various activity,
- 22 coups or operations like Operation Mongoose when
- I was a teenager, and yet there were no
- 24 prosecutions.
- MR. DREEBEN: Yeah.

1	JUSTICE THOMAS: Why? If you if
2	what you're saying is right, it it would seem
3	that that would have been ripe for criminal
4	prosecution of someone.
5	MR. DREEBEN: So, Justice Thomas, I
6	think this is a central question. The reason
7	why there have not been prior criminal
8	prosecutions is that there were not crimes. And
9	I want to explain why there are layers of
10	safeguards that assure that former presidents do
11	not have to lightly assume criminal liability
12	for any of their official acts.
13	At the outset, there is a statutory
14	construction principle that is applicable here.
15	It arises when there is a serious constitutional
16	question about applying a criminal statute to
17	the president's acts. It is not and I'm sure
18	that we will discuss this that no statute can
19	apply to the president in his official capacity
20	absent a designation of the president in it.
21	But there is a principle that if there is a
22	serious constitutional question, courts will
23	strive to construe the statute so that it does
24	not apply to the president.
25	In addition to that, the president, I

- 1 think has been mentioned earlier, has access to
- 2 advice from the attorney general. And it would
- 3 be a due process problem to prosecute a
- 4 president who received advice from the attorney
- 5 general that his actions were lawful absent the
- 6 kind of collusion or conspiracy that itself
- 7 represented a criminal violation, which I don't
- 8 really see as being a --
- 9 JUSTICE THOMAS: Well --
- 10 MR. DREEBEN: -- realistic option.
- 11 And then, if I could say one more
- thing, because you raised the question about
- 13 potential overseas taking of life, and the
- 14 Office of Legal Counsel has addressed this quite
- 15 specifically.
- There is a background principle of
- 17 criminal law called the public authority
- 18 exception to liability, and it is read into
- 19 federal law unless Congress takes specific
- 20 action to oust it, which it never has done as
- 21 far as I am aware.
- 22 And in a case in which the president
- 23 sought to engage in overseas activity that would
- 24 result in the taking of life, OLC did not say
- 25 the federal murder statute doesn't apply. That

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would be the -- the thrust of my friend's
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- 2 argument on clear statement.
- Instead, OLC went through an extensive
- 4 analysis on why the public authority defense
- 5 would prevent it from being considered a
- 6 violation of law to go after a terrorist, for
- 7 example.
- 8 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Counsel --
- 9 JUSTICE ALITO: Well, Mr. -- I'm
- 10 sorry.
- 11 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: -- the court
- of appeals below, whose decision we're
- 13 reviewing, said: "A former president can be
- 14 prosecuted for his official acts because the
- 15 fact of the prosecution means that the former
- 16 president has allegedly acted in defiance of the
- 17 laws."
- 18 It -- do you agree with that
- 19 statement?
- 20 MR. DREEBEN: Well, I think it sounds
- 21 tautologically true, but I -- I want to
- 22 underscore that the obligation of a president is
- 23 to take care that the laws are faithfully
- 24 executed.
- 25 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Well, I -- the

- 1 -- I think it sounds tautologically true as
- 2 well, and that, I think, is the clearest
- 3 statement of the court's holding, which is why
- 4 it concerns me.
- 5 It -- It -- as I read it, it says
- 6 simply a former president can be prosecuted
- 7 because he's being prosecuted.
- 8 MR. DREEBEN: Well, I -- I would not
- 9 suggest that that's either the proper approach
- in this case or certainly not the government's
- 11 approach. A prosecution does, of course, invoke
- 12 federal criminal law. The allegations have to
- 13 be presented to a grand jury, which votes upon
- 14 the indictment.
- 15 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Well, that's
- 16 what I -- I mean, shortly after that statement
- in the court, that -- court's opinion, that's
- what they said, but there's no reason to worry
- 19 because the prosecutor will act in good faith
- and there's no reason to worry because a grand
- 21 jury will have returned the indictment.
- Now you know how easy it is in many
- 23 cases for a prosecutor to get a grand jury to
- 24 bring an indictment, and reliance on the faith
- 25 -- good faith of the prosecutor may not be

1 enough in the -- some cases. I'm not suggesting

- 2 here.
- 3 So, if it's tautological and those are
- 4 the only protections that the court of appeals
- 5 below gave and that is no longer your position,
- 6 you're not defending that position, why
- 7 shouldn't we either send it back to the court of
- 8 appeals or issue an opinion making clear that
- 9 that's not the law?
- 10 MR. DREEBEN: Well, I -- I am
- 11 defending the court of appeals' judgment. And I
- do think that there are layered safeguards that
- 13 the Court can take into account that will
- 14 ameliorate concerns about unduly chilling
- 15 presidential conduct.
- 16 That concerns us. We are not
- 17 endorsing a regime that we think would expose
- 18 former presidents to criminal prosecution in bad
- 19 faith, for political animus, without adequate
- 20 evidence. A politically driven prosecution
- 21 would violate the Constitution under Wayte
- 22 versus United States.
- It's not something within the arsenal
- of prosecutors to do. Prosecutors take an oath.
- 25 The attorney general takes an oath. So --

1	CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Well
2	MR. DREEBEN: I I don't want to
3	overstate the Your Honor's concern with
4	potentially relying solely on good faith, but
5	that's an ingredient. And then the courts stand
6	ready to adjudicate motions based on selective
7	prosecution, political animus. This Court
8	relied on those very protections in
9	CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Right.
10	MR. DREEBEN: the Vance case just
11	two years ago.
12	JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: What's the test
13	CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: But but
14	what what concerns me is, as you know, the
15	court of appeals did not get into a focused
16	consideration of what acts we're talking about
17	
18	MR. DREEBEN: Mm-hmm.
19	CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: or what
20	documents we're talking about because of its
21	adoption of what you termed, and I agreed quite
22	correctly, as a tautological statement. Because
23	the fact of prosecution was enough, enough to
24	take away any official immunity, the fact of
25	prosecution, they had no need to look at what

- 1 courts normally look at when you're talking
- 2 about a privilege or immunity question.
- 3 MR. DREEBEN: Well, I -- I think I
- 4 would take issue, Mr. Chief Justice, with the
- 5 idea of taking away immunity. There is no
- 6 immunity that is in the Constitution, unless
- 7 this Court creates it today. There certainly is
- 8 no textual immunity. We do not submit that
- 9 that's the end of the story. United States
- 10 versus Nixon wasn't a textually-based case.
- 11 Neither was Nixon versus Fitzgerald. We endorse
- 12 both of those holdings.
- But what is important is that no
- 14 public official has ever had the kind of
- absolute criminal immunity that my friend speaks
- of, even with respect to the Speech or Debate
- 17 Clause. It's very narrow. It's focused on
- 18 legislative acts. It's not focused on
- 19 everything that a Congressman does.
- 20 And it responds to a very specific
- 21 historical circumstance that basically involved
- 22 the two other branches potentially harassing
- 23 legislators and preventing them from doing their
- jobs. That's why it ended up in the
- 25 Constitution.

1	Nothing like that ended up in in
2	the Constitution for the presidents, and that's
3	because one of the chief concerns of the Framers
4	was the risk of presidential misconduct. They
5	labored over this. They adopted an impeachment
6	structure that separated removal from office as
7	a political remedy from criminal prosecution.
8	This departed from the British model.
9	The British model was you get impeached and
10	criminally prosecuted and convicted in the same
11	proceeding. The Framers did not want that.
12	They wanted a political remedy in case a
13	president was engaging in conduct that
14	endangered the nation. He could be removed.
15	He can't be prosecuted while he's a
16	sitting president. That's been the longstanding
17	Justice Department position.
18	JUSTICE ALITO: Mr. Dreeben, you
19	dispute the proposition that a former president
20	has some form of immunity.
21	MR. DREEBEN: Mm-hmm.
22	JUSTICE ALITO: But, as I understand
23	your argument, you do recognize that a former
24	president has a form of special protection,
25	namely, that statutes that are applicable to

- 1 everybody must be interpreted differently under
- 2 some circumstances when they are applied to a
- 3 former president.
- 4 Isn't that true?
- 5 MR. DREEBEN: It -- it is true
- 6 because, Justice Alito, of the general principle
- 7 that courts construe statutes to avoid serious
- 8 constitutional questions. And that has been the
- 9 longstanding practice of the Office of Legal
- 10 Counsel in the Department of Justice.
- 11 JUSTICE ALITO: All right. So this is
- 12 more, I think, than just a -- a quarrel about
- terminology, whether what the former president
- 14 gets is some form of immunity or some form of
- 15 special protection, because it involves this
- 16 difference which I'm sure you're very well aware
- 17 of.
- 18 That if it's just a form of special
- 19 protection, in other words, statutes will be
- interpreted differently as applied to a former
- 21 president, then that is something that has to be
- 22 litigated at trial. The -- the former president
- 23 can make a motion to dismiss and may cite OLC
- 24 opinions, and the district court may say: Well,
- 25 that's fine, I'm not bound by OLC and I

1	interpret it differently, so let's go to trial.
2	And then there has to be a trial, and
3	that may involve great expense and it may take
4	up a lot of time, and during the trial, the
5	the former president may be unable to engage in
6	other activities that the former president would
7	want to engage in. And then the outcome is
8	dependent on the jury, the instructions to the
9	jury and how the jury returns a verdict, and
LO	then it has to be taken up on appeal.
L1	So the protection is greatly diluted
L2	if you take the form if it takes the form
L3	that you have proposed. Now why is that better?
L4	MR. DREEBEN: It it's better
L5	because it's more balanced. The the blanket
L6	immunity that Petitioner is arguing for just
L7	means that criminal prosecution is off the
L8	table, unless he says that impeachment and
L9	conviction have occurred.
20	Those are political remedies that are
21	extremely difficult to achieve. In a case where
22	the conduct, misconduct, occurs close to the end
23	of a president's term, Congress is unlikely to
24	crank up the machinery to do it, and if the
2.5	impeachment trial has to occur after the

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1 president has left office, there's an open
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- 2 question about whether that can happen at all.
- 3 So --
- 4 JUSTICE ALITO: Well it -- you're
- 5 arguing against the most far-reaching --
- 6 MR. DREEBEN: Correct.
- 7 JUSTICE ALITO: -- aspects of -- of
- 8 Mr. Sauer's argument, right?
- 9 MR. DREEBEN: That -- that is -- that
- 10 is correct. And -- and let me turn then to why
- 11 we --
- 12 JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: Well -- well, what
- about, to unpack it a little more, do you agree
- 14 that there's some aspects of Article II
- 15 presidential power that are exclusive and that
- 16 Congress cannot regulate and therefore cannot
- 17 criminalize?
- 18 MR. DREEBEN: Absolutely.
- 19 JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: Okay. For other
- official acts that the president may take that
- 21 are not within that exclusive power, assume for
- the sake of argument this question that there's
- 23 not blanket immunity for those --
- MR. DREEBEN: Mm-hmm.
- 25 JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: -- official acts

- 1 but that to preserve the separation of powers,
- 2 to provide fair notice, to make sure Congress
- 3 has thought about this, that Congress has to
- 4 speak clearly to criminalize official acts of
- 5 the president by a specific reference.
- 6 That seems to be what the OLC opinions
- 7 suggest -- I know you have a little bit of a
- 8 disagreement with that -- and what this Court's
- 9 cases also suggest.
- 10 MR. DREEBEN: So, Justice Kavanaugh,
- 11 I'd like -- like to take all of those in turn
- 12 because I don't think this Court's cases speak
- 13 that broadly. I definitely don't think that the
- 14 Office of Legal Counsel opinions stand for this
- broad proposition that unless the president is
- 16 specifically named, he's not in -- in the
- 17 statute. And I don't think that that's
- 18 necessary in order to afford adequate protection
- 19 for the president's valid Article II functions.
- 20 JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: Well, you said
- 21 unless -- I'm sorry to interrupt, but I want to
- 22 just get this out and you can incorporate it in
- 23 the answer. You said unless there's a serious
- 24 constitutional question.
- MR. DREEBEN: Correct.

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1 JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: Well, it's --
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- 2 isn't -- it's a serious constitutional question
- 3 whether a statute can be applied to the
- 4 president's official acts. So wouldn't you
- 5 always interpret the statute not to apply to the
- 6 president, even under your formulation, unless
- 7 Congress had spoken with some clarity?
- 8 MR. DREEBEN: I -- I don't think -- I
- 9 don't think across the board that a serious
- 10 constitutional question exists on applying any
- 11 criminal statute to the president.
- 12 JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: The problem is the
- vague stat, you know, obstruction and 371,
- 14 conspiracy to defraud the United States, can be
- used against a lot of presidential activities
- 16 historically with a -- a creative prosecutor who
- wants to go after a president.
- MR. DREEBEN: Well, let me try to
- 19 backtrack a little bit to the --
- 20 JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: That's the --
- 21 that's the -- that's what we're talking about
- 22 historically, is the risk that -- and -- and
- 23 going forward the -- the risk. So you can take
- 24 all of that.
- 25 MR. DREEBEN: I -- I think that the --

- 1 the question about the risk is very serious,
- and, obviously, it is a question that this Court
- 3 has to evaluate.
- 4 For the executive branch, our view is
- 5 that there is a -- a balanced protection that
- 6 better serves the interests of the Constitution
- 7 that incorporates both accountability and
- 8 protection for the president. And I want to go
- 9 through the protections that do exist, but
- 10 perhaps it's worth returning at the outset to
- 11 the statutory construction question that you
- 12 raised.
- The Office of Legal Counsel has said
- the offense of bribery, of course, applies to
- 15 the president. It does not name the president,
- 16 Justice Gorsuch. Section 201 does not
- 17 specifically name the president.
- 18 JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: Right. Well,
- 19 assume that's personal. So that's --
- 20 MR. DREEBEN: Well, I think that
- 21 it's -- it's --
- JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: -- that's what
- 23 Brewster said.
- MR. DREEBEN: It --
- 25 JUSTICE GORSUCH: The bribe -- bribery

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1 statute in 607 says the president. I've got it
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- 2 in front of me. And so there is -- there is
- 3 that.
- 4 MR. DREEBEN: Well, Section --
- 5 JUSTICE GORSUCH: Let -- let me
- 6 just back up, though, just --
- 7 MR. DREEBEN: Okay.
- JUSTICE GORSUCH: -- a second to what
- 9 was a quick exchange with Justice Kavanaugh that
- 10 I just want to make sure I understand.
- 11 MR. DREEBEN: Yeah.
- 12 JUSTICE GORSUCH: Did you agree that
- 13 there are some core functions of the executive
- that a president conduct that Congress cannot
- 15 criminalize?
- MR. DREEBEN: Yes. We --
- 17 JUSTICE GORSUCH: So is -- is that a
- 18 form -- I mean, we can call it immunity or you
- 19 can call it they can't do it. But what's the
- 20 difference?
- MR. DREEBEN: We call it an as-applied
- 22 Article II challenge that we think --
- JUSTICE GORSUCH: Okay, okay.
- 24 MR. DREEBEN: -- fits within --
- 25 JUSTICE GORSUCH: Can we call it

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1 immunity just for shorthand's sake so we -- so I
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- 2 think we are kind of narrowing the ground of
- 3 dispute here. It seems to me there is some --
- 4 some area you -- you concede that on official
- 5 acts that Congress cannot criminalize, and now
- 6 we're just talking about the scope.
- 7 MR. DREEBEN: Well, I don't think it's
- 8 a "just," but I -- I think it's a very
- 9 significant gap between any official act and the
- 10 small core of exclusive official acts.
- JUSTICE GORSUCH: No, I -- I -- I got
- 12 that, but I -- I want to explore that, okay?
- MR. DREEBEN: Okay.
- JUSTICE GORSUCH: So, for example,
- 15 let's say a president leads a mostly peaceful
- 16 protest sit-in in front of Congress because he
- objects to a -- a piece of legislation that's
- 18 going through.
- MR. DREEBEN: Mm-hmm.
- JUSTICE GORSUCH: And it, in fact,
- 21 delays the proceedings in Congress.
- Now, under 1512(c)(2), that might be
- 23 corruptly impeding a proceeding, an official
- 24 proceeding. Could -- is that core and therefore
- immunized or whatever word, euphemism you want

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1
      to use for that?
 2
               MR. DREEBEN: So --
                JUSTICE GORSUCH: Or is that not core
 3
 4
      and therefore prosecutable --
 5
               MR. DREEBEN: Well, it -- it's --
                JUSTICE GORSUCH: -- without a clear
 6
 7
      statement that applies to the president?
                MR. DREEBEN: It's not -- it's not
 8
            The core kinds of activities that the
 9
      Court has acknowledged are the things that I
10
11
     would run through the Youngstown analysis. And
12
      it's a pretty small set, but things like the
13
     pardon power, the power to recognize foreign
14
     nations, the power to veto legislation, the
15
     power to make appointments, these are things
16
     that the Constitution specifically allocates to
17
      the president.
18
                Once you get out --
19
                JUSTICE GORSUCH: So a president then
20
      could be prosecuted for the conduct I described
21
      after he leaves office?
2.2
                MR. DREEBEN: Probably not, but I want
23
      to explain the framework --
24
                JUSTICE GORSUCH: Why -- why?
25
               MR. DREEBEN: -- of -- of why I don't
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1 think that that would be prosecution that would
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- 2 be valid.
- First, I think you need to run through
- 4 all of the sort of normal categories of
- 5 analysis. Is there a serious constitutional
- 6 question that's posed by applying that statute
- 7 to the president? If so, then you may well
- 8 default to it does not apply at least on that
- 9 fact pattern.
- JUSTICE GORSUCH: Well, I thought you
- 11 said it -- that -- that was my question.
- MR. DREEBEN: Yes. I understand.
- JUSTICE GORSUCH: And you said it --
- it fell outside that core, we'll call it
- immunity for simplicity's sake.
- MR. DREEBEN: Yes, I understand. But
- 17 --
- JUSTICE GORSUCH: But --
- MR. DREEBEN: There's a -- there's a
- 20 separate --
- JUSTICE GORSUCH: So they couldn't --
- MR. DREEBEN: -- category of --
- JUSTICE GORSUCH: Okay. So why
- 24 couldn't he be prosecuted for leading a civil
- 25 rights protest in front of the Capitol that --

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1 that delays a vote on a piece of important
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- 2 legislation?
- 3 MR. DREEBEN: So I think what you need
- 4 to do is run through all of the very
- 5 president-specific protective layers of
- 6 analysis. So one of them is whether the statute
- 7 would be construed not to apply to his conduct,
- 8 even if it's not part of that small core of
- 9 things that Congress can't regulate at all.
- 10 If it operates to prevent the
- 11 president from fulfilling his Article II --
- 12 JUSTICE GORSUCH: Well, he -- he could
- have given speeches against it. He did.
- MR. DREEBEN: Yes.
- 15 JUSTICE GORSUCH: But he left -- he --
- 16 he -- he did something more, and it -- and it
- 17 corruptly impeded and sought to influence an
- 18 official proceeding.
- MR. DREEBEN: Well, so I -- I don't
- 20 know -- we're -- we're starting with the layers,
- 21 I think, of protection. And we're now down
- 22 through whether the statute would be construed
- 23 to apply to him. Then there would be a question
- 24 of whether --
- 25 JUSTICE GORSUCH: Assume it does.

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1 MR. DREEBEN: I will assume it. Then
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- 2 -- then there's the question of whether he has
- 3 the state of mind necessarily --
- 4 JUSTICE GORSUCH: Assume he does.
- 5 MR. DREEBEN: -- to violate it.
- JUSTICE GORSUCH: Corrupt --
- 7 MR. DREEBEN: Okay.
- 8 JUSTICE GORSUCH: Nobody knows what
- 9 corrupt intent means? We've been around that
- 10 tree --
- 11 MR. DREEBEN: I think we will probably
- 12 --
- JUSTICE GORSUCH: -- twice already.
- MR. DREEBEN: -- find out.
- JUSTICE GORSUCH: And -- and maybe it
- means that he knows that he was doing wrong, is
- 17 what --
- MR. DREEBEN: Perhaps.
- JUSTICE GORSUCH: -- the government
- 20 told us.
- 21 MR. DREEBEN: Right.
- JUSTICE GORSUCH: He knows he's doing
- 23 wrong. He knows he shouldn't be out there
- 24 blocking congressmen from going to vote.
- MR. DREEBEN: Well, let me get to the

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1 next layer then, which is that the president
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- does have access to the attorney general to
- 3 provide legal advice and regularly gets legal
- 4 advice from the -- the attorney general on the
- 5 lawful scope of the president's activities.
- 6 We could go down two tracks here. One
- 7 is that the attorney general advises him that,
- 8 as an incident of his Article II authority and
- 9 in carrying out the functions of the presidency,
- 10 he can lawfully participate in that protest.
- 11 It's kind of the First Amendment analogue to the
- 12 president's official powers, which the Court is
- 13 exploring in other cases.
- 14 Alternatively, the attorney general
- 15 could advise him, I'm sorry, Mr. President,
- there's nothing in the language of this statute
- 17 that carves you out. I don't see a serious
- 18 constitutional question in it --
- 19 JUSTICE GORSUCH: I got it.
- 20 MR. DREEBEN: -- because you don't
- 21 have to do that, and I would advise you not to
- 22 --
- JUSTICE GORSUCH: And then --
- JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: Mr. Dreeben --
- 25 MR. DREEBEN: -- violate criminal law.

1	JUSTICE GORSUCH: and then he could
2	be prosecuted?
3	MR. DREEBEN: No.
4	JUSTICE GORSUCH: No? If if he
5	gets a negative opinion from the attorney
6	general, he still couldn't be prosecuted?
7	MR. DREEBEN: I'm going to assume that
8	most presidents are not going to take in a
9	JUSTICE GORSUCH: Well, but if he gets
10	one and does it anyway, then he could be
11	prosecuted?
12	MR. DREEBEN: Well, so then, if we are
13	down at that level, I think what we are really
14	asking is whether the president is subject to
15	the criminal law.
16	JUSTICE GORSUCH: And your answer?
17	MR. DREEBEN: And our answer is yes
18	JUSTICE GORSUCH: Yeah. Okay.
19	MR. DREEBEN: he is subject to the
20	criminal law, but
21	JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: Mr. Dreeben, can
22	we go back to the bribery statute? I, like you,
23	understand that the only thing that is covered
24	by that is the president is barred from
25	soliciting or receiving funds in any room or

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1 building in the United States.
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- 2 MR. DREEBEN: That is -- that is
- 3 correct. And it's an extremely --
- 4 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: Official building.
- 5 It's a very limited --
- 6 MR. DREEBEN: Yes.
- 7 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: -- mention of the
- 8 president.
- 9 MR. DREEBEN: And -- and, really, I
- 10 think others --
- JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: Can -- can -- so,
- 12 as I understand this, there's two very limited
- provisions mentioning the president as included.
- MR. DREEBEN: That's right.
- JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: There's a whole
- number of provisions that exclude the president,
- many, many, many more that exclude the
- 18 president, correct?
- 19 MR. DREEBEN: It's a kind of small
- 20 number on both --
- JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: All right. Now --
- MR. DREEBEN: -- sides of the fence,
- 23 Justice Sotomayor.
- 24 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: -- Justice Barrett
- 25 made the point that if we say a president can't

- 1 be included in a criminal law unless explicitly
- 2 named, then that would bar the Senate from
- 3 impeaching him for high crimes or misdemeanor
- 4 because that means that he's not subject to the
- 5 law at all. Correct?
- 6 MR. DREEBEN: So I -- I think, it --
- 7 Justice --
- 8 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: That's a tautology
- 9 you can't escape.
- 10 MR. DREEBEN: Justice Sotomayor, what
- 11 I -- I think that Justice Barrett was saying --
- 12 and we would agree with it -- is that under my
- friend's position, after impeachment, he could
- 14 be prosecuted, but under his statutory
- 15 construction approach, there would be nothing to
- 16 prosecute him for.
- 17 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: Exactly. That's
- 18 the point.
- 19 MR. DREEBEN: Exactly.
- JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: Which is, if he's
- 21 not covered by the criminal law, he can't be
- 22 impeached for it.
- MR. DREEBEN: Yes.
- JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: For violating it.
- 25 All right. Now could we go further on this

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1 clear statement rule? The situations -- and you
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- 2 mentioned it earlier -- in which we have looked
- 3 to see if the president is covered is
- 4 contextual, correct?
- 5 MR. DREEBEN: Correct.
- 6 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: And what are the
- 7 factors that generally we'll look at? I -- I'm
- 8 thinking specifically about whether the APA
- 9 covers the president.
- 10 MR. DREEBEN: Correct.
- 11 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: And what we did
- there was analyze what powers were being given
- 13 to -- in the lawsuit and -- et cetera. We
- 14 looked at words. We looked at structure. We
- 15 looked at separation-of-powers issues relating
- to our case law that said you can't direct the
- 17 president to do anything and this would have
- 18 been a subterfuge for that, correct?
- 19 MR. DREEBEN: All correct.
- JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: All right. So I
- 21 don't know why, two of my colleagues, how they
- 22 would fashion a clear statement rule that would
- 23 say when a law says any person can't accept a
- 24 bribe, that that permits the president to do it.
- MR. DREEBEN: So I agree, Justice

- 1 Sotomayor, that -- that -- that the way that
- 2 this Court has interpreted statutes that do
- 3 carve out the president -- Justice Kavanaugh
- 4 asked about this -- was very context-specific.
- 5 The Franklin case basically involved a holding
- 6 that we are highly unlikely to say that the
- 7 president is an agency, something that the
- 8 government said would be a peculiar
- 9 understanding of agency, when the effect of it
- would be that we would review the president's
- 11 decisions under statutes for abuse of
- 12 discretion, which is a very extraordinary thing
- 13 to do.
- I think even going back to Marbury --
- this is perhaps a point on which I agree with my
- 16 friend. Marbury says discretionary acts of the
- 17 president are not the kind of thing that the
- 18 Court reviews.
- 19 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: All right. Could
- 20 I go back to your brief and -- and -- and going
- 21 back to what some of my colleagues have asked
- 22 you. There appears to be some narrowing
- 23 principles to the concept that the president is
- 24 subject to all criminal laws in all situations.
- MR. DREEBEN: Correct.

1	JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: You agree that if
2	it affects core powers, then the he would not
3	be subject to any laws that attempted to limit
4	those core powers, correct?
5	MR. DREEBEN: That is right.
6	JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: You're defining
7	core powers as those specified by Article II?
8	MR. DREEBEN: That is essentially
9	correct, yes.
10	JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: All right. And
11	the only words in the Constitution is that
12	that have to do with the president and law is
13	that he shall "take care that the law be
14	faithfully executed, " correct?
15	MR. DREEBEN: That is right.
16	JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: Hard to imagine
17	that a president who breaks the law is
18	faithfully executing the law, correct?
19	MR. DREEBEN: He has to execute all of
20	the laws.
21	JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: All right.
22	JUSTICE BARRETT: Counsel
23	JUSTICE ALITO: Well, Mr. Dreeben
24	JUSTICE BARRETT: Oh.
25	JUSTICE ALITO: do you really I

- 1 mean, presidents have to make a lot of tough
- decisions about enforcing the law, and they have
- 3 to make decisions about questions that are
- 4 unsettled, and they have to make decisions based
- on the information that's available. Do you
- 6 really -- did -- did I understand you to say,
- 7 well, you know, if he makes a mistake, he makes
- 8 a mistake; he's subject to the criminal laws
- 9 just like anybody else?
- 10 MR. DREEBEN: Well, I --
- 11 JUSTICE ALITO: You don't think he's
- in a special -- a peculiarly precarious
- 13 position?
- MR. DREEBEN: He's in a special
- position for a number of reasons. One is that
- 16 he has access to legal advice about everything
- 17 that he does. He's under a constitutional
- obligation to -- he's supposed to be faithful to
- 19 the laws of the United States and the
- 20 Constitution of the United States.
- 21 And making a mistake is not what lands
- you in a criminal prosecution. There's been
- 23 some talk about the statutes that are issue in
- 24 this case. I think they are fairly described as
- 25 malum in se statutes, engaging in conspiracies

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1 to defraud the United States with respect to one
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- of the most important functions, namely, the
- 3 certification of the next president.
- 4 JUSTICE ALITO: Well, I -- I don't
- 5 want to dispute the particular application of --
- of that, of 371, conspiracy to defraud the
- 7 United States, to the particular facts here, but
- 8 would you not agree that that is a peculiarly
- 9 open-ended statutory prohibition in that -- that
- 10 fraud under that provision, unlike under most
- other fraud provisions, does not have to do --
- doesn't require any impairment of a property
- 13 interest?
- MR. DREEBEN: It's designed to protect
- 15 the functions of the United States Government.
- 16 And it's difficult to think of a more critical
- 17 function than the certification of who won the
- 18 election.
- JUSTICE ALITO: Yeah, I -- I'm not --
- 20 as I said, I'm not discussing the particular
- 21 facts of this case, but it applies to any fraud
- that interferes seriously with any government
- 23 operation, right?
- MR. DREEBEN: So what -- what the
- 25 government needs to show is an intent to impede,

- 1 interfere, or defeat a lawful government
- 2 function by deception, and it has to be done
- 3 with scienter.
- 4 These are not the kinds of activities
- 5 that I think any of us would think a president
- 6 needs to engage in in order to fulfill his
- 7 Article II duties and particularly in a case
- 8 like this one.
- 9 I -- I want to pick up on something
- 10 that the Court said earlier about the
- 11 distinction between a public official acting to
- 12 achieve public ends and a public official acting
- 13 to achieve private ends.
- 14 As applied to this case, the president
- 15 has no functions with respect to the
- 16 certification of the winner of the presidential
- 17 election. It seems likely that the Framers
- designed the Constitution that way because, at
- 19 the time of the founding, presidents had no
- 20 two-term limit. They could run again and again
- and were expected potentially to want to do
- 22 that.
- 23 So the potential for self-interest
- 24 would explain why the states -- conduct the
- 25 elections. They send electors to certify who

- 1 won those elections and to provide votes. And
- 2 then Congress in a joint -- extraordinary joint
- 3 session certifies the vote.
- 4 And the president doesn't have an
- official role in that proceeding. So it's
- 6 difficult for me to understand how there could
- 7 be a serious constitutional question about
- 8 saying you can't use fraud to defeat that
- 9 function. You can't obstruct it through
- 10 deception. You can't deprive millions of voters
- of their right to have their vote counted for
- 12 the candidate who they chose.
- 13 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Thank you,
- 14 counsel.
- Justice Thomas?
- 16 Justice Alito?
- 17 JUSTICE ALITO: Could we just briefly
- 18 review the layers of protection that you think
- 19 exists? And I'm going to start with what the
- 20 D.C. Circuit said.
- 21 So the first layer of protection is
- 22 that attorneys general and other Justice
- 23 Department attorneys can be trusted to act in a
- 24 professional and ethical manner, right?
- MR. DREEBEN: Yes.

1	JUSTICE ALITO: How robust is that
2	protection? I mean, most of the the vast
3	majority of attorneys general and Justice
4	Department attorneys and we both served in
5	the Justice Department for a long time are
6	honorable people and they take their
7	professional ethical responsibilities seriously,
8	but there have been exceptions, right, both
9	among attorneys general and among federal
10	prosecutors?
11	MR. DREEBEN: There have been rare
12	exceptions, Justice Alito, but when we're
13	talking about layers of protection, I do think
14	this is the the starting point. And if the
15	Court has concerns about the robustness of it,
16	I I would suggest looking at the charges in
17	this case. They involve
18	JUSTICE ALITO: Well, I want to talk
19	about this in in the abstract because what is
20	before us, of course, does involve this
21	particular case, which is immensely important,
22	but whatever we decide is going to apply to all
23	future presidents.
24	So, as for attorneys general, there

25 have been two who were convicted of criminal

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offenses while in office. There were others, A.
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- 2 Mitchell Palmer is one that comes to mind, who
- 3 is widely regarded as having abused the power of
- 4 his office.
- 5 Would you agree with that?
- 6 MR. DREEBEN: I would, but they are
- 7 two officials in a long line of attorneys
- 8 generals who did not and in Departments of
- 9 Justice that are staffed by multiple people who
- 10 do adhere to their office. And, Justice Alito,
- if I could just -- the point that I wanted to
- make about this case does go to the general
- 13 proposition.
- 14 The allegations about the misuse of
- 15 the Department of Justice to perpetuate election
- 16 fraud show exactly how the Department of Justice
- functions in the way that it is supposed to.
- 18 Petitioner is alleged to have tried to get the
- 19 Department of Justice to send fraudulent letters
- 20 to the states to get them to reverse electoral
- 21 results. The Department of --
- JUSTICE ALITO: Yeah, I --
- 23 MR. DREEBEN: -- Justice pushed back
- 24 --
- 25 JUSTICE ALITO: -- I -- I understand

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1 -- I understand -- I understand that, Mr.
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- 2 Dreeben, but as I said, this case will have
- 3 effects that go far beyond this particular
- 4 prosecution.
- 5 So moving on to the second level of
- 6 protection that the D.C. Circuit cited, federal
- 7 grand juries will shield former presidents from
- 8 unwarranted indictments.
- 9 How much protection is that?
- 10 MR. DREEBEN: Well, it -- it affords
- 11 two levels of protection. One is the probable
- 12 cause finding requires evidence. I think some
- of the fears about groundless prosecutions
- aren't supported by evidence, and they're not
- 15 going to get out of the starting gate.
- JUSTICE ALITO: I mean, there --
- there's the old saw about indicting a ham
- 18 sandwich.
- 19 MR. DREEBEN: Yes, but I think,
- 20 Justice Alito we --
- 21 JUSTICE ALITO: I mean, you -- you
- 22 have a lot of experience in the Justice
- 23 Department. Do you come across a lot of cases
- 24 where the -- the U.S. attorney or another
- 25 federal prosecutor really wanted to indict a

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1 case and the grand jury refused to do so?
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- MR. DREEBEN: There are such cases.
- JUSTICE ALITO: Are there? Yeah?
- 4 MR. DREEBEN: Yes. But I think that
- 5 the other --
- 6 JUSTICE ALITO: Every once in a while
- 7 there's an eclipse too.
- 8 (Laughter.)
- 9 MR. DREEBEN: Well, I think that
- 10 that's for the most reason is prosecutors have
- 11 no incentive to bring a case to a grand jury and
- 12 secure an indictment when they don't have
- evidence to prove guilt beyond a reasonable
- 14 doubt. It's self-defeating.
- 15 JUSTICE ALITO: All right. Then the
- third level is that former presidents enjoy all
- 17 the protections afforded all criminal
- 18 defendants, right?
- I mean, we've discussed that. And
- that may be true at the end of the day, but a
- lot can happen between the time when an
- 22 indictment is returned and the time when the
- 23 former president finally gets vindication
- 24 perhaps on appeal.
- 25 Isn't that correct?

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1
                MR. DREEBEN:
                              It -- it is correct,
 2
     Justice Alito, but I think that we should also
      consider the history of this country. As -- as
 3
     members of the Court have observed, it's baked
 4
      into the Constitution that any president knows
 5
 6
     that they are exposed to potential criminal
 7
     prosecution. My friend says after impeachment
     and conviction. We don't read the Impeachment
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 9
      Judgment Clause that way, but we are -- it's
10
      common ground that all former presidents have
11
      known that they could be indicted and convicted.
12
                And Watergate cemented that
13
     understanding. The Watergate smoking gun tape
14
      involved President Nixon and H.R. Haldeman
15
     talking about and then deciding to use the CIA
16
      to give a bogus story to the FBI to shut down a
17
      criminal investigation.
18
                JUSTICE ALITO: I mean, Mr. Sauer and
19
      others have identified events in the past where
20
     presidents have engaged in conduct that might
     have been charged as a federal crime, and you --
21
2.2
     you say, well, no, that's not really true. This
23
      is page 42 of your brief.
                So what about President Franklin
24
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D. Roosevelt's decision to intern Japanese

- 1 Americans during World War II? Couldn't that
- 2 have been charged under 18 U.S.C. 241,
- 3 conspiracy against civil rights?
- 4 MR. DREEBEN: Today, yes. Given this
- 5 Court's decision in Trump versus United States
- 6 in which the -- you know, Trump versus Hawaii,
- 7 excuse me, where the Court said Korematsu is
- 8 overruled. I mean, President Roosevelt made
- 9 that decision with the advice of his attorney
- 10 general. That's a layer of safeguard.
- 11 JUSTICE ALITO: Is that really true?
- 12 I thought -- I thought Attorney General Biddle
- 13 thought that there was really no threat of
- 14 sabotage, as did J. Edgar Hoover.
- MR. DREEBEN: So I think that there is
- 16 a lot of historical controversy, but it
- 17 underscores that that occurred during wartime.
- 18 It implicates potential commander in chief
- 19 concerns, concerns about the exigencies of
- 20 national defense that might provide an
- 21 as-applied Article II challenge at the time.
- 22 I'm not suggesting today.
- 23 But the idea that a decision that was
- 24 made and ultimately endorsed by this Court,
- 25 perhaps wrongly in the Korematsu case, would

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1 support criminal prosecution under 241, which
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- 2 requires under United States versus Lanier that
- 3 the right had been made specific so that there
- 4 is notice to the president, I don't think that
- 5 would have been satisfied.
- 6 JUSTICE ALITO: All right. Well, we
- 7 could go through other historical examples. I
- 8 won't do that. Let me just touch briefly on a
- 9 couple of other things.
- 10 One is the relevance of advice of
- 11 counsel, and I wasn't clear what your answer is.
- 12 So, if the president gets advice from the
- 13 attorney general that something is lawful, is
- 14 that an absolute defense?
- MR. DREEBEN: Yes, I -- I think that
- it is. Under the principle of entrapment by
- 17 estoppel, this is a due process doctrine that we
- 18 referred to in our brief or reply brief in
- 19 Garland versus Carqill this term at page 19
- 20 where we cited authority of this Court that if a
- 21 authorized government representative tells you
- that what you are about to do is lawful, it
- 23 would be a -- a root violation of due process to
- 24 prosecute you for that.
- JUSTICE ALITO: Well, will that --

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1 won't that give presidents an incentive to be
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- 2 sure to pick an attorney general who can -- will
- 3 -- who will reliably tell the president that it
- 4 is lawful to do whatever the president wants to
- 5 do if there's any possibly conceivable argument
- 6 in favor of it?
- 7 MR. DREEBEN: So I think the
- 8 constitutional structure protects against that
- 9 risk. The president nominates the attorney
- 10 general and the Senate provides advice and
- 11 consent. And these are the sort of structural
- 12 checks that have operated for 200 years to
- 13 prevent the kind of abuses that my friend fears
- 14 going forward as a result of this
- once-in-history prosecution.
- 16 JUSTICE ALITO: On the question of
- whether a president has the authority to pardon
- 18 himself, which came up earlier in the argument
- 19 --
- MR. DREEBEN: Mm-hmm.
- 21 JUSTICE ALITO: -- what's the answer
- 22 to that question?
- MR. DREEBEN: I don't believe the
- 24 Department of Justice has taken a position. The
- 25 -- the only authority that I'm aware of is a

1 member of the Office of Legal Counsel wrote on a

- 2 memorandum that there is no self-pardon
- 3 authority. As far as I know, the Department has
- 4 not addressed it further. And, of course, this
- 5 Court had not addressed it either.
- 6 JUSTICE ALITO: Well, when you
- 7 addressed that question before us, are you
- 8 speaking in your capacity solely as a member of
- 9 the Special Counsel's team, or -- or are you
- 10 speaking on behalf of the Justice Department,
- 11 which has special institutional
- 12 responsibilities?
- MR. DREEBEN: I am speaking on behalf
- of the Justice Department, representing the
- 15 United States.
- 16 JUSTICE ALITO: Now how -- don't you
- 17 think we need to know the answer to -- at least
- 18 to the Justice Department's position on that
- 19 issue in order to decide this case?
- 20 Because, if a president has the
- 21 authority to pardon himself before leaving
- office and the D.C. Circuit is right that there
- is no immunity from prosecution, won't the --
- the predictable result be that presidents on the
- last couple of days of office are going to

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1 pardon themselves from anything that they might
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- 2 have been conceivably charged with committing?
- 3 MR. DREEBEN: I -- I really doubt
- 4 that, Justice Alito. I mean, it sort of
- 5 presupposes a regime that we have never had
- 6 except for President Nixon and as alleged in the
- 7 indictment here, presidents who are conscious of
- 8 having engaged in wrongdoing and seeking to
- 9 shield themselves.
- 10 I think the political consequences of
- 11 a president who asserted a right of self-pardon
- that has never been recognized, that seems to
- 13 contradict a bedrock principle of our law that
- 14 no person shall be the judge in their own case.
- 15 Those are adequate deterrents, I think, so that
- this kind of dystopian regime is not going to
- 17 evolve.
- JUSTICE ALITO: All right. Let me end
- 19 -- end with just a question about what is
- 20 required for the functioning of a stable
- 21 democratic society, which is something that we
- 22 all want. I'm sure you would agree with me that
- 23 a stable democratic society requires that a
- 24 candidate who loses an election, even a close
- one, even a hotly contested one, leave office

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1 peacefully if that candidate is -- is the
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- 2 incumbent.
- 3 MR. DREEBEN: Of course.
- 4 JUSTICE ALITO: All right. Now, if a
- 5 -- an incumbent who loses a very close, hotly
- 6 contested election knows that a real possibility
- 7 after leaving office is not that the president
- 8 is going to be able to go off into a peaceful
- 9 retirement but that the president may be
- 10 criminally prosecuted by a bitter political
- opponent, will that not lead us into a cycle
- that destabilizes the functioning of our country
- 13 as a democracy?
- 14 And we can look around the world and
- find countries where we have seen this process,
- where the loser gets thrown in jail.
- 17 MR. DREEBEN: So I think it's exactly
- 18 the opposite, Justice Alito. There are lawful
- 19 mechanisms to contest the results in an
- 20 election. And outside the record but I think of
- 21 public knowledge, Petitioner and his allies
- filed dozens of electoral challenges and, in my
- understanding, has lost all but one that was not
- 24 outcome determinative in any respect. There
- 25 were judges the -- that said, in order to

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1 sustain substantial claims of fraud that would
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- 2 overturn an election result that's certified by
- a state, you need evidence, you need proof. And
- 4 none of those things were manifested.
- 5 So there is an appropriate way to
- 6 challenge things through the courts with
- 7 evidence. If you lose, you accept the results.
- 8 That has been the nation's experience. I think
- 9 the Court is well familiar with that.
- 10 JUSTICE ALITO: All right. Thank you.
- 11 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Justice
- 12 Sotomayor?
- 13 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: A stable
- democratic society needs the good faith of its
- 15 public officials, correct?
- MR. DREEBEN: Absolutely.
- 17 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: And that good
- 18 faith assumes that they will follow the law?
- MR. DREEBEN: Correct.
- JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: Now, putting that
- 21 aside, there is no fail-safe system of
- 22 government, meaning we have a judicial system
- 23 that has layers and layers and layers of
- 24 protection for accused defendants in the hopes
- 25 that the innocent will go free. We fail

- 1 routinely, but we succeed more often than not.
- 2 In the vast majority of cases, the innocent do
- 3 go free. Sometimes they don't, and we have some
- 4 post-conviction remedies for that. But we still
- 5 fail. We've executed innocent people.
- 6 Having said that, Justice Alito went
- 7 through step by step all of the mechanisms that
- 8 could potentially fail. In the end, if it fails
- 9 completely, it's because we've destroyed our
- 10 democracy on our own, isn't it?
- 11 MR. DREEBEN: It -- it is, Justice
- 12 Sotomayor, and I also think that -- that there
- are additional checks in the system. Of course,
- the constitutional Framers designed a separated
- powers system in order to limit abuses. I think
- one of the ways in which abuses are limited is
- 17 accountability under the criminal law for
- 18 criminal violations. But the ultimate check is
- 19 the goodwill and faith in democracy.
- 20 And crimes that are alleged in this
- 21 case that are the antithesis of democracy, that
- 22 subvert it --
- JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: An encouragement
- 24 --
- MR. DREEBEN: -- undermine that.

Т	JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: An encouragement
2	to believe words have been somewhat put into
3	suspicion here, that no man is above the law
4	either in his official or private acts?
5	MR. DREEBEN: Yes yes. I think
6	that is an assumption of the Constitution.
7	CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Justice Kagan?
8	JUSTICE KAGAN: Mr. Dreeben, I want to
9	go through your framework and make sure I
LO	understand it.
L1	So, first, on the small category of
L2	things that you say have absolute protection
L3	MR. DREEBEN: Yes.
L 4	JUSTICE KAGAN: that they are core
L5	executive functions
L6	MR. DREEBEN: Yes.
L7	JUSTICE KAGAN: what are those
L8	small categories?
L9	MR. DREEBEN: Pardon power.
20	JUSTICE KAGAN: Pardon. Veto?
21	MR. DREEBEN: Veto, foreign
22	recognition, appointments. Congress cannot say
23	you can't appoint a federal judge who hasn't
24	received, you know, a certain diploma, hasn't
25	achieved a certain age. There are a few other

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1 powers in the Constitution.
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- JUSTICE KAGAN: Is commander in chief?
- 3 MR. DREEBEN: Commander in chief is --
- 4 is on the list, but I want to add to my answer
- 5 on that that Congress has substantial authority
- 6 in the national security realm. Congress
- 7 declares war. It raises armies. It has power
- 8 over the purse. That's more of a --
- 9 JUSTICE KAGAN: So that may be viewed
- 10 as not really in that core set of functions
- 11 which nobody has any power but the president
- 12 over?
- MR. DREEBEN: Yes. I think that there
- may be some aspects like directing troops on the
- 15 field in which the president's power is
- 16 completely unreviewable.
- 17 JUSTICE KAGAN: Okay. Now, in -- in
- 18 -- in -- in the next category, where you --
- 19 where -- where we've left the core set behind --
- MR. DREEBEN: Yes.
- JUSTICE KAGAN: -- but we're still in
- 22 the world of official actions --
- MR. DREEBEN: Mm-hmm.
- 24 JUSTICE KAGAN: -- and that's where
- 25 you say there are various statutory construction

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1 rules that might come into play.
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- 2 MR. DREEBEN: Correct.
- 3 JUSTICE KAGAN: But you have
- 4 characterized those as something different from
- just saying, oh, look, the statute doesn't say
- 6 the president; therefore, it doesn't apply to
- 7 the president.
- 8 MR. DREEBEN: That is right.
- 9 JUSTICE KAGAN: So I wanted to give
- 10 you an opportunity to say, you know, how that
- 11 would look, how that analysis would look in a
- 12 given case. And -- and in the course of
- 13 responding to that, you know, I'm sort of
- 14 thinking of something like the OLC opinion --
- MR. DREEBEN: Mm-hmm.
- 16 JUSTICE KAGAN: -- which says
- 17 bribery --
- MR. DREEBEN: Mm-hmm.
- 19 JUSTICE KAGAN: -- the president can
- 20 be tried and convicted of bribery, even in the
- 21 part of the bribery statutes that do not say the
- 22 president.
- MR. DREEBEN: Mm-hmm.
- JUSTICE KAGAN: Why is that true?
- 25 MR. DREEBEN: That is true because

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1 there is no serious constitutional question that
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- 2 the president needs to engage in bribery in
- 3 order to carry out his constitutional functions,
- 4 and the Office of Legal Counsel pointed out that
- 5 bribery is enumerated in the Impeachment Clause.
- 6 So it falls outside of anything that could be
- 7 viewed as inherent in the need of Article II to
- 8 function.
- 9 JUSTICE KAGAN: Do you think the
- 10 premise of that OLC opinion was that the bribery
- 11 was simply not official?
- MR. DREEBEN: No.
- JUSTICE KAGAN: Or is the premise that
- 14 the bribery was official and -- and still the
- 15 president could be prosecuted for it?
- MR. DREEBEN: I think that bribery is
- 17 -- is the kind of hybrid that illustrates the
- abuse of public office for private gain that we
- 19 think is paradigmatic of the kinds of things
- 20 that should be not held to be immune.
- In a bribery case, the public official
- 22 cannot extract the bribe without the official
- 23 power to offer as the quid or the pro. I guess
- 24 the quo actually. So it -- it really is a crime
- 25 that can only be committed by public officials

- 1 who misuse their power, and it was one of the
- 2 things that was most mistrusted.
- 3 Many of the acts that are charged in
- 4 this indictment or that would violate federal
- 5 criminal law similarly involve the misuse of
- 6 official power for private gain.
- 7 JUSTICE KAGAN: So, if you were to
- 8 say, like, what the line is in this category,
- 9 like, when it is that the statute should be
- 10 understood as precluding presidential
- 11 prosecution and when it is that the statute
- 12 should be understood as allowing it, what
- 13 general principles should guide?
- MR. DREEBEN: So the -- the -- the
- general principles, I think, kind of emerge from
- looking at what the Office of Legal Counsel has
- done. So, for example, with respect to a
- 18 federal statute that prohibited appointments to
- 19 courts of people within certain degrees of
- 20 consanguinity, the Office of Legal Counsel said
- 21 this infringes on a very important appointment
- 22 power of the president, the power to appoint
- 23 federal judges. It cannot be presumed that
- 24 Congress intended to do that because it would
- 25 raise a very serious constitutional question.

- 1 The president is out.
- 2 Then there are categories of statutes
- 3 where the president is in, like, for example,
- 4 the grassroots lobbying statute. The Office of
- 5 Legal Counsel wrote an opinion about that, and
- 6 it said for the president or other public
- 7 officials to go out into the world and to
- 8 promote their programs, that can't be what
- 9 Congress intended to prohibit.
- 10 What it did intend to prohibit is
- 11 using federal funds to gin up -- gin up an
- 12 artificial grassroots campaign that gave the
- appearance of emerging from the people, but it
- was really top-down. And the Office of Legal
- 15 Counsel said the president and officials who
- 16 carry out the president's mandates are subject
- 17 to that statute. So that's a more nuanced one.
- 18 And then the third example that I will
- 19 give you is the statute that would permit
- 20 prosecution for contempt of Congress. The
- 21 Office of Legal Counsel concluded that a
- 22 good-faith assertion of executive privilege as a
- 23 reason for not providing information to Congress
- 24 would preclude prosecution because Congress
- 25 cannot be deemed to have altered the separation

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of powers in such a manner.
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- I think OLC probably would have gone
- 3 on to say, if Congress tried to do it, it would
- 4 be deemed unconstitutional. But, again, this
- 5 was a statute that did not specifically name the
- 6 president. There are only two that do that.
- 7 So the entire corpus of federal
- 8 criminal law, including bribery offenses,
- 9 sedition, murder, would all be off limits if it
- 10 were taken to the -- to the extent
- 11 that some of the questions have suggested and
- 12 for the general principle, does it raise a
- 13 serious constitutional question, and, if so, to
- what extent? Can it be carved out individually?
- And there may be some instances where
- 16 the statutes here could be carved out and a
- 17 particular act could be found to be protected.
- Or does the statute across the board, in such a
- wide range of applications, somewhat analogous
- 20 to overbreadth analysis, infringe on the
- 21 president's power so that we're going to say
- 22 that -- that the president is just out?
- JUSTICE KAGAN: Now that set of
- 24 issues, they seem important and may occasionally
- 25 be difficult.

1	MR. DREEBEN: Mm-hmm.
2	JUSTICE KAGAN: They they also seem
3	not really before us in the way Justice Jackson
4	suggested earlier.
5	MR. DREEBEN: Mm-hmm.
6	JUSTICE KAGAN: What do you I mean,
7	do you think they are before us, we should just
8	clear it up, here it is, we have a case?
9	What what else could we do? How should we
10	deal with this, that there are these
11	MR. DREEBEN: Yes. Yes.
12	JUSTICE KAGAN: lingering issues
13	that go beyond the question of whether there's
14	the kind of absolute immunity that the former
15	president is invoking?
16	MR. DREEBEN: So I think the Court has
17	discretion to reach that issue even though
18	Justice Jackson is totally right, it was not
19	raised in the district court and it was not
20	raised in the court of appeals.
21	And the the analysis that I would
22	use to get there is a fusion of a couple of
23	principles. One is the Court has often resolved
24	threshold questions that are a prerequisite to
25	an intelligent resolution of the question

- 1 presented.
- 2 So, in a case like United States
- 3 versus Grubbs, for example, the Court reached
- 4 out to decide what -- whether anticipatory
- 5 warrants are valid under the Fourth Amendment
- 6 before turning to the question whether the
- 7 triggering condition for an anticipatory warrant
- 8 had to be in the warrant. So that's one
- 9 principle.
- 10 And then a -- a precedent that bears
- 11 some analogy to this is Vermont Natural
- 12 Resources Agency versus United States ex rel
- 13 Stevens. It was a qui tam case, and the first
- question was whether a state agency was a person
- within the meaning of the False Claims Act, and
- the second question was whether, if the state
- 17 agency was, Eleventh Amendment immunity kicked
- 18 in.
- 19 And the Court wrote an analysis of why
- it could reach both questions. The reaching the
- 21 person question didn't expand the Court's
- jurisdiction, and it made sense as a matter of
- 23 constitutional avoidance to do that.
- 24 There are some considerations that cut
- 25 against this. And I -- I want to be clear that

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1 for overall government equities, we are not wild
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- 2 about parties who raise a -- an immunity case
- 3 that can be presented to a court on an
- 4 interlocutory appeal and then smuggling in other
- 5 issues. So we would want to guide the Court not
- 6 to have an expansive approach to that issue.
- 7 But the final thing that I would say
- 8 about this is part of our submission to this
- 9 Court is that the Article I branch and the
- 10 Article II branches are aligned in believing
- 11 that this prosecution is an appropriate way to
- 12 enforce the law, Congress by making the law, the
- 13 current executive by deciding to bring it.
- 14 And since a building block of that
- submission is that Congress actually did apply
- 16 these criminal laws to official conduct, the
- 17 Court may wish to exercise its discretion to
- 18 resolve that issue.
- 19 JUSTICE KAGAN: Okay. I have one last
- 20 set of questions, which has to do with the
- 21 official/unofficial line.
- MR. DREEBEN: Yes.
- JUSTICE KAGAN: And you heard Mr.
- 24 Sauer's responses to both Justice Barrett's
- 25 questions and my questions about what he thinks

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1 counts as official here and what he thinks
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- 2 counts as unofficial here.
- 3 And I'm just wondering what you took
- 4 from his responses and also how you would
- 5 characterize what is official and what is not
- 6 official in this indictment.
- 7 MR. DREEBEN: So I -- I think
- 8 Petitioner conceded that there are acts that are
- 9 not official that are alleged in the indictment.
- 10 And we agree with him on all of that.
- I think I disagree with him on
- 12 everything else that he said about what is
- official and what is not. Organizing fraudulent
- slates of electors, creating false documentation
- that says I'm an elector, I was appointed
- 16 properly, I'm going to send a -- a vote off to
- 17 Congress that reflects that Petitioner won
- 18 rather than the candidate that actually got the
- 19 most votes and who was ascertained by the
- 20 governor and whose electors were appointed to
- 21 cast votes, that is not official conduct. That
- is campaign conduct.
- 23 And I think that the D.C. Circuit in
- the Blassingame case did draw an appropriate
- 25 distinction. A first-term president who's

1 running for re-election can act in the capacity

- 2 as office-seeker or office-holder.
- 3 And when working with private lawyers
- 4 and a private public relations advisor to gin up
- 5 fraudulent slates of electors, that is not any
- 6 part of a president's job. So --
- JUSTICE KAGAN: There's -- I'm sorry,
- 8 there's an allegation in the indictment that has
- 9 to do with the removal of a Justice Department
- 10 official. Would -- would -- is that core
- 11 protected conduct?
- 12 MR. DREEBEN: We don't think that
- that's core protected conduct. I don't think
- 14 that -- that I would characterize that episode
- 15 quite that way.
- We do agree that the Department of
- 17 Justice allegations were a use of the
- 18 president's official power. In many ways, we
- 19 think that aggravates the nature of this
- 20 offense.
- 21 Seeking as a candidate to oust the
- 22 lawful winner of the election and have oneself
- 23 certified with private actors is a private
- 24 scheme to achieve a private end, and many of the
- co-conspirators alleged in the indictment are

- 1 private.
- 2 But for an incumbent president to then
- 3 use his presidential powers to try to enhance
- 4 the likelihood that it succeeds makes the crime
- 5 in our view worse --
- 6 JUSTICE KAGAN: And --
- 7 MR. DREEBEN: So -- in the Department
- 8 of Justice episode occurs very late in the
- 9 election cycle, after many other schemes had
- 10 failed.
- 11 And at that point, the -- the
- 12 Petitioner is alleged to have tried to pressure
- 13 the Department of Justice to send false letters
- 14 to the states claiming that there were serious
- 15 election irregularities and that they should
- 16 investigate who they certified as the president.
- 17 None of this was true.
- The Department of Justice officials
- 19 all said this is not true. We are not going to
- 20 do that. And at that point, Petitioner is
- 21 alleged to have threatened to remove the
- 22 Department of Justice officials who were
- 23 standing by their oath and replace them with
- another person who would carry it out.
- We're not seeking to impose criminal

- 1 liability on the president for exercising or
- 2 talking about exercising the appointment and
- 3 removal power. No. What we're seeking to
- 4 impose criminal liability for is a conspiracy to
- 5 use fraud to subvert the election, one means of
- 6 which was to try to get the Justice Department
- 7 to be complicit in this.
- 8 The case would have been no different
- 9 if Petitioner were successful and he had
- 10 actually exercised the appointment and removal
- 11 power and it had gone through and those
- 12 fraudulent letters were sent. It would have
- 13 made the scheme more dangerous, but it would not
- 14 have changed the crime.
- 15 JUSTICE KAGAN: And how do we think
- about things like conversations with the vice
- 17 president? In other words, things that if you
- 18 say it that way, it's clear that they would fall
- 19 under executive privilege.
- MR. DREEBEN: Mm-hmm.
- 21 JUSTICE KAGAN: But how does that
- relate to the question that we're asking here?
- 23 MR. DREEBEN: So this is one of the
- 24 most difficult questions for the Department of
- 25 Justice, and I -- I want to explain why that is.

1	If we are operating under a Fitzgerald
2	versus Nixon lens and looking at this the way
3	that we look at things when there is a private
4	lawsuit filed against the president, we take a
5	very broad view of what the outer perimeter of
6	official presidential action is in order to be
7	as protective of the president against private
8	lawsuits that, as this Court explained in Nixon
9	versus Fitzgerald, can be very deleterious to
10	the president's conduct of business.
11	So, if we were putting this under a
12	Fitzgerald lens, we would then have to answer to
13	the question: Was he acting in in the
14	capacity as office-seeker, or was he acting in
15	the capacity as office-holder?
16	And if you run through the indictment,
17	you can find support for those two
18	characterizations, and the Department of Justice
19	has not yet had to come to grips with how we
20	would analyze that set of interactions.
21	JUSTICE KAGAN: Thank you.
22	CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Justice
23	Gorsuch?
24	JUSTICE GORSUCH: If you did, though,
25	you I just wanted to confirm I thought I

- 1 heard you thought that the Blassingame framework
- 2 was the appropriate one.
- 3 Is that right?
- 4 MR. DREEBEN: Largely -- largely yes,
- 5 Justice Gorsuch. We -- we agree with the idea
- of the distinction between office-holder and
- 7 office-seeker.
- 8 We also agree that if it's objectively
- 9 reasonable to view the activities as those of
- office-holder, then the Fitzgerald immunity
- 11 kicks in. I think we would look more at the
- 12 content of the actual interaction in order to
- make that determination than Blassingame
- 14 suggested at least on the facts of that case
- 15 might be appropriate.
- 16 JUSTICE GORSUCH: Can you give me an
- 17 example of what you have in mind? I'm just
- 18 trying to understand what nuance you're
- 19 suggesting.
- 20 MR. DREEBEN: So -- so -- so
- 21 Blassingame adopted a, you know, generally very
- 22 favorable, pro-government framework that -- we
- 23 endorse in tried civil cases.
- 24 JUSTICE GORSUCH: I would have
- 25 thought, yeah.

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1 MR. DREEBEN: Okay. Not here, because
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- 2 we don't think that Fitzgerald applies in the
- 3 criminal context.
- 4 JUSTICE GORSUCH: Well, I understand
- 5 that.
- 6 MR. DREEBEN: Okay.
- 7 JUSTICE GORSUCH: But -- but -- but --
- 8 but -- but putting that aside, the distinction
- 9 between official act and private
- 10 office-seeker --
- MR. DREEBEN: Yes.
- 12 JUSTICE GORSUCH: -- their test is,
- 13 you think, good enough for government work?
- MR. DREEBEN: I -- I -- on -- on this
- one, the Department hasn't taken a next step
- 16 since the Blassingame decision, but let me offer
- 17 a few thoughts that, Justice Gorsuch, I think
- 18 might clarify it.
- The Blassingame decision focused on
- 20 objective contextual indications to try to see
- 21 whether the president was acting as a campaigner
- 22 as opposed to --
- JUSTICE GORSUCH: Yeah.
- MR. DREEBEN: -- a -- a you know, an
- 25 office-holder.

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1 JUSTICE GORSUCH: President, yeah.
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- 2 MR. DREEBEN: I think that -- that
- 3 that decision can also be made by looking at
- 4 what the president actually said. And let me
- 5 illustrate that with an allegation that I think
- 6 my friend --
- JUSTICE GORSUCH: Briefly.
- 8 MR. DREEBEN: -- talked -- briefly.
- 9 That it -- in one of the interactions between
- 10 Petitioner and a state official, Petitioner is
- 11 alleged to have said: All I need you -- you to
- do is to find me 11,000 votes and change.
- I think, if you look at that -- that
- 14 content, it's pretty clear that Petitioner is
- 15 acting in the capacity as office-seeker, not as
- 16 president. And we would look at that content.
- 17 JUSTICE GORSUCH: Okay. Okay. But
- 18 the test -- I'm just focused on the legal test.
- 19 MR. DREEBEN: Right.
- JUSTICE GORSUCH: I'm not hearing any
- 21 objections to it.
- MR. DREEBEN: Other than I think that
- 23 the D.C. Circuit placed more content
- 24 consideration off limits than I would.
- JUSTICE GORSUCH: Okay. All right.

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1 And then I wanted to understand, on the core
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- 2 immunity or whatever word we use, that -- that
- 3 it seems to me that we're narrowing the ground
- 4 of dispute here considerably, do -- do we look
- 5 at motives, the president's motives for his
- 6 actions?
- 7 I mean, the -- for example, he has
- 8 lots of war powers, as we discussed, but he
- 9 might use them in order to enhance his election,
- 10 his personal interests. Is that a relevant
- 11 consideration when we're looking at core powers?
- 12 MR. DREEBEN: So I -- I -- I am
- thinking of this more as looking at the
- objective of the activity as opposed to the kind
- of subjective motive in the sense that Your
- 16 Honor is talking about. I think that there is a
- 17 lot of concern about saying an electoral motive
- 18 to be reelected as such --
- 19 JUSTICE GORSUCH: Right.
- 20 MR. DREEBEN: -- is problematic --
- JUSTICE GORSUCH: I mean, every
- 22 first-term president --
- MR. DREEBEN: Yes.
- 24 JUSTICE GORSUCH: -- everything he
- does can be seen through the prism, by critics

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1 at least, of his personal interest in
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- 2 re-election.
- 3 MR. DREEBEN: Yes.
- 4 JUSTICE GORSUCH: And so you wouldn't
- 5 want that -- I -- I think you would say personal
- 6 motivations off limits with respect to the core
- 7 powers.
- 8 MR. DREEBEN: Probably -- well, with
- 9 respect to the core powers, we think those are
- just things that can't be regulated at all, like
- 11 the pardon power and veto.
- 12 JUSTICE GORSUCH: Right.
- MR. DREEBEN: Can't --
- 14 JUSTICE GORSUCH: Regardless of
- 15 motive?
- MR. DREEBEN: Correct.
- 17 JUSTICE GORSUCH: Regardless of
- 18 motive?
- MR. DREEBEN: That is right.
- JUSTICE GORSUCH: Okay.
- 21 MR. DREEBEN: That is right.
- JUSTICE GORSUCH: All right. So then
- 23 we're in the non-core powers --
- MR. DREEBEN: Right.
- JUSTICE GORSUCH: -- where we're

- 1 fighting over. What role do motives play there?
- 2 I mean, it -- one could remove an -- an
- 3 appointee that -- well, first of all, is --
- 4 maybe ask this first -- is removing an
- 5 appointee, a presidential appointee, a core
- 6 power or a non-core power in your world?
- 7 MR. DREEBEN: So, here -- here, I
- 8 might need to differentiate between the
- 9 principal officers that this Court in cases like
- 10 Myers and Seila Law has regarded as having
- 11 constitutional status of being removable at will
- from inferior officers, where Congress does have
- some regulatory latitude to impose restrictions
- 14 on removal.
- 15 JUSTICE GORSUCH: Sure.
- 16 MR. DREEBEN: And -- and a restriction
- 17 --
- JUSTICE GORSUCH: Put -- put that
- 19 aside. Yeah, I -- I understand that.
- 20 MR. DREEBEN: All right. Putting --
- 21 putting that aside, yes, appointing a principal
- officer is a core power. I am not prepared to
- 23 say that there is no potential criminal
- 24 regulation to say you can't do it for corrupt
- 25 purposes, to enrich yourself, for example.

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1 JUSTICE GORSUCH: Well, bribery, all
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- 2 right.
- 3 MR. DREEBEN: Yes.
- 4 JUSTICE GORSUCH: But -- but that's
- 5 what I was wondering. Do motives come into the
- 6 core power analysis or not? And now I'm hearing
- 7 -- I thought I heard no, and now I'm hearing
- 8 maybe.
- 9 MR. DREEBEN: I think "maybe" might be
- 10 a little bit more appropriate because it's not
- involved in this case. The Department has not
- 12 had to take a position on exactly how these core
- powers would be resolved under an as-applied
- 14 constitutional analysis. None is involved in
- 15 this case.
- JUSTICE GORSUCH: And I quess I'm
- 17 wondering -- and I'm not concerned about this
- 18 case so much as future ones too --
- MR. DREEBEN: Yes.
- 20 JUSTICE GORSUCH: -- but these
- 21 non-core powers, and maybe --
- MR. DREEBEN: Yes.
- JUSTICE GORSUCH: -- core powers where
- 24 a president is acting with, at least in part, a
- 25 personal interest in getting re-elected.

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1
      Everything he does --
 2
               MR. DREEBEN: Yeah.
 3
                JUSTICE GORSUCH: -- he wants to get
      reelected. And if you're -- if you're allowing
 4
      in motive to color that, I -- I -- I'm wondering
 5
     how much is left of -- of either the core or
 6
7
     non-core powers under your view?
                MR. DREEBEN: So I -- I -- I would be
 8
 9
     fine with carving that out and deeming that to
     be something that's intrinsic in our electoral
10
11
      system. We're not talking about applying
12
      criminal law to somebody who makes an
13
     announcement that this program will be good for
14
     the United States, and somebody could come along
15
      and say, well, you really did it to get
16
     re-elected.
17
               Leaving aside whether any of that
18
     violates a criminal law -- I know that the next
19
      question is assume that it does -- I'm doubtful
20
      that it, in fact, does because I don't think
21
      criminal laws generally operate on motives as
22
      opposed to objectives and purposes. But --
                JUSTICE GORSUCH: Well, all right --
23
               MR. DREEBEN: -- that -- that's --
24
25
                JUSTICE GORSUCH: -- intentions. I
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1 mean, you --
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- 2 MR. DREEBEN: Yeah.
- JUSTICE GORSUCH: -- you can frame a
- 4 motive as an intention and an intention as a
- 5 motive, as you well know, every day of the week.
- 6 MR. DREEBEN: Yes.
- JUSTICE GORSUCH: So let's put that
- 8 aside too.
- 9 MR. DREEBEN: I understand. Well,
- 10 putting -- putting that aside, that really to me
- 11 falls in a very different category. And it is
- 12 also possible --
- JUSTICE GORSUCH: So there are some
- 14 motives or intents that -- that are cognizable
- and others that aren't? I mean, it's -- it's
- 16 awkward, right, when we look at back at, like,
- the injunction, back to Marbury and the early
- 18 cases, you can't enjoin a president.
- 19 MR. DREEBEN: Yeah.
- JUSTICE GORSUCH: Also meant --
- MR. DREEBEN: A sitting president.
- JUSTICE GORSUCH: -- you couldn't hold
- 23 him in contempt, right?
- MR. DREEBEN: A sitting -- a sitting
- 25 president.

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1 JUSTICE GORSUCH: For sure. For sure.
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- 2 MR. DREEBEN: Justice Gorsuch, could I
- 3 try one more time --
- 4 JUSTICE GORSUCH: Well, let me just --
- 5 MR. DREEBEN: -- to clarify?
- 6 JUSTICE GORSUCH: -- spin this -- spin
- 7 this out just a second, right?
- 8 MR. DREEBEN: Okay.
- 9 JUSTICE GORSUCH: And -- and it
- 10 didn't matter what the president's motives were.
- 11 We're not going to look behind it.
- MR. DREEBEN: Right. Right.
- 13 JUSTICE GORSUCH: And -- and same
- thing in Nixon. We said, gosh, in Nixon versus
- 15 Fitzgerald, that's something courts shouldn't
- 16 get engaged in because presidents have all
- 17 manner of motives. And, again, I'm not
- 18 concerned about this case, but I am concerned
- 19 about future uses of the criminal law to target
- 20 political opponents based on accusations about
- 21 their motives.
- MR. DREEBEN: Mm-hmm.
- JUSTICE GORSUCH: Whether it's
- 24 re-election or who knows what "corrupt" means in
- 25 1512, right? We -- we don't know what that

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1 means. Maybe we'll find out sometime soon.
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- 2 But the -- the dangerousness of
- 3 accusing your political opponent of having bad
- 4 motives.
- 5 MR. DREEBEN: Mm-hmm.
- 6 JUSTICE GORSUCH: And -- and if that's
- 7 enough to overcome your core powers or any other
- 8 limits. I -- reactions, thoughts?
- 9 MR. DREEBEN: Yeah. So -- so I -- I
- 10 think that you're raising a very difficult
- 11 question about --
- 12 JUSTICE GORSUCH: That's the idea,
- 13 right? I mean --
- 14 MR. DREEBEN: That is the idea. And
- 15 --
- JUSTICE GORSUCH: -- testing --
- testing the limits of both sides' arguments.
- MR. DREEBEN: And -- and I'm going to
- say something that I don't normally say, which
- is that's really not involved in this case. We
- 21 don't have --
- 22 (Laughter.)
- MR. DREEBEN: We don't have bad
- 24 political motive in that sense. I would start
- 25 --

1	JUSTICE GORSUCH: I I I
2	understand that. I appreciate that, but you
3	also appreciate that we're
4	MR. DREEBEN: Yes.
5	JUSTICE GORSUCH: writing a rule
6	for
7	MR. DREEBEN: Yes.
8	JUSTICE GORSUCH: for the ages.
9	MR. DREEBEN: Yes. And and I think
LO	I would start by looking at the statutes and
L1	and seeing what restrictions they do place on
L2	the president's conduct.
L3	And, for example, the statute that
L4	prohibits fraud to defeat the lawful functions
L5	of the United States, the statute defines what
L6	the purpose is that the defendant has to have in
L7	mind. It has to be to defeat something that the
L8	United States is doing and it has to be by
L9	deception.
20	I don't think that that gets us into
21	the realm of motive hunting in the area where we
22	are as concerned, I think, as the Court would
23	be, about doing something that would undermine
24	the presidency and the executive branch.
25	And $1512(c)(2)$, we may have different

- 1 views on the clarity and the scope of that
- 2 statute. I think, if the Court does interpret
- 3 "corruptly" as involving a consciousness of
- 4 wrongdoing and elevates that to consciousness of
- 5 illegality, then we're in a different realm.
- 6 Wanting to get re-elected is not a -- an illegal
- 7 motive, and you don't have to worry about
- 8 prosecuting presidents for that.
- 9 JUSTICE GORSUCH: Yeah. Okay. Thank
- 10 you, Mr. Dreeben.
- 11 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Justice
- 12 Kavanaugh?
- JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: As you've
- indicated, this case has huge implications for
- 15 the presidency, for the future of the
- 16 presidency, for the future of the country in my
- 17 view.
- 18 You've referred to the Department a
- 19 few times as having supported the position. Who
- in the Department? Is it the president, the
- 21 attorney general?
- MR. DREEBEN: The Solicitor General of
- 23 the United States. Part of the way in which the
- 24 special counsel functions is as a component of
- 25 the Department of Justice. The regulations

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1 envision that we reach out and consult. And on
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- 2 a question of this magnitude, that involves
- 3 equities that are far beyond this prosecution,
- 4 as the questions of the Court have --
- 5 JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: So it's the
- 6 solicitor general?
- 7 MR. DREEBEN: Yes.
- 8 JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: Okay. Second,
- 9 like Justice Gorsuch, I'm not focused on the
- 10 here and now of this case. I'm very concerned
- 11 about the future. And I think one of the
- 12 Court's biggest mistakes was Morrison versus
- 13 Olson.
- MR. DREEBEN: Mm-hmm.
- JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: I think that was a
- 16 terrible decision for the presidency and for the
- 17 country and not because there were bad people
- 18 who were independent counsels, but President
- 19 Reagan's administration, President Bush's
- 20 administration, President Clinton's
- 21 administration were really hampered --
- MR. DREEBEN: Yes.
- 23 JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: -- in their
- 24 view --
- MR. DREEBEN: Mm-hmm.

1	JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: all three, by			
2	the independent counsel structure. And and			
3	what I'm worried about here is that that was			
4	kind of let's relax Article II a bit for the			
5	needs of the moment. And I'm worried about the			
6	similar kind of situation applying here.			
7	That was a prosecutor investigating a			
8	president in each of those circumstances and			
9	someone picked from the opposite party, the			
10	current president, and usually			
11	MR. DREEBEN: Mm-hmm.			
12	JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: was how it			
13	worked. And and Justice Scalia wrote that			
14	"the the fairness of a process must be			
15	adjudged on the basis of what it permits to			
16	happen			
17	MR. DREEBEN: Mm-hmm.			
18	JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: not what it			
19	produced in a particular case." You've			
20	emphasized many times regularity, the Departmen			
21	of Justice.			
22	And he said and I think this			
23	applied to the independent counsel system, and			
24	it could apply if presidents are routinely			
25	subject to investigation going forward. "One			

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1 thing is certain, however: it involves
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- 2 investigating and perhaps prosecuting a
- 3 particular individual. Can one imagine a less
- 4 equitable manner of fulfilling the Executive
- 5 responsibility to investigate and prosecute?
- 6 What would the reaction be if, in an area not
- 7 covered by this statute, the Justice Department
- 8 posted a public notice inviting applicants to
- 9 assist in an investigation and possible
- 10 prosecution of a certain prominent person? Does
- 11 this not invite what Justice Jackson described
- 12 as 'picking the man and then searching the law
- books or putting investigators to work to pin
- some offense on him?' To be sure, the
- investigation must relate to the area of
- 16 criminal offense" specified by the statute, but
- 17 that has often been and nothing prevents it from
- 18 being very broad. I paraphrased at the end
- 19 because it was referring to the judges.
- 20 MR. DREEBEN: Mm-hmm. Yes.
- 21 JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: That's the concern
- 22 going forward, is that the -- the system will --
- 23 when -- when former presidents are subject to
- 24 prosecution and the history of Morrison versus
- Olson tells us it's not going to stop, it's

- 1 going to -- it's going to cycle back and be used
- 2 against the current president or the next
- 3 president or -- and the next president and the
- 4 next president after that.
- 5 All that, I want you to try to allay
- 6 that concern. Why is this not Morrison v. Olson
- 7 redux if we agree with you?
- 8 MR. DREEBEN: Well, first of all, the
- 9 -- the independent counsel regime did have many
- 10 structural features that emphasized independence
- 11 at the expense of accountability. We don't have
- 12 that regime now. But, even under that regime,
- 13 Justice Kavanaugh, I think, if you look at
- 14 Lawrence Walsh's report on Iran/Contra, I think
- this goes to a very fundamental point for the
- 16 Court to consider.
- 17 Judge Walsh said: I investigated
- 18 these matters. The proof did not nearly come
- 19 close to establishing criminal violations. So
- 20 we've lived from Watergate through the present,
- 21 through the independent counsel era with all of
- 22 its flaws, without these prosecutions having
- 23 gone off on a runaway train. We --
- JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: Well, I think
- 25 President Reagan, President Bush, and President

- 1 Clinton, whether rightly or wrongly, thought
- 2 opposite, thought contrary to what you just
- 3 said.
- 4 MR. DREEBEN: I think nobody likes
- 5 being investigated for a crime, but it didn't
- 6 result in the kind of vindictive prosecutions
- 7 that I think Your Honor is -- is raising as a
- 8 possibility.
- JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: Yeah.
- 10 MR. DREEBEN: We -- we have a
- 11 different system now. I think there was a
- 12 consensus throughout Washington that there were
- 13 flaws in the independent counsel system. It
- 14 lapsed.
- We now are inside the Justice
- 16 Department with full accountability resting with
- the attorney general, so the special counsel
- 18 regulations now don't operate the way that the
- independent counsel regulations do.
- 20 And this Court would have something to
- 21 say about it, I think, if the independent
- 22 counsel statute were revived. I'm not sure that
- 23 anybody is in favor of that.
- JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: Right. No, I was
- just saying this is kind of the mirror image of

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1 that, is one way someone could perceive it, but
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- 2 I take your point about the different structural
- 3 protections internally.
- 4 And like Justice Scalia said, let me
- 5 -- I do not mean to suggest anything of the sort
- 6 in the present case. I'm not talking about the
- 7 present case. So I'm talking about the future.
- 8 Second, another point, you said talked
- 9 about the criminal statutes, it's very easy to
- 10 characterize presidential actions as false or
- 11 misleading under vague statutes. So President
- 12 Lyndon Johnson, statements about the Vietnam War
- 13 --
- MR. DREEBEN: Mm-hmm.
- JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: -- say something's
- 16 false, turns out to be false that he says about
- 17 the Vietnam War, 371 prosecution --
- MR. DREEBEN: So --
- 19 JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: -- after he leaves
- 20 office?
- MR. DREEBEN: -- I think not, but I --
- 22 when you -- this is an area that I do think that
- 23 merits some serious and nuanced consideration.
- 24 Statements that are made by a president to the
- 25 public are not really coming within the realm of

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1 criminal statutes. They've never been
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- 2 prosecuted.
- I realize that the Court can say:
- 4 Well, what if they were? And -- and then I
- 5 think you get to what I would regard as a hard
- 6 constitutional question that I would probably
- 7 guide the Court away from trying to resolve
- 8 today, although I do think it's very different
- 9 from our case and distinguishable in important
- ways, but you're dealing here with two branches
- of government that have a paramount interest in
- 12 the integrity and freedom of their interactions
- 13 with each other.
- On the one hand, the president, of
- course, should be very free to send, usually,
- 16 his cabinet officials and sub-cabinet officials
- 17 to testify to Congress to provide them with the
- information needed to enact legislation and to
- make national policy. And we're very concerned
- about anything that would trammel that.
- 21 On the other side of the equation,
- 22 Congress has a compelling interest in receiving
- 23 accurate information and at the very least --
- JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: I -- I agree.
- 25 MR. DREEBEN: -- not information that

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1 is intentionally and knowingly false.
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- JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: Right.
- 3 MR. DREEBEN: That would pollute the
- 4 legislative process.
- JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: How about, I think
- 6 it came up before, President Ford's pardon?
- 7 MR. DREEBEN: Mm-hmm.
- 8 JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: Very controversial
- 9 in the moment.
- 10 MR. DREEBEN: Yes.
- JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: Hugely unpopular,
- 12 probably why he lost in '76.
- MR. DREEBEN: Yes.
- JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: Now looked upon as
- one of the better decisions in presidential
- 16 history, I think, by most people. If he's
- thinking about, well, if I grant this pardon to
- 18 Richard Nixon, could I be investigated myself
- 19 for obstruction of justice on the theory that
- 20 I'm interfering with the investigation of
- 21 Richard Nixon?
- MR. DREEBEN: So this would fall into
- that small core area that I mentioned to Justice
- 24 Kagan and Justice Gorsuch of presidential
- 25 responsibilities that Congress cannot regulate.

1	JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: How about			
2	President Obama's drone strikes?			
3	MR. DREEBEN: So the the Office of			
4	Legal Counsel looked at this very carefully and			
5	determined that, number one, the federal murder			
6	statute does apply to the executive branch. The			
7	president wasn't personally carrying out the			
8	strike, but the aiding and abetting laws are			
9	broad, and it determined that a public authority			
10	exception that's built into statutes and that			
11	applied particularly to the murder statute,			
12	because it talks about unlawful killing, did not			
13	apply to the drone strike.			
14	So this is actually the way that the			
15	system should function. The Department of			
16	Justice takes criminal law very seriously. It			
17	runs it through the analysis very carefully with			
18	established principles. It documents them. It			
19	explains them. And then the president can go			
20	forward in accordance with it. And there is no			
21	risk of prosecution for that course of activity.			
22	JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: Thank you for your			
23	answers.			
24	CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Justice			
25	Barrett?			

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1
                JUSTICE BARRETT: Mr. Dreeben, I want
 2
      to pick up with that public authority defense.
      So I'm looking at the OLC memo that David Barron
 3
     wrote that you cited in your briefs, and in --
 4
     he describes the public authority defense citing
 5
 6
      the model penal code. There are a few different
 7
      definitions, but I'll just highlight this one:
      Justifying conduct which is required or
 8
      authorized by the law defining the duties or
 9
      functions of a public officer, the law governing
10
11
      the armed services or lawful conduct of war, or
12
      any other provision of law imposing a public
13
     duty.
                That sounds a lot like dividing a line
14
15
     between official and private conduct. It -- it
      -- I think it's narrower, and I recognize it's a
16
17
     defense, not an immunity, but when we look at --
     when you look at the definition of it, are you
18
      acting within the scope of authority conferred
19
20
     by law or discharging a duty conferred by law?
21
                I think it's narrower than
2.2
      Blassingame, narrower than Nixon versus
23
     Fitzgerald.
24
                MR. DREEBEN: Mm-hmm.
25
                JUSTICE BARRETT: But that's what it
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1 sounds like to me. Do you agree or disagree?
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- 2 MR. DREEBEN: You -- you know, Justice
- 3 Barrett, I certainly understand the intuition
- 4 that when you act outside of your lawful
- 5 authority, you've kind of gone on a frolic and
- 6 detour, you're no longer carrying it out. I
- 7 don't really think that that quite works for
- 8 presidential activity.
- 9 The only way that he could have
- 10 implemented the orders is by exercising his
- 11 commander-in-chief authority over the armed
- 12 forces or his authority to supervise the
- 13 executive branch. Those seem like core
- 14 executive acts to me. There is such a
- possibility as an unlawful executive act.
- 16 JUSTICE BARRETT: I'm not sure that I
- 17 understand your answer. I mean, I was thinking,
- 18 it -- it seemed to me that in your briefs and
- 19 today, when you referred to the public authority
- 20 defense --
- MR. DREEBEN: Yes.
- JUSTICE BARRETT: -- you said that's
- one of the built-in protections and --
- MR. DREEBEN: Yes.
- 25 JUSTICE BARRETT: -- why immunity is

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1 not necessary --
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- 2 MR. DREEBEN: Yes.
- JUSTICE BARRETT: -- because, in some
- 4 of these instances, when the president takes
- 5 such actions that, you know, the courts have
- 6 been asking you might this result in criminal
- 7 prosecution, you say: Well, he could raise this
- 8 public authority defense.
- 9 And so I'm saying isn't this public
- 10 authority defense, if raised, doesn't it sound
- 11 like a defense that says: Well, I had -- I was
- 12 authorized by law to discharge this function?
- MR. DREEBEN: And, therefore, I acted
- 14 lawfully?
- 15 JUSTICE BARRETT: Therefore, I acted
- 16 lawfully --
- 17 MR. DREEBEN: Yes.
- 18 JUSTICE BARRETT: -- and am not
- 19 criminally liable?
- MR. DREEBEN: Correct.
- 21 JUSTICE BARRETT: Does that involve a
- look into motives? Kind of this is -- gets to
- 23 what Justice Gorsuch was asking you. Could you
- 24 say I was acting within the scope of my
- 25 authority by granting a pardon, removing a

- 1 cabinet officer, but then the public authority
- 2 defense might not apply because you had a bad
- 3 motive in doing so?
- 4 MR. DREEBEN: No, I -- I -- I don't
- 5 think so, Justice Barrett. I think that it
- 6 operates based on objective facts disclosed to
- 7 counsel. Counsel then provides the advice, in
- 8 this case the Department of Justice, and it --
- 9 it's an objectively valid defense. It's a
- 10 complete defense to prosecution.
- 11 JUSTICE BARRETT: So what would be so
- 12 bad -- I mean, one thing that strikes me as
- 13 different -- well, one thing that's obviously
- 14 different between a public authority defense and
- immunity is an interlocutory appeal and having
- 16 it resolved at the outset.
- 17 MR. DREEBEN: Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm.
- JUSTICE BARRETT: What would be so bad
- 19 about having a question like that resolved at
- the threshold, having it be an immunity, the
- 21 same kind of question that could be brought up
- as a defense later, but have it be brought up at
- 23 the threshold as an immunity, and then an
- 24 interlocutory appeal would be available --
- MR. DREEBEN: Mm-hmm.

1	JUSTICE BARRETT: and it would be
2	freedom from standing trial but not a a jet
3	not a get-out-of-jail-free card?
4	MR. DREEBEN: Yes, I I understand
5	that, and I think that if the Court believed
6	that that was the appropriate way to craft
7	presidential protections, it has the authority
8	to craft procedural rules that implement its
9	Article II concerns.
10	That said, public authority is
11	we're calling it a defense, but under many
12	statutes, it's actually an exception to
13	liability itself. And what you're really
14	talking about is trying the general issue.
15	And, generally, in criminal cases,
16	even cases that involve First Amendment issues,
17	like threat statutes, the jury is the
18	determinant of the facts. And I have a little
19	bit of difficulty with the idea of trying the
20	whole public authority issue separately to the
21	judge and having that go up on interlocutory
22	appeal with review of facts before you could
23	ever get it forward into a criminal case.
24	That said, if I would prefer a
25	regime in which the Court altered some of the

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1 procedural rules surrounding the president than
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- 2 a total absolute blanket immunity that takes
- 3 away the -- the possibility of criminal
- 4 prosecution, even if it was a core violation of
- 5 the statute in the teeth of attorney general
- 6 advice and has no overriding public purpose.
- 7 JUSTICE BARRETT: You think it has to
- 8 be a jury question? And, I -- I mean, I --
- 9 let's see. I wasn't necessarily proposing
- 10 actually treating it as a defense that was done
- 11 at the outset --
- MR. DREEBEN: Mm-hmm.
- 13 JUSTICE BARRETT: -- and then subject
- 14 to interlocutory appeal. I was proposing what
- about an immunity doctrine that drew from the
- 16 public authority defense that the Department of
- 17 Justice thinks would otherwise apply. So just
- 18 -- just go with me on that for a minute.
- 19 MR. DREEBEN: Okay.
- JUSTICE BARRETT: Why would it be so
- 21 bad for it not to be a jury question? I mean,
- 22 it seems to me that some of these Article II
- concerns would be exacerbated by having it go to
- 24 a jury rather than a judge.
- 25 MR. DREEBEN: So I -- I think some of

1 them are judge questions that could be resolved

- 2 on the face of the indictment. If the
- 3 Department of Justice ever returned an
- 4 indictment that said the issuance of this pardon
- 5 or this series of pardons constituted
- 6 obstruction of justice, I have a little
- 7 difficulty hypothesizing it, but a motion could
- 8 be made on the face of the indictment that says
- 9 Article II precludes Congress from regulating
- 10 these activities; the indictment needs to be
- 11 dismissed.
- 12 And if the Court wished to attach to
- that kind of a rule interlocutory appeal, then
- 14 that -- that would be a -- a lesser safeguard
- 15 than the -- the one that my friend is proposing
- 16 here.
- 17 Other kinds of defenses, though,
- 18 really do intersect with the general issue. And
- 19 for those, I have a much greater time seeing how
- 20 the Court could implement that. And would there
- 21 be costs in going to trial? Yes. There is no
- 22 perfect system here. We are trying to design a
- 23 system that preserves the effective functioning
- of the presidency and the accountability of a
- 25 former president under the rule of law.

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1 And the perfect system that calibrates
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- 2 all of those values probably has not been
- devised. I think that the system that we have
- 4 works pretty well. Maybe it needs a few
- 5 ancillary rules. It is different from the
- 6 radical proposal of my friend.
- 7 JUSTICE BARRETT: Oh, I -- I agree.
- 8 Let -- let me ask you about state
- 9 prosecutions --
- 10 MR. DREEBEN: Mm-hmm.
- 11 JUSTICE BARRETT: -- because, if the
- 12 president has some kind of immunity that's
- 13 implicit in Article II --
- MR. DREEBEN: Mm-hmm.
- JUSTICE BARRETT: -- then that
- 16 immunity would protect him in -- from state
- 17 prosecutions --
- MR. DREEBEN: Of course.
- 19 JUSTICE BARRETT: -- as well. A lot
- of the protections that you're talking about are
- 21 internal protections that the federal government
- has, protections in the Department of Justice,
- which obviously are not applicable at the many,
- 24 many, many, many state and local jurisdictions
- 25 across the country.

1	What do you have to say to that?			
2	MR. DREEBEN: So that raises a			
3	Supremacy Clause issue, and the Court would run			
4	a Supremacy Clause analysis that would probably			
5	start with basic principles like McCulloch			
6	versus Maryland. The states do not have the			
7	authority to burden federal functions and would			
8	then kind of move through In re Neagle, where			
9	the Court said that a state murder prosecution			
10	of a federal official guarding a Supreme Court			
11	Justice and who fired a shot was not			
12	permissible.			
13	If the Court thought that you needed a			
14	more categorical rule for the states, I think			
15	the Supremacy Clause certainly leaves it within			
16	the Court's prerogative to determine that the			
17	president, unlike all other officials, deserves			
18	more of a robust federal defense than what I			
19	have just described.			
20	JUSTICE BARRETT: But it would still			
21	be a defense in in the states? It wouldn't			
22	be I mean			
23	MR. DREEBEN: Well, any			
24	JUSTICE BARRETT: because that			
25	that's my point. Like, you know, it's one thing			

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1 to say, well, the president -- there are not
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- 2 going to be these prosecutions that are
- 3 politically motivated, the things that Justice
- 4 Kavanaugh was referring to that might be the
- 5 danger of -- of this system, one thing that we
- 6 have to worry about, that might not carry the
- 7 day, but, you know, that's a concern.
- 8 It's totally different when you take
- 9 it outside of the Department of Justice and its
- 10 structures and then you throw it out elsewhere,
- 11 the idea across -- across the states, the idea
- of an immunity, I think, has a lot more purchase
- if you're talking about something that protects
- the former president from standing trial and the
- 15 stake in state and local level.
- 16 MR. DREEBEN: So I -- I -- I don't
- 17 know that you would have to design a system in
- 18 which the president would have to stand trial at
- 19 the state and local level. It's certainly
- 20 within the Court's authority as a matter of
- 21 Supremacy Clause law to find an immunity. But
- 22 we -- we have been talking here about -- at some
- length on the distinction between official acts
- and private acts.
- JUSTICE BARRETT: Yeah.

- 1 MR. DREEBEN: That will have to be
- 2 determined by some sort of a process. Any
- 3 immunity defense that the Court announces can
- 4 still be met by a state assertion that we're
- 5 prosecuting private conduct. You're going to
- 6 have to have some process.
- 7 I think having some legal process is
- 8 not a reason to cast aside a nuanced system that
- 9 actually looks at what protections are necessary
- 10 as opposed to what would provide the absolute
- 11 maximum insulation for former presidents even if
- we acknowledge that it's highly prophylactic.
- 13 JUSTICE BARRETT: Totally agree, and I
- wasn't actually contrasting the absolute
- 15 immunity rule. I was saying that --
- MR. DREEBEN: Yes.
- 17 JUSTICE BARRETT: -- if there was some
- 18 sort of official private -- there are
- 19 consequences --
- MR. DREEBEN: Yes.
- 21 JUSTICE BARRETT: -- towards -- about
- 22 making immunity. Okay.
- 23 And since you bring up the private
- 24 acts, this is my last question. So I -- I had
- asked Mr. Sauer about, on page 46 and 47 of your

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1 brief --
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- 2 MR. DREEBEN: Yes.
- JUSTICE BARRETT: -- you say, "Even if
- 4 the Court were inclined to recognize some
- 5 immunity for a former president's official acts,
- 6 it should remand for trial because the
- 7 indictment alleges substantial private conduct."
- 8 MR. DREEBEN: Yes.
- 9 JUSTICE BARRETT: And you said that
- 10 the private conduct would be sufficient.
- MR. DREEBEN: Yes.
- 12 JUSTICE BARRETT: The Special Counsel
- has expressed some concern for speed and wanting
- 14 to move forward. So, you know, the normal
- process, what -- what Mr. Sauer asked, would be
- 16 for us to remand if we decided that there were
- 17 --
- MR. DREEBEN: Mm-hmm.
- 19 JUSTICE BARRETT: -- some official
- 20 acts immunity and to let that be sorted out
- 21 below.
- It is another option for the Special
- 23 Counsel to just proceed based on the private
- 24 conduct and drop the official conduct?
- 25 MR. DREEBEN: Well -- well, two things

- 1 on that, Justice Barrett.
- 2 First -- first of all, there's really
- an integrated conspiracy here that had different
- 4 components as alleged in the indictment, working
- 5 with -- with private lawyers to achieve the
- 6 goals of the fraud and, as I said before, the --
- 7 the Petitioner reaching for his official powers
- 8 to try to make the conspiracies more likely to
- 9 succeed. We would like to present that as an
- 10 integrated picture to the jury so that it sees
- 11 the sequence and the gravity of the conduct and
- 12 why each step occurred.
- 13 That said, if the Court were to say
- 14 that the fraudulent elector scheme is private,
- reaching out to state officials as a candidate
- is private, trying to exploit the violence after
- 17 January 6th by calling senators and saying
- 18 please delay the certification proceeding, is
- 19 private campaign activity, we still think,
- 20 contrary to what my friend said, that we could
- 21 introduce the interactions with the Justice
- 22 Department, the efforts to pressure the vice
- 23 president, for their evidentiary value as
- showing the defendant's knowledge and intent.
- 25 And we would take a jury instruction that would

- 1 say you may not impose criminal culpability for
- 2 the actions that he took. However, you may
- 3 consider it insofar as it bears on knowledge and
- 4 intent.
- 5 That's the usual rule with protected
- 6 speech, for example, under Wisconsin versus
- 7 Mitchell. My friend analogizes this to the
- 8 Speech or Debate Clause, but we don't think the
- 9 Speech or Debate Clause has any applicability
- 10 here. It's a very explicit constitutional
- 11 protection that says senators and
- 12 representatives shall not be questioned in any
- other place. So it carries an evidentiary
- 14 component that's above and beyond whatever
- official act immunity he is seeking.
- 16 And the last thing I would say on this
- is we think that the concerns about the use of
- 18 evidence of presidential conduct that might
- otherwise be official and subject to executive
- 20 privilege is already taken care of by United
- 21 States versus Nixon. That balances the
- 22 president's interests in confidentiality against
- 23 the need of the judicial system for all
- available facts to get to the truth.
- 25 And once that has been overcome, we

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1 submit that evidence can be used even if
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- 2 culpability can't rest on it.
- JUSTICE BARRETT: Thank you.
- 4 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Justice
- 5 Jackson?
- 6 JUSTICE JACKSON: Just to pick up
- 7 where Justice Barrett left off, I -- I think I
- 8 heard you say that it -- even if we decide here
- 9 something a -- a rule that's not the rule that
- 10 you prefer that is somehow separating out
- 11 private from official acts and saying that that
- 12 should apply here, there's sufficient
- 13 allegations in the indictment in the
- 14 government's view that fall into the private
- 15 acts bucket that the case should be allowed to
- 16 proceed?
- 17 MR. DREEBEN: Correct.
- JUSTICE JACKSON: Because, in an
- ordinary case, it wouldn't be stopped just
- 20 because some of the acts are allegedly
- immunized, even if people agree that some are
- immunized, if there are other acts that aren't,
- the case would go forward?
- MR. DREEBEN: That is right.
- 25 JUSTICE JACKSON: All right. Going

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1 back to the clear statement argument, I -- I --
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- 2 I'm struggling with that argument because my
- 3 understanding was that when a charged criminal
- 4 statute is read narrowly in the presidential
- 5 context to not apply to the president, a
- 6 constitutional question is being avoided, so
- 7 that you're doing that to avoid having to deal
- 8 with the constitutional question.
- 9 So what is the constitutional question
- 10 that is being avoided in those kinds of
- 11 situations?
- 12 MR. DREEBEN: A serious one. This is
- just an application of this Court's ordinary
- 14 construction of criminal statutes that if there
- 15 is an available interpretation that would avoid
- 16 a serious constitutional question, the Court's
- 17 preference is to --
- 18 JUSTICE JACKSON: Right.
- 19 MR. DREEBEN: -- go in that way.
- 20 JUSTICE JACKSON: And the nature -- I
- 21 guess I'm going at what is -- what is -- my
- 22 understanding is that what is being avoided in
- 23 that situation is the question of whether a
- former president or, you know, can be held
- 25 criminally liable for doing the alleged act that

1 is being asserted in that statute, consistent

- 2 with the Constitution.
- 3 So we look at the statute. It's got
- 4 some elements in it. And we are saying, well,
- 5 geez, if this statute and those elements apply
- 6 to the president's conduct in this situation,
- 7 we'd have to answer the question can the
- 8 president be held liable, consistent with the
- 9 Constitution, for that behavior, is that right?
- 10 MR. DREEBEN: So the first step in
- 11 that analysis, I just want to --
- 12 JUSTICE JACKSON: Yes, please.
- MR. DREEBEN: Yes, but the first step
- is, is there ambiguity.
- 15 JUSTICE JACKSON: Okay. Right.
- MR. DREEBEN: And these statutes apply
- to any person. They apply to whoever. There's
- 18 no ambiguity in those phrases. This Court in
- 19 Nardone versus United States concluded that
- 20 similar words, "any person" --
- JUSTICE JACKSON: Yes.
- MR. DREEBEN: -- apply to government
- 23 officials.
- JUSTICE JACKSON: All right. Well,
- 25 assume -- let's just assume that we -- I -- I

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1 guess I'm just trying to get at we're avoiding a
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- 2 constitutional question if we do that in -- in
- 3 the ordinary case, and -- and what's confusing
- 4 to me about this case is that we're not being
- 5 asked to avoid the constitutional question.
- 6 In fact, the question of whether or
- 7 not the president can be held liable consistent
- 8 with the Constitution or does he have immunity
- 9 is the question that's being presented to us.
- 10 So I don't understand how the clear
- 11 statement kind of analysis even works. It seems
- 12 completely tautological to me for us to hold
- that presidents cannot be prosecuted under any
- 14 criminal statute without a clear statement from
- 15 Congress to avoid the question of whether or not
- the Constitution allows them to be prosecuted.
- 17 We'd have to have a reason, right? I
- mean, we'd have -- we'd have to have a rationale
- 19 for applying the -- clear statement rule.
- 20 MR. DREEBEN: I -- I think the Court
- 21 would have to have some rationale that's not
- 22 evident in either the existing doctrine or the
- 23 text. And just one data point for the Court in
- thinking about how the clear statement rule
- works.

1	In United States versus Sun-Diamond, a			
2	case about gratuities that the Court is probably			
3	familiar with, Justice Scalia wrote an opinion			
4	for a unanimous Court in which he used a			
5	hypothetical about what would happen if the			
6	president received a sports replica jersey at a			
7	typical White House event. Would that violate			
8	Section 201(c)? And the Court offered a			
9	construction that it had to be for or because an			
10	official act to avoid that problem.			
11	I think, if there was such a			
12	well-received understanding that presidents are			
13	not included in general federal criminal law			
14	unless the president is specifically named,			
15	which he is not in Section 201, Justice Scalia			
16	would have thought of that and some member of			
17	the Court would have reacted, and none did.			
18	JUSTICE JACKSON: All right. Let me			
19	go on to ask about what you take the			
20	Petitioner's position to be in this case because			
21	we've had a lot of talk about drawing the lines.			
22	Justice Kavanaugh, Justice Gorsuch suggested			
23	that we should be thinking about Blassingame and			
24	that within the first, we have private versus			
25	official and then within official now we have			

- 1 something about core acts versus other acts as
- 2 we try to figure out, you know, at what level
- 3 the president is going to have immunity.
- 4 But I took the Petitioner's argument
- 5 in this case not to be inviting us to engage in
- 6 that kind of analysis. I thought he was arguing
- 7 that all official acts get immunity -- of? And
- 8 so I didn't understand us to be having to drill
- 9 down on which official acts do.
- 10 And so my question is, why isn't it
- 11 enough for the purposes of this case, given what
- 12 the Petitioner has argued, to just answer the
- 13 question of whether all official acts get
- 14 immunity?
- MR. DREEBEN: That -- that is enough.
- 16 And if the Court -- answers that question the
- 17 way that the government has submitted, that
- 18 resolves the case.
- 19 I -- I want to make a clarification
- 20 that I may have left the Court with some
- 21 uncertainty about. The official act analysis
- 22 that my friend is talking about is the
- 23 Fitzgerald versus Nixon outer perimeter test,
- 24 which is extremely protective of the president.
- 25 It's not looking at core versus ancillary. It's

- 1 saying everything the president does is a target
- 2 for private civil lawsuits. That is not a great
- 3 thing. And, therefore, they are all cut off.
- 4 JUSTICE JACKSON: That's an absolute
- 5 immunity kind of concept, right?
- 6 MR. DREEBEN: Correct. That's right.
- JUSTICE JACKSON: Anything that's
- 8 official in the outer perimeter is not subject
- 9 to liability.
- 10 MR. DREEBEN: That is right.
- 11 JUSTICE JACKSON: And so we don't have
- to then go, well, okay, we have the bucket of
- official, now let's figure out which within that
- 14 might be subject to liability. Not on the
- theory of absolute immunity, correct?
- 16 MR. DREEBEN: Neither on the theory of
- 17 absolute immunity or on our theory. On -- on
- 18 his theory, everything's protected. On our
- 19 theory, there is no immunity, but this is where
- 20 I would draw the distinction.
- There are as-applied constitutional
- 22 challenges that you run through the Youngstown
- framework and this Court's customary method of
- analysis, and you determine whether there's a
- 25 infringement of Article II.

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1 JUSTICE JACKSON: So what you're
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- 2 saying is, even if we reject the absolute
- 3 immunity theory, it's not as though the
- 4 president is -- you know, doesn't have the
- 5 opportunity to make the kinds of arguments that
- 6 arise as -- at the level of, you know, this
- 7 particular act or this particular statute has a
- 8 problem in retrospect.
- 9 I think I hear you saying we should
- 10 not be trying to, in the abstract, set up those
- 11 boundaries ahead of time. As a function of sort
- of blanket immunity, allow each allegation to be
- 13 brought and then we would decide in that
- 14 context.
- MR. DREEBEN: Yes, with -- with the
- 16 additional note that Petitioner has never made
- 17 that argument. And I think it would be up to a
- 18 district court to decide whether to go that
- 19 route. At this point in the litigation, he's
- 20 put all -- all of his eggs in the absolute
- 21 immunity basket.
- JUSTICE JACKSON: All right. And if
- 23 we -- if we invite -- you know, if we see the
- 24 question presented as broader than that and we
- do say let's engage in the core official versus

- 1 not core and try to figure out the line, is --
- 2 is this the right vehicle to hammer out that
- 3 test?
- I mean, I -- I had understood that the
- 5 -- most, if not all, but most of the allegations
- 6 here, there's really no plausible argument that
- 7 they would fall into core versus not such that
- 8 they are immune.
- 9 MR. DREEBEN: We don't think there are
- 10 any core acts that have been alleged in the
- indictments that would be off limits as a matter
- 12 of Article II.
- JUSTICE JACKSON: So, if we were going
- to do this kind of analysis, try to figure out
- what the line is, we should probably wait for a
- vehicle that actually presents it in a way that
- 17 allows us to test the different sides of the --
- 18 the standard that we'd be creating, right?
- MR. DREEBEN: I don't see any need in
- 20 this case for the Court to embark on that
- 21 analysis.
- 22 JUSTICE JACKSON: All right. The
- 23 final sort of set of questions that I have have
- to do with what I do take as a very legitimate
- 25 concern about prosecutorial abuse, about future

1 presidents being targeted for things that they

- 2 have done in office.
- I -- I -- I take that concern. I
- 4 think it's a real thing. But I wonder whether
- 5 some of it might also be mitigated by the fact
- 6 that existing administrations have a
- 7 self-interest in protecting the presidency, that
- 8 they understand that if they go after the former
- 9 guy, soon they're going to be the former guy and
- 10 they will have created precedent that will be
- 11 problematic.
- 12 So I wonder if you might comment on
- 13 whether some of the caution from the Justice
- 14 Department and the prosecutors and whatnot comes
- from an understanding that they will soon be
- 16 former presidents as well.
- 17 MR. DREEBEN: I -- I think,
- 18 absolutely. And -- and I would locate this as a
- 19 structural argument that's built into the
- 20 Constitution itself. The executive branch, I
- 21 think, as this Court knows, has executive branch
- interests that it at times asserts in opposition
- 23 to Congress so that the proper functioning of
- 24 the president is protected. And I believe that
- 25 that value would be operative and is operative

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in anything as momentous as charging a former
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- 2 president with a crime.
- JUSTICE JACKSON: And I would also
- 4 say, I think, and ask you to comment on, you
- 5 know, presidents are concerned about being
- 6 investigated and prosecuted, and it chills to
- 7 some extent their, you know, ability to do what
- 8 they want in office.
- 9 And that's a concern on one side. But
- 10 can -- can you comment on the concern about
- 11 having a president unbounded while in office, a
- 12 president who knows that he does not have to
- 13 ultimately follow the law because there is
- 14 really nothing more than, say, political
- accountability in terms of -- of impeachment?
- I mean, we have amicus briefs here
- from Professor Lederman, for example, who says,
- 18 you know, a president would not be prohibited by
- 19 statute from perjuring himself under oath about
- 20 official matters, from corruptly altering,
- 21 destroying, or concealing documents to prevent
- them from being used in an official proceeding,
- from suborning others to commit perjury, from
- 24 bribing witnesses or public officials. And he
- goes on and on about the things that a

1 president in office with the knowledge that they

- 2 have no criminal accountability would do.
- I see that as a concern that is at
- 4 least equal to the president being worried -- so
- 5 worried about criminal prosecution that he, you
- 6 know, is a little bit limited in his ability to
- 7 function.
- 8 So can you talk about those competing
- 9 concerns?
- 10 MR. DREEBEN: So, Justice Jackson, I
- 11 think it would be a sea change to announce a
- sweeping rule of immunity that no president has
- 13 had or has needed. I think we have also had a
- 14 perfectly functioning system that has seen
- occasional episodes of presidential misconduct.
- 16 The Nixon era is the paradigmatic one. The
- indictment in this case alleges another.
- 18 For the most part, I believe that the
- 19 legal regime and the constitutional regime that
- we have works, and to alter it poses more risks.
- 21 JUSTICE JACKSON: Thank you.
- MR. DREEBEN: Thank you.
- 23 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Thank you,
- 24 counsel.
- 25 Rebuttal, Mr. Sauer?

Т		MR. SAUER: I have nothing further,
2	Your Hono	or.
3		CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Thank you,
4	counsel.	
5		Counsel.
6		The case is submitted.
7		(Whereupon, at 12:40 p.m., the case
8	was submi	Ltted.)
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