SUPREME COURT OF THE UNITED STATES

| IN THE SUPREME COURT OF THE | UNITED STATES |
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| MACQUARIE INFRASTRUCTURE |) |
| CORPORATION, ET AL., |) |
| Petitioners, |) |
| v. |) No. 22-1165 |
| MOAB PARTNERS, L.P., ET AL., |) |
| Respondents. |) |
| | |

Pages: 1 through 71

Place: Washington, D.C.

Date: January 16, 2024

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| 3 | MACQUARIE INFRASTRUCTURE) |
| 4 | CORPORATION, ET AL., |
| 5 | Petitioners,) |
| 6 | v.) No. 22-1165 |
| 7 | MOAB PARTNERS, L.P., ET AL.,) |
| 8 | Respondents.) |
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| 11 | Washington, D.C. |
| 12 | Tuesday, January 16, 2024 |
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| 14 | The above-entitled matter came on for oral |
| 15 | argument before the Supreme Court of the United |
| 16 | States at 10:03 a.m. |
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| 1 | APPEARANCES: |
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| 2 | LINDA T. COBERLY, ESQUIRE, Chicago, Illinois; on |
| 3 | behalf of the Petitioners. |
| 4 | DAVID C. FREDERICK, ESQUIRE, Washington, D.C.; on |
| 5 | behalf of Respondent Moab Partners, L.P. |
| 6 | EPHRAIM McDOWELL, Assistant to the Solicitor General |
| 7 | Department of Justice, Washington, D.C.; for the |
| 8 | United States, as amicus curiae, supporting the |
| 9 | Respondent. |
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| 1 | PROCEEDINGS |
|----|--|
| 2 | (10:03 a.m.) |
| 3 | CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: We'll hear |
| 4 | argument first this morning in Case 22-1165, |
| 5 | Macquarie Infrastructure Corporation versus |
| 6 | Moab. |
| 7 | Ms. Coberly. |
| 8 | ORAL ARGUMENT OF LINDA T. COBERLY |
| 9 | ON BEHALF OF THE PETITIONERS |
| 10 | MS. COBERLY: Thank you, Mr. Chief |
| 11 | Justice, and may it please the Court: |
| 12 | Like many cases, this case should be |
| 13 | resolved by the text, and, here, the text is in |
| 14 | Rule 10b-5 as adopted by the Congress in the |
| 15 | PSLRA. That text makes clear that an omission |
| 16 | is actionable in just one circumstance, when the |
| 17 | omitted fact is material and necessary to make a |
| 18 | statement not misleading. |
| 19 | Today, you're going to hear arguments |
| 20 | for omission liability in a different |
| 21 | circumstance, when the omitted fact is material |
| 22 | and required to be stated by Item 303. None of |
| 23 | those arguments is rooted in the text. |
| 24 | The text doesn't permit eliding the |
| 25 | statement requirement by treating the entire |

- 1 management narrative as misleading if one thing
- 2 is left out. The PSLRA shows that Congress had
- 3 something far more specific in mind by the word
- 4 "statement."
- 5 The text also doesn't permit recasting
- 6 a claim about what a 10-K does or doesn't say as
- 7 a claim involving a fraudulent scheme or act.
- 8 Whenever this Court has recognized liability
- 9 under Rule 10b-5(a) or (c), the case has
- involved something more or different than speech
- 11 alone.
- 12 And this is all in the context of the
- 13 judicially implied private right of action,
- 14 which this Court is loath to expand. No
- 15 circuit, either before or after the PSLRA, has
- 16 approached 10b-5 liability in the ways that Moab
- 17 and the government are seeking here.
- Now, to be clear, no one is seeking
- 19 immunity. The SEC has extensive powers to
- 20 penalize an omission that violates Item 303.
- 21 But, without the element of a misleading
- 22 statement, an omission can't be the subject of a
- 23 private class action.
- I'm happy to take the Court's
- 25 questions.

1 JUSTICE THOMAS: Can a -- a compliance 2 certification statement be made misleading by an 3 omission? MS. COBERLY: I would say no, Your 4 Honor, for a couple of reasons. 5 6 So, first of all, the government isn't 7 arguing that a compliance statement itself is a misleading statement. The government's argument 8 9 is that a compliance statement makes the narrative as a whole the misleading statement. 10 11 As for the compliance certification 12 itself, though, Your Honor, that statement wouldn't be actionable under the federal 13 14 securities laws because, first of all, it would 15 be a statement of opinion, and, secondly, to the 16 extent that it is relating to an item of future 17 import, it would be protected by the 18 forward-looking -- the bar on claims against 19 forward-looking statements by the safe harbor. 20 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: Are there any specific arguments with respect to 906? I think 21 2.2 that question was related to 906 and the certification there. 23 They're -- the -- Moab 24 MS. COBERLY:

is making an argument based on 906, Your Honor.

- 1 I'll note that the Second Circuit did not rely
- on 906, a 906 certification. The 906
- 3 certification wasn't mentioned in the complaint,
- 4 in the briefs below, or -- or in the brief in
- 5 opposition. So we don't think it's really --
- 6 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: And that
- 7 certification is not a part of the 303 filing,
- 8 is it?
- 9 MS. COBERLY: It is not. It is a
- 10 separate document from the securities filings
- 11 themselves. And, of course, the requirement for
- 12 a 906 certification does not appear in the
- 13 securities laws. It appears in the criminal
- 14 code. And this Court is loath to interpret a
- 15 civil remedy from something in the criminal code
- 16 unless Congress specifically stated so.
- 17 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: So, in this case,
- 18 we don't need to reach that issue?
- MS. COBERLY: I think that's correct,
- 20 Your Honor.
- 21 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Counsel, the
- 22 distinction you draw between sort of half-truths
- and omissions strikes me as one that might be
- 24 hard to apply in practice.
- Let's say you have a statement that,

- 1 you know, our -- our sales are going to rise
- 2 because of the new processors we're going to
- 3 bring online, but what you don't say is that our
- 4 sales are going to fall because EPA is going to
- 5 issue new regulations. You know what --
- 6 something like along those lines that you know.
- 7 And they're going to limit further the use of
- 8 No. 6 oil.
- 9 Now is that an omission case because,
- 10 you know, there's a difference between new
- 11 processors increasing sales and EPA regulation
- 12 lowering it, or is it a half-truth situation
- 13 because the first part says our sales will rise?
- 14 MS. COBERLY: Well, Your Honor, that's
- 15 a kind of question that district courts answer
- 16 every day in securities cases. In every
- instance where a plaintiff identifies a
- 18 statement and identifies it as a half-truth, the
- 19 court is then tasked with answering a lot of
- 20 questions about that statement. Does it match
- 21 the omitted fact? Is it close enough in topic
- 22 given the context of -- of the -- of the
- 23 statements?
- 24 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Well, what's
- 25 the answer in the hypothetical that I --

| Т | MS. COBERLY: I think the answer to |
|----|---|
| 2 | that question, Your Honor, would be no, and |
| 3 | that's because the statement needs to be |
| 4 | something like in kind in both subject matter |
| 5 | and specificity. And so the classic example |
| 6 | that this Court has discussed in Escobar is |
| 7 | taken from Justice Cardozo in Junius |
| 8 | Construction, and that's two streets intersect |
| 9 | and if a third also exists but is omitted, then |
| 10 | the statement about the two streets might be |
| 11 | misleading by omission. |
| 12 | JUSTICE KAGAN: Well, where do you get |
| 13 | that from the text? I mean, I understand how |
| 14 | you get your principal argument from the text. |
| 15 | But, there, I understood you to be saying that |
| 16 | there are limits on the ways in which an |
| 17 | omission can make statements in the MD&A or in |
| 18 | the broader form misleading, and I don't see |
| 19 | anything like that in the text. |
| 20 | MS. COBERLY: Well, what the text |
| 21 | tells us, Your Honor, is is the the text |
| 22 | makes it unlawful to omit to state a material |
| 23 | fact necessary in order to to make the |
| 24 | statements made, in the light of the |
| 25 | circumstances under which they were made, not |

- 1 misleading. And courts have interpreted that
- 2 text to require a similarity in like -- in both
- 3 subject matter and specificity between the
- 4 statement rendered misleading and the omitted
- fact, and that's how courts typically --
- 6 JUSTICE KAGAN: Well, I mean, I -- I
- 7 -- I guess this is along the same lines as the
- 8 Chief Justice's question. If you have a set of
- 9 paragraphs or a set of sentences, what have you,
- 10 which paints a very rosy picture of the
- 11 prospects of a company, and then it turns out
- that you've omitted the thing that is actually
- going to crater the company next month, that
- 14 rosy picture seems to be rendered misleading.
- But I understood your answer to the
- 16 Chief Justice to say that you did not agree with
- 17 that. Am I -- is that right?
- 18 MS. COBERLY: So I think the first
- 19 question is if there is a statement that the
- 20 complaint identifies --
- 21 JUSTICE KAGAN: And when you say "if
- 22 there is a statement, "I mean, it's -- it's
- 23 actually framed in the plural in the text, so
- it's "statements." Are you saying that there
- 25 has to be one discrete statement? And where --

1 where does that come from? 2 MS. COBERLY: The -- it comes from the 3 PSLRA, Your Honor. So the PSLRA requires that each statement must be specifically identified 4 in the complaint. So the PSLRA took that plural 5 6 language, the plural language in Rule 10b-5, and 7 it described what -- what is the pleading requirement for that statement in the context of 8 a claim based on an omission that makes 9 statements made misleading, and what it said is 10 11 the complaint shall specify each statement 12 alleged to have been misleading. 13 JUSTICE KAGAN: So --14 MS. COBERLY: So --15 JUSTICE KAGAN: -- again, go back to 16 my hypothetical, and it's like -- it's a big 17 paragraph that just says this company has a 18 bright future ahead of it for the following 19 19 reasons, and then it doesn't tell you the thing that's going to crater the company next week. 20 21 How does your analysis apply to that? 2.2 MS. COBERLY: I think the analysis 23 would change. The result would be the same, and 24 let me explain why. I think, in that instance, 25 there might very well be a statement that is the

- 1 -- that satisfies the statement element of the
- 2 omission claim provided that it was identified
- 3 in the complaint.
- 4 But this is why the specificity is so
- 5 important. Once that specific statement, that
- 6 -- that paragraph with the rosy future and so
- 7 on, is identified in the complaint, then the
- 8 defendant has the opportunity to move to dismiss
- 9 the case.
- 10 It might, for example, in that
- 11 instance invoke a -- invoke the safe harbor for
- 12 forward-looking statements. It might also
- invoke this Court's ruling in Omnicare, which
- 14 identifies statements of opinion as being
- 15 different from statements of fact.
- 16 Now, of course, a statement of opinion
- 17 can be misleading, but that requires a very
- 18 special kind of omitted fact that the Court was
- 19 very clear about in the Omnicare decision.
- 20 So the importance of the specific
- 21 statement is tied in part to the PSLRA's
- 22 requirements, which are very important here,
- 23 especially because that's the moment when
- 24 Congress finally weighed in on the judicially
- 25 implied private right of action.

| 1 | But the statement requirement is also |
|----|---|
| 2 | important because of all the things that flow |
| 3 | from it, all of the other elements and |
| 4 | safeguards that use the statement as their |
| 5 | predicate. And to have, as as the government |
| 6 | argues, the statement be the entire narrative, |
| 7 | which, here, was pages and pages and pages on |
| 8 | many different topics with respect to multiple |
| 9 | different subsidiaries of a holding company, |
| 10 | that kind of statement isn't what the the |
| 11 | Congress had in mind when it used the word |
| 12 | "statement" in the PSLRA. |
| 13 | JUSTICE BARRETT: Ms. Coberly, can I |
| 14 | ask you what I think is a a variation on this |
| 15 | theme? Is the rule that you're asking for |
| 16 | pretty narrow? |
| 17 | Because the Chief and Justice Kagan |
| 18 | are pointing out that it can sometimes be |
| 19 | difficult to tell when an omission causes a |
| 20 | statement or statements in the disclosure to be |
| 21 | misleading. So Professor Grundfest suggests |
| 22 | that most omission cases can pretty easily be |
| 23 | repleaded as misleading statement cases. |
| 24 | Do you agree that that's going to be |
| 25 | true of some significant portion of these, |

- 1 meaning that the rule that you're asking for is
- 2 fairly narrow?
- 3 MS. COBERLY: It -- yes, I do agree
- 4 with that, Your Honor. And so, first of all, I
- 5 think it's important to remember how we got
- 6 here. The Second Circuit held that a violation
- 7 of Item 303 is actionable independent of whether
- 8 there's a misleading statement. And -- and we
- 9 think that rule is incorrect and needs to be
- 10 vacated.
- Now, as far as what the -- the status
- 12 quo will be going forward, and it is what the
- law is in every other circuit right now, a
- 14 plaintiff must identify a specific statement.
- 15 If that happens, then, of course, the statement
- 16 requirement is satisfied and we move on to the
- 17 other elements.
- So all we're seeking here is respect
- 19 for the text of 10(b) that -- which says that an
- 20 omission is actionable only when necessary to --
- 21 when the omitted fact is necessary to make the
- 22 other statements made not misleading. And so
- we're -- we're simply asking for what Congress
- asked for, which is that the complaint identify
- 25 a misleading statement.

| 1 | JUSTICE JACKSON: Is there anything |
|----|---|
| 2 | JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: Are you hoping |
| 3 | I I'm sorry. I thought the Second Circuit in |
| 4 | the alternative had held that there were |
| 5 | half-truths here, and so why are we here if |
| 6 | you're going to lose anyway when you go down |
| 7 | back down? |
| 8 | MS. COBERLY: Well, respectfully, we |
| 9 | don't think we're going to lose when we go back |
| LO | down, but |
| L1 | JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: I know you won |
| L2 | I know you won on this issue on the district |
| L3 | court. |
| L4 | MS. COBERLY: Indeed. So the specific |
| L5 | half-truths that the Second Circuit identified |
| L6 | don't have to do with the Item 303 omission. So |
| L7 | the the paragraphs in the complaint that |
| L8 | described the Item 303 omission simply referred |
| L9 | to Item 303 and did not tie that failure to |
| 20 | comply with any specific statement. |
| 21 | The two statements |
| 22 | JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: Was was this |
| 23 | fought about below on the Second in the |
| 24 | Second Circuit? So did you make these this |
| 25 | argument in the Second Circuit? |

1 I mean, obviously, we can just, if we 2 were to rule in your favor, not to suggest we are, but just to say that, we would vacate and 3 remand and let the Second Circuit apply the 4 correct rule, correct? 5 6 MS. COBERLY: Yes. But the -- the two 7 statements, there were two very specific statements that the court found had been 8 9 adequately pleaded as half-truths, and both of those statements, first of all, were in oral 10 11 discussions. They were not in pleadings. 12 were not in filings with the SEC. So Item 303 13 didn't apply to them at all. 14 They were statements made orally by 15 management in conferences with investors, and 16 the court held that both of those statements 17 were rendered misleading by -- and this is how Moab had argued it -- by the omission of 18 19 specific facts relating to the base of 20 customers. 21 So they're very -- they're statements 2.2 about factually who are our customers, and the 23 allegation was that those statements were misleading because there was information about 24 25 those customers, factual information, that had

- 1 been omitted. So that's the very narrow
- 2 omission claim, half-truth claim, that the
- 3 Second Circuit allowed to proceed.
- 4 And that claim, by the way, is
- 5 proceeding today in the district court. The
- 6 claim that's before the Court today is about --
- 7 is a much broader claim. It's a claim that --
- 8 that the holding company should have disclosed
- 9 not just the existence of IMO 2020, not the fact
- 10 that it -- the alleged fact that it didn't
- 11 comply with Item 303, but very specifically the
- idea, the prediction, that IMO 2020 would have a
- 13 very significant negative impact on the
- 14 performance of one of the subsidiaries and that
- that impact would cause the holding company to
- 16 cut its dividends, which is ultimately the news
- 17 that the plaintiffs allege led to the decrease
- in the stock price.
- 19 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: Thank you,
- 20 counsel.
- 21 JUSTICE JACKSON: And I suppose that
- 22 you can argue, you know, with many different
- 23 parts of that argument. You -- you -- you're
- 24 going to claim that they're wrong about the way
- 25 in which the omission had an impact, but I quess

- 1 they're also arguing that you're seeking blanket
- 2 immunity for omissions in the Item 303 context.
- 3 Are you?
- 4 MS. COBERLY: We are not, Your Honor.
- 5 And --
- 6 JUSTICE JACKSON: So you -- so you
- 7 agree that Item 303 omissions could give rise to
- 8 the kind of liability that they say exists here?
- 9 MS. COBERLY: No. No. And I want to
- draw a distinction between immunity and 10b-5.
- 11 So we think that in -- a failure to comply with
- 12 Item 303 is not actionable unless it's tied to a
- 13 specific misleading statement that's plead --
- 14 pleaded in the complaint, in which case the Item
- 15 303 requirement is not doing very much work.
- 16 JUSTICE JACKSON: But can that -- can
- 17 that statement be of the nature that the SG
- 18 points out? So you have a list, you know, the
- 19 company does comply partially, it -- it talks
- 20 about various trends, et cetera, but it leaves
- 21 out a few that seem to be pretty consequential
- 22 if investors knew about them.
- Is that the kind of scenario that you
- say could possibly give rise to liability here
- 25 but just wasn't pled in this situation?

MS. COBERLY: Well, in -- first of 1 2 all, in that instance, I'm not sure Item 303 is 3 doing very much work. So we already have the classic example, again, from Justice Cardozo 4 in -- in Junius Construction of the two roads 5 and the one road. 6 7 So the analogy here would be, if the complaint had identified a specific statement of 8 9 certain forward-looking trends that were going 10 to have an impact and it left out this 11 forward-looking trend that was going to have an 12 impact, the plaintiff might be able to plead the 13 statement requirement by identifying that 14 specific statement. 15 Now that didn't happen here, but --16 but that was a -- that would be a -- a pleading 17 that might satisfy --18 JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: On -- on the --19 MS. COBERLY: -- the statement 20 requirement. 21 JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: -- immunity word, 22 I thought your response would be that the SEC --23 MS. COBERLY: We do. 24 JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: -- has authority 25 to enforce omissions in 303.

1 MS. COBERLY: That is my response. 2 With respect to the question about immunity for 3 10(b) liability, we're -- even there, we're not seeking immunity exactly. We're simply saying 4 that you have to identify a misleading statement 5 6 and it has to be something that's like in kind. 7 But Your Honor is quite right that the SEC has ample authority to -- to pursue and 8 9 penalize failures to violate or failures to 10 comply with that --11 JUSTICE JACKSON: Right. But just 12 to -- just to be clear, I guess I'm -- I'm just trying to understand, are you making the 13 14 argument that there's something about the nature 15 of an Item 303 disclosure that it can't give 16 rise to liability or there are circumstances 17 that you can envision like the one perhaps you 18 identified where it might, but they didn't 19 allege that in this case? MS. COBERLY: We are not asking this 20 21 Court to make a ruling based on the nature of 2.2 Item 303 representations. What we're asking the 23 Court to do is respect the text of Rule 10b-5(b). 24 25 If a -- if a plaintiff identifies a

2.1

- 1 specific misleading statement in a -- an Item
- 2 303 disclosure, that happens to be in an Item
- 3 303 disclosure, which means, by the way, it
- 4 happens to be anywhere in the MD&A of the public
- 5 filing, then the plaintiff could plead that
- 6 specific statement as a misleading statement for
- 7 purposes of the --
- 8 JUSTICE KAGAN: But just to --
- 9 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: I --
- 10 JUSTICE KAGAN: -- make sure I --
- 11 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: I was just
- 12 going to say, I thought you argued that the
- 13 private actions could not be brought under
- 14 Section 303 alone even though the Commission
- might be able to take actions?
- MS. COBERLY: We do arque that, Your
- 17 Honor, but -- but the problem here is to -- to
- 18 identify -- what the Second Circuit held was
- 19 that a violation of Item 303, standing alone, is
- 20 actionable under Rule 10b-5(b) whether or not
- 21 there was a misleading statement. And so what
- 22 we're asking for is for the Court to require the
- 23 misleading statement.
- 24 The statement has to be identified and
- it has to be something specific to comply with

2.2

- 1 the PSLRA pleading requirements, and then the
- 2 defendant will go through the process, and the
- 3 court, of evaluating whether that kind of
- 4 statement is the sort of thing on which
- 5 securities liability can rest.
- 6 JUSTICE KAGAN: And just to make sure
- 7 I understand your answer to Justice Jackson's
- 8 hypothetical, if, in the MD&A, the -- the
- 9 company says there are three trends that you
- 10 should know about, you, the investor, should
- 11 know about, when you think about our future
- sales, and it lists three trends, but it doesn't
- 13 list a fourth that's actually much more
- 14 consequential than those three and cuts in the
- opposite direction, has the -- has -- has
- that satisfied the requirement?
- 17 MS. COBERLY: I think that would
- 18 satisfy the requirement of the misleading
- 19 statement.
- JUSTICE KAGAN: Yeah.
- 21 MS. COBERLY: It remains -- then there
- 22 are other pleading requirements as well --
- JUSTICE KAGAN: Sure.
- 24 MS. COBERLY: -- including potentially
- 25 the application of the safe harbor, because I

- 1 actually think that statement that Your Honor is
- 2 positing probably is a forward-looking statement
- 3 that would be protected from liability under the
- 4 statutory safe harbor.
- 5 JUSTICE KAGAN: But, in terms of the
- 6 issue that we're deciding today --
- 7 MS. COBERLY: Right.
- 8 JUSTICE KAGAN: -- it would pass that?
- 9 MS. COBERLY: I think it likely would
- 10 pass that, Your Honor. And that's why it's so
- important that the statement be specific and
- 12 identified.
- 13 There's actually -- the -- the
- 14 safe harbor provision itself contains an
- important textual clue as well. It discusses
- statements as being something contained in the
- filings, contained in, in fact, specifically
- 18 contained in the Management's Discussion and
- 19 Analysis, which, of course, is a lengthy
- 20 narrative. Based on that understanding of what
- 21 a statement is, it's not appropriate to suggest,
- as the government does, that the statements made
- 23 could be in general the entire MD&A.
- 24 And one of the reasons it's important
- for the PSLRA, I think, to identify something

2.4

- 1 more specific is because the MD&A is long and
- 2 complex and covers many different subjects. I
- 3 mean, our client, for example, was a holding
- 4 company that had four different major
- 5 subsidiaries engaged in different businesses.
- 6 It was affected by many regulations. It, in
- 7 fact, disclosed in its MD&A the possibility that
- 8 regulations that impact the commodities stored
- 9 by this subsidiary could impact the outcome, the
- 10 financial results, of the holding company. That
- 11 was actually disclosed at a higher level of
- 12 generality. That did not become misleading
- 13 simply because it did not provide a specific
- 14 example that included this alleged regulation.
- 15 And we -- we want companies to
- 16 disclose what's required under Item 303. We
- want them to provide that information. But, if
- 18 we have a rule that says anytime you say
- 19 anything you can be held liable for what you
- don't say, that would have exactly the opposite
- 21 result of the requirement.
- JUSTICE BARRETT: Ms. Coberly, what
- about 10b-5(a) and(c)? Would a 303 omission be
- 24 actionable under either of those subsections,
- and are you asking us to say anything about

1 that? 2 MS. COBERLY: We are not asking the 3 Court to say anything about that necessarily because the Second Circuit didn't. So we did 4 not brief that issue as if it was before the 5 Court. The Second Circuit did not rely on that. 6 7 But what I can say, Your Honor, is that every time this Court has recognized 8 9 liability under (a) and (c), it has found something in addition to speech alone. And if 10 11 it were the case that you could -- this in our 12 case is a quintessential (b) case, right? about what a 10-K or a 10-Q does or doesn't say. 13 14 And if that case could be recast as a 15 scheme case or an act case and avoid the 16 specific requirements of (b), no one would ever 17 bring a claim under (b). And, presumably, there 18 would be some decision by some court of appeals 19 somewhere that held that a misrepresentation or omission in a 10-K or a 10-O can be asserted 20 21 under (a) and (c). And no court, including the 2.2 Second Circuit, has ever reached that result as 23 far as we are aware. 24 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Thank you,

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25

counsel.

| 1 | Justice Thomas? |
|----|--|
| 2 | Justice Gorsuch, anything further? |
| 3 | All right. Justice Barrett? |
| 4 | Okay. Thank you, counsel. |
| 5 | MS. COBERLY: Thank you. |
| 6 | CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Mr. Frederick. |
| 7 | ORAL ARGUMENT OF DAVID C. FREDERICK |
| 8 | ON BEHALF OF RESPONDENT MOAB PARTNERS, L.P |
| 9 | MR. FREDERICK: Thank you, Mr. Chief |
| 10 | Justice, and may it please the Court: |
| 11 | This case involves a classic 10b-5(b) |
| 12 | misleading half-truth. Petitioners disclosed a |
| 13 | few known trends that would affect their bottom |
| 14 | line but omitted the IMO 2020 uncertainty that |
| 15 | would decimate 40 percent of their revenue. |
| 16 | Just as disclosing two roads near a property |
| 17 | when a third one actually bisects it is a |
| 18 | classic fraudulent half-truth, so is a partial |
| 19 | Item 303 disclosure that omits required material |
| 20 | information. A reasonable investor would expect |
| 21 | the description of known trends to be complete |
| 22 | and would be misled by such a material omission. |
| 23 | If accepted, Petitioners' argument |
| 24 | would create a roadmap for fraud. Petitioners |
| 25 | knew they were about to lose a substantial part |

2.7

- of their business but kept their stock price
- 2 artificially inflated by deliberately
- 3 withholding information about their readiness to
- 4 comply with an important rule change. When the
- 5 truth emerged, their stock price fell by more
- 6 than 40 percent in one day.
- 7 Congress enshrined a private right of
- 8 action to redress this kind of half-truth. Now
- 9 Petitioners concede that an omission can be a
- 10 half-truth when there is a statement on the same
- 11 subject. But Item 303 defines the relevant
- 12 subject, any known trends or uncertainties that
- are reasonably likely to significantly affect
- 14 revenues or income.
- So, if a company, as, Mr. Chief
- 16 Justice, your hypothetical pointed out,
- discloses that sales are going to go up by some
- 18 customers, but suppose that the supplier of
- 19 parts is about to go into bankruptcy, both of
- those statements go to the same subject under
- 21 Item 303. But an omission of one, the
- 22 bankruptcy of the supplier, would materially
- 23 affect the bottom line. For the reason that
- they don't give you a standard for determining
- 25 the same subject, it has to be tied to Item 303.

| Т | i welcome the Court's questions. |
|----|--|
| 2 | JUSTICE THOMAS: But, even if you |
| 3 | lose, doesn't the SEC have authority over the |
| 4 | omission? |
| 5 | MR. FREDERICK: Not under 10b-5(b) |
| 6 | under their theory. The SEC would only have |
| 7 | administrative authority through their Corporate |
| 8 | Finance Department, but they wouldn't have the |
| 9 | authority to bring a fraud claim that would seek |
| LO | other potential remedies. And the SEC has made |
| L1 | quite clear that its enforcement staff is meager |
| L2 | compared to the resources and opportunities for |
| L3 | institutional investors like the ones that I |
| L4 | represent to be able to bring private actions. |
| L5 | JUSTICE THOMAS: And so which |
| L6 | omissions would not be misleading? |
| L7 | MR. FREDERICK: Well, omission |
| L8 | JUSTICE THOMAS: If pure omissions are |
| L9 | misleading it seems as though you're saying |
| 20 | the mere fact that it is an omission makes it |
| 21 | misleading. Can you is there a limit to |
| 22 | that? |
| 23 | MR. FREDERICK: Yes, there is, Justice |
| 24 | Thomas. And what the Second Circuit did below |
| 25 | was it went through, essentially, a decision |

- 1 tree whether there was a violation of Item 303. It asked first, is there a known trend? Would it reasonably affect the bottom line? If the 3 answer to that is no, then any omission that 4 would not concern a known trend wouldn't be 5 6 required for disclosure. And if there was an 7 uncertainty about that, then the managers are asked whether or not disclosing that event would 8 9 be reasonably likely to occur, which is a lower standard still. 10 The Second Circuit provided those kind 11 12 of prophylactic protections through the decision tree that it undertook to determine whether or 13 14 not an omission in these particular contexts 15 would be important, and it determined -- and 16 this isn't challenged on appeal -- that it was 17 objectively unreasonable for the company not to put in their Item 303 disclosure the facts that 18
- 22 And so, for that reason, it seems very 23 clear to us that when the managers are assessing

which is going to decimate the 6 oil market.

would be necessary to determine the company's

readiness to deal with the IMO 2020 rule change,

24 what needs to be in the Item 303 disclosure,

19

20

21

omitting something that would be so material, as

- 1 was the case here, would be independently
- 2 actionable.
- 3 And I would point out that the
- 4 underlying Second Circuit case that's really on
- 5 appeal here is called Stratte-McClure. That was
- 6 the precedent on which the per curiam panel
- 7 below relied.
- 8 Stratte-McClure said that omissions
- 9 that were of such materiality would lead the
- 10 financial statements to be misleading. We think
- 11 what it meant by that was the MD&A part. And
- 12 the comment is made, well, the MD&A is many
- pages. Well, the statement in a Supreme Court
- brief can be many, many pages. And so the fact
- that we're not talking about one sentence, but
- 16 we're talking about a statement, is relevant for
- 17 determining what material information reasonable
- investors would want to have.
- 19 JUSTICE JACKSON: Can I just --
- 20 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Counsel --
- JUSTICE JACKSON: Go ahead.
- 22 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: -- you -- you
- 23 began by saying this was a classic half-truth.
- MR. FREDERICK: Yes.
- 25 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Are -- are you

1 -- is -- the way that the dispute was presented at least in some parts is a distinction between 3 half-truths and -- and pure omissions. Are you giving up on that distinction, 4 or you don't buy it? I mean, you -- you do not 5 6 buy that distinction at all? 7 MR. FREDERICK: I think their -- what they define "pure omission" to be is a violation 8 of a disclosure rule. And if you look at a 9 disclosure violation, you have to look at what 10 11 was disclosed compared to what wasn't disclosed. 12 And that's the classic half-truth that your very first hypothetical, Mr. Chief Justice, 13 14 brought to light. And we think, here, where the 15 company is talking about some of the material 16 trends that would affect their bottom line but 17 not the trend that's going to affect nearly half of their business, is clearly a material trend 18 19 and a material omission that renders the statements that they've made elsewhere in the 20 21 Item 303 disclosure to be misleading. 2.2 JUSTICE BARRETT: And you would --JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: But isn't --23 24 JUSTICE BARRETT: -- have to identify 25 those specific statements?

1 MR. FREDERICK: Well, there are two answers, Justice Barrett, and I want to be clear 2 3 for the record what our position is. We agree with the SG that the 4 categorical matter, the statement, is the MD&A. 5 6 So that is an adequate statement if referenced 7 in the complaint, which we have on paragraphs 277 and 278 of our complaint. 8 If, however, the Court were to 9 conclude that more particularized statements 10 11 within the MD&A needed to be identified, we've 12 also done that in the complaint in the preceding 13 six or seven paragraphs. 14 And so whichever way the Court rules, 15 if it accepts the Solicitor General's more 16 categorical approach or if it takes the more 17 nuanced approach that we have also offered as an alternative, we think that you get to the same 18 19 place. JUSTICE KAGAN: But, if I understand 20 21 you correctly, Mr. Frederick -- and this is 22 really just repeating the Chief Justice's 23 question -- you have put off the table, you're 24 not defending the Second Circuit's position,

which is that there's no statement, however

- 1 capaciously or narrowly defined, there's no
- 2 statement that needs to be alleged becomes
- 3 misleading because of the omission?
- 4 MR. FREDERICK: That's not correct,
- 5 Justice Kagan. What the Stratte-McClure Court
- 6 said and held was that the omissions rendered
- 7 the financial statement misleading. And so the
- 8 Second Circuit has viewed the categorical
- 9 position that the government does as the correct
- 10 ruling on the statement.
- 11 JUSTICE KAGAN: Well, let -- let's
- 12 just imagine that the Second Circuit said
- 13 something else, which is that any omission
- 14 counts without having to show that it rendered
- 15 any other statement misleading.
- 16 You would reject that?
- 17 MR. FREDERICK: I -- I don't
- 18 think that anybody -- that any court has ever
- 19 held that. We're not arguing that. The Second
- 20 Circuit didn't hold that. It would be purely
- 21 hypothetical.
- JUSTICE KAGAN: So what everybody is
- arguing about is just sort of how narrow or how
- 24 capacious we should understand the requirement
- 25 that there needs to be another statement that's

- 1 rendered misleading?
- 2 MR. FREDERICK: I think that's
- 3 basically right in terms of framing the
- 4 battlefield here, Justice Kagan, and that's why
- 5 the subject is what is so important.
- They're willing to concede that there
- 7 can be half-truths when there are omissions on
- 8 the same subject, but they never really make
- 9 clear what is the subject in the context of a
- 10 public filing by a public company to a public
- 11 agency charged with administering particular
- 12 rules designed to protect investors.
- JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: Can -- can we just
- 14 say that a -- an omission alone is not good
- 15 enough, you have to identify a statement as
- 16 well, and send it back?
- 17 MR. FREDERICK: I don't think that's
- 18 going to help anyone, Justice Kavanaugh,
- 19 frankly, for this reason.
- 20 JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: It'll help us, but
- 21 --
- 22 (Laughter.)
- MR. FREDERICK: I -- and I appreciate
- 24 my role is to help you, Justice Kavanaugh. But,
- in furtherance of helping the bar, let me urge

- 1 you to say that the omission has to be tied to
- 2 the particular statements at issue, which are,
- 3 here, the MD&A, the management discussion. That
- 4 has to be the subject in which you evaluate
- 5 omissions and statements.
- 6 It's the only administrable rule where
- 7 you look at what is required under the Item 303
- 8 rule and you determine whether the company
- 9 complied with the form --
- 10 JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: Well, to say the
- 11 MD&A as a whole is misleading really kind of
- 12 waters down the -- the statement requirement.
- 13 At least that's the argument on the other side.
- MR. FREDERICK: It is. And that's why
- we made the backup argument that if charged with
- 16 looking at particular statements in the MD&A, we
- 17 pleaded that, we can do that, we can establish
- 18 that.
- But I think, Justice Kavanaugh, what's
- 20 important is that when there are material
- 21 omissions of the type and sky -- size and scope
- 22 here, it's really important to have a tool to be
- able to say, we're not going to flyspeck every
- 24 sentence and the placement of every comma. This
- 25 company didn't disclose what was going to happen

- 1 to 40 percent of their business.
- JUSTICE GORSUCH: Well, Mr. Frederick,
- 3 if -- if there's such agreement that a
- 4 statement's required and, in fact, you -- you
- 5 seem to be okay with your -- your friend, Ms.
- 6 Coberly's, suggestion that it has to be a
- 7 specific statement in a specific context, why
- 8 not send it back for analysis under that
- 9 standard?
- 10 MR. FREDERICK: Certainly, a -- a
- 11 remand is going to happen anyway because of the
- 12 existence of the other claims.
- 13 JUSTICE GORSUCH: But would -- would
- 14 that -- would that help the bar?
- MR. FREDERICK: I don't know that --
- 16 JUSTICE GORSUCH: Would that be
- 17 useful?
- 18 MR. FREDERICK: Well, what I would
- 19 like to urge the Court is that when a -- an
- 20 omission is evaluated in the context of a
- 21 misleading statement, the test for determining
- it in an Item 303 context is, is it the subject
- 23 covered by the Item 303 requirement?
- 24 JUSTICE GORSUCH: I understand that's
- 25 your first argument, but you seem to be --

| Τ | MR. FREDERICK: NO. |
|----|--|
| 2 | JUSTICE GORSUCH: content with a |
| 3 | more specific level of analysis too, and your |
| 4 | friend on the other side suggests that that |
| 5 | might even be required by the PSLRA. |
| 6 | MR. FREDERICK: Well |
| 7 | JUSTICE GORSUCH: And if you're |
| 8 | content with it and she's content with it and |
| 9 | you say it would be helpful for us to go beyond |
| LO | talking about omissions, why shouldn't we go |
| L1 | ahead and do that? |
| L2 | MR. FREDERICK: Because I think the |
| L3 | government's position is the more categorical |
| L4 | one, which we defend as well, and we believe |
| L5 | that is correct for multiple reasons. The PSLRA |
| L6 | doesn't require individual sentences. It |
| L7 | requires statements, statements |
| L8 | JUSTICE GORSUCH: But, if lower courts |
| L9 | have uniformly, Ms. Coberly suggests, understood |
| 20 | it at a lower level of specificity than |
| 21 | than than that, why why shouldn't if |
| 22 | you're asking for help for the bar, why wouldn't |
| 23 | it be helpful for the bar to affirm what lower |
| 24 | courts have done in that respect? |
| 25 | MR. FREDERICK: Well, I think she's |

- 1 misstated the law of the Second Circuit, is the
- 2 financial statement, and the MD&A is the
- 3 important narrative discussion in the financial
- 4 statement. So, to the extent that she's talking
- 5 about other courts, the only other court that's
- 6 addressed the question presented directly is the
- 7 Ninth Circuit, which has held categorically that
- 8 no Item 303 violation can give rise to a 10b-5
- 9 claim.
- 10 JUSTICE GORSUCH: No, but we're
- 11 talking about 10b-5 generally. We're now moving
- 12 past the 303 issue as I understand it and
- talking about what it takes to plead a 10b-5(b)
- 14 case generally.
- 15 MR. FREDERICK: Well --
- 16 JUSTICE GORSUCH: And as -- as Ms.
- 17 Coberly suggests at least -- and what I've read
- 18 seems to comport with it -- that the level of
- 19 specificity is lower than -- than -- than just
- 20 saying go look at a long document like a legal
- 21 brief.
- MR. FREDERICK: Well, Justice Gorsuch,
- 23 I don't -- I don't want to fight your instinct
- 24 to ratify --
- JUSTICE GORSUCH: Oh, go ahead and

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1
      fight it.
 2
                (Laughter.)
 3
                JUSTICE GORSUCH: But, if you're
 4
      looking for guidance and that's correct and
 5
     useful quidance and --
 6
               MR. FREDERICK: The -- the problem --
 7
                JUSTICE GORSUCH: -- I mean, or do you
 8
     want us just to go ahead and answer the --
 9
     the -- the narrow question presented about
      omissions? I -- I'm just --
10
11
               MR. FREDERICK: I would say that --
12
                JUSTICE GORSUCH: -- wondering where
13
     you're at.
14
               MR. FREDERICK: -- the problem with
15
     getting too high a level of specificity is that
16
      it misses the very hypothetical that the Chief
17
     started the argument with, where the company
18
      oversells the fact that 30 percent of its
19
     revenue come from a customer that, say, doubles
20
      its order, but it doesn't talk about the parts
21
      supplier that's about to go into bankruptcy that
22
     would affect 30 percent.
23
                When --
24
                JUSTICE GORSUCH: That -- that might
25
     be a -- a specific. I mean, we're going to have
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- 1 to argue about that, but that's, I think, what
- 2 lower courts do all the time and say is that
- 3 specific enough. Is that more like the
- 4 crossroads example that you both have used, or
- 5 is it too far flung to qualify as a statement on
- 6 that subject matter?
- 7 MR. FREDERICK: And that's why the
- 8 Item 303 framework is a better one than a
- 9 free-floating same-subject test, which is the
- 10 other side's offer.
- 11 JUSTICE GORSUCH: But do you concede
- 12 that elsewhere in securities law it is more
- specific than that under 10b-5(b) and that --
- 14 that courts do require a more specific level of
- 15 granularity than just say it's somewhere in a --
- 16 required somewhere in a regulation?
- 17 MR. FREDERICK: Yes, but that is
- 18 usually in the context of earnings calls, press
- 19 releases, voluntary statements in which the
- 20 company is not required to make disclosures.
- 21 JUSTICE JACKSON: But I guess --
- MR. FREDERICK: And --
- JUSTICE JACKSON: Sorry. I guess
- that's my problem, Mr. Frederick, because I'm --
- 25 to the extent that the government's general

- 1 categorical view reduces to whenever the company
- 2 is required to make statements, not doing so
- 3 renders the report misleading, I -- I guess I
- 4 don't understand how that's any different than
- 5 just saying pure omissions in a context in which
- 6 there's a regulation that requires you to
- 7 disclose count.
- 8 It seems to me it -- it writes
- 9 out of the statute something about the statement
- 10 being rendered misleading to interpret that to
- 11 mean anytime you are required to disclose
- 12 certain information in a statement and it isn't
- there you have a misleading statement.
- MR. FREDERICK: But, Justice Jackson,
- the part of the statute that they don't really
- 16 want to talk about is the part that says "in the
- 17 light of the circumstances under which they were
- 18 made." The circumstances here are the
- 19 regulation requiring disclosure on specific
- 20 topics.
- 21 JUSTICE JACKSON: No, I understand
- 22 that. But the Chief Justice asked the very
- 23 question that I was going to ask, which is what
- is the difference between a pure omission in a
- 25 world in which you're required to make a

- 1 disclosure and an omission that renders a
- 2 statement misleading? And if you do it at a
- 3 certain level of generality, I see that there is
- 4 no difference between those two.
- 5 MR. FREDERICK: And I think there is
- 6 no difference except in the circumstance where
- 7 you simply don't file an MD&A at all. That is a
- 8 pure omission. It is as pure as you can be that
- 9 you have violated the rule by simply not
- 10 complying with it.
- 11 Now I'm told that never happens in the
- 12 real world, but that's why this whole pure
- omission thing is a canard for really not
- 14 capturing what is going on in a securities
- action, which are a series of half-truths.
- 16 Here, the difference is that between
- 17 the voluntary scenario where you do have to have
- 18 more specificity about the misleading omissions
- and statements, where you're under a regulatory
- 20 regime that requires certain disclosures and
- 21 certain managers' analyses, you have to follow
- 22 the regulation, and the regulation here calls
- 23 for this disclosure.
- Now, Justice Jackson, to be sure, not
- 25 all of those misleading statements or omissions

- 1 are going to give rise to 10b-5 claims. You
- 2 have to plead -- plead materiality and
- 3 specificity.
- 4 JUSTICE JACKSON: But why -- why is
- 5 there a difference in 10(b) and -- and -- and
- 6 Section 11 then? In other words, how do you
- 7 respond -- it seems to me the Section 11
- 8 argument is what you're saying. When you're
- 9 required to state something and you don't state
- 10 it, Section 11 says there's liability.
- We have different language in 10b-5.
- 12 So how do you account for that?
- MR. FREDERICK: Well, 10b-5 is
- intended to be more of a catch-all for a -- a
- provision in which the SEC was intending to
- 16 capture by rule all conceivable forms of fraud.
- 17 Section 11 is a very specific rule capturing
- just the disclosures made in offering documents
- 19 because, once a stock is put on the market
- 20 through an offering document, the offering
- 21 document, all four corners, are supposed to help
- the investor identify the worth of the offering.
- Once the offering is made, the market
- 24 takes over, right? And so the specificity
- 25 required is necessary because Section 11 is a

- 1 strict liability offense. It does not involve
- 2 scienter. Fraud requires scienter.
- 3 And so having more particularity with
- 4 respect to the offering document statements in
- 5 that context makes economic sense, and it makes
- 6 governmental sense in the -- in the regard that
- 7 what you're doing is holding the maker of those
- 8 statements strictly liable for messing up by --
- 9 either by misleading in some way or omitting
- 10 something that was stated.
- 11 You don't do that in the fraud context
- because you're looking for broader concepts and
- language in which to enforce, and that's why the
- 14 SEC, when it promulgated Rule 10b-5, looked to a
- 15 different provision that did speak to the
- 16 circumstances in which fraud could be conducted.
- 17 JUSTICE ALITO: Mr. Frederick, what
- about the question that we agreed to review?
- 19 Now you told us it was a worthless question in
- 20 your brief in opposition. But, wisely or not,
- 21 we took the case to decide that question.
- 22 And based on the argument this morning
- 23 and your briefs, I don't really see a
- 24 disagreement between you and Ms. Coberly on the
- 25 narrow question that the Court agreed to take.

- 1 I understand you to say that when there is a
- 2 material omission in the 303, then a number of
- 3 statements in the 303 can be regarded as
- 4 misleading. And you need to say that, right, to
- 5 get under 10b-5(b)? Is that correct?
- 6 MR. FREDERICK: Well, we need that to
- 7 get under 10b-5(b). We do that multiple ways,
- 8 either categorically because the entire MD&A is
- 9 false and misleading or because the individual
- 10 statements within it are false and misleading.
- 11 JUSTICE ALITO: All right. I'll
- 12 follow up when --
- 13 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Why don't you
- 14 go ahead now.
- JUSTICE ALITO: Well, the question is
- 16 whether a failure to make a disclosure required
- 17 under Item 303 can support a private claim under
- 18 Section 10(b) -- you'll understand that to refer
- 19 to 10b-5(b) -- "even in the absence of an
- 20 otherwise misleading statement."
- 21 And you're not arguing that as I
- 22 understand it. You're arguing that there are
- 23 misleading statements in the 303 because it --
- 24 it fails to state things that should have been
- 25 stated.

1 MR. FREDERICK: But the opacity of 2 that last phrase that you highlighted, Justice 3 Alito, is part of my argument. What is an otherwise misleading statement depends on 4 context. The context here are the omissions. 5 6 So you might look at a statement and say: 7 That's not misleading, except for the fraud and omissions that were material to render that 8 9 particular statement otherwise misleading. 10 So we argue on the Question Presented 11 the Second Circuit has never decided this on the 12 basis of pure omissions. They decided it in the 13 context of misleading financial statements. 14 the "otherwise misleading" gets the half-truth 15 theory into the case. 16 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Thank you, 17 counsel. 18 Justice Thomas? 19 JUSTICE THOMAS: Mr. Frederick, am I 20 correct in assuming that the -- you're just 21 adding, you're saying it has to be a pure 2.2 material omission? 23 MR. FREDERICK: What I'm saying is 24 that --

JUSTICE THOMAS: It seems to me as the

| Τ. | only adjective you're adding is "material." |
|----|--|
| 2 | MR. FREDERICK: "Material" is |
| 3 | necessary to make a 10b-5 claim |
| 4 | JUSTICE THOMAS: Yeah. |
| 5 | MR. FREDERICK: Justice Thomas. |
| 6 | And so there also has to be scienter. So it |
| 7 | has to be a pure material omission with scienter |
| 8 | that also causes the other elements in order to |
| 9 | give rise to a 10b-5 claim. We we |
| 10 | acknowledge |
| 11 | JUSTICE THOMAS: Yeah. |
| 12 | MR. FREDERICK: that. |
| 13 | CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Anything |
| 14 | further? |
| 15 | Justice Gorsuch? No? |
| 16 | Justice Jackson? |
| 17 | Thank you, counsel. |
| 18 | Mr. McDowell. |
| 19 | ORAL ARGUMENT OF EPHRAIM McDOWELL |
| 20 | FOR THE UNITED STATES, AS AMICUS CURIAE, |
| 21 | SUPPORTING THE RESPONDENT |
| 22 | MR. McDOWELL: Thank you, Mr. Chief |
| 23 | Justice, and may it please the Court: |
| 24 | I want to just pick up on this idea |
| 25 | that the Petitioners are asking for a tight |

- 1 factual connection between the statement and --
- and the omission. But that ignores the context
- 3 in which an MD&A is -- is made. The context is
- 4 Item 303.
- 5 Item 303 requires companies to
- 6 disclose all information in a particular
- 7 category. And when you have that sort of
- 8 regulation, that's the subject matter in which
- 9 you evaluate the statement and omission.
- 10 So just to take the Cardozo case as an
- 11 example, that -- that case was a voluntary
- 12 disclosure case. There was no disclosure
- 13 regulation at issue. And in that circumstance,
- we agree that there will need to be some factual
- 15 connection between the statement and the
- 16 omission.
- But, when you have a regulation like
- 18 you have here, that's the way in which you
- 19 evaluate the statement and omission. So just to
- 20 take the facts of that case and -- and vary them
- 21 a bit, suppose there were a regulation in that
- 22 case requiring sellers to disclose to buyers
- everything that could affect the material value
- of the property. In that circumstance,
- 25 disclosing -- not disclosing a nearby factory

- 1 would be misleading, even though, even in a
- 2 voluntary disclosure case, it might not be
- 3 misleading, and there would need to be a tight
- 4 subject matter connection.
- I welcome the Court's questions.
- 6 JUSTICE THOMAS: But aren't you too
- 7 saying that as long as it's material, the
- 8 omission is material, that it satisfied
- 9 10b-5(b)?
- 10 MR. McDOWELL: No, Your Honor. We're
- 11 saying that it has -- there has to be an Item 3
- 12 -- Item 303 violation, it has to be material
- under this Court's decision in Basic, which is a
- 14 different materiality standard than Item 303
- itself, and then there has to be scienter as
- 16 well. So there are multiple different elements
- 17 beyond just materiality.
- JUSTICE THOMAS: What I'm trying to
- 19 get at is I'm trying to understand what the --
- what's the difference between what you're saying
- 21 and what Petitioner is saying. Petitioner
- 22 seemed to suggest that an additional statement
- is required. You're saying at least from what
- I'm hearing that it has to be material, and I
- 25 take as a grant it's scienter, okay? But I

- don't see that that adds anything more other
- 2 than it's a -- it's a pure omission that is
- 3 material.
- 4 MR. McDOWELL: No, Your Honor, because
- 5 we're saying that the statement here is the
- 6 MD&A's narrative discussion and analysis as a
- 7 whole, and when you have an omission that
- 8 satisfies the Item 303 standard, that renders
- 9 that entire narrative misleading because --
- 10 JUSTICE THOMAS: But I don't see how
- 11 you could have an omission if you don't have the
- 12 initial 303 statement.
- MR. McDOWELL: You do have the initial
- 14 303 statement. That's the MD&A. The MD&A is
- 15 the statement in response to --
- 16 JUSTICE THOMAS: I -- I understand
- 17 that, but I -- anyway, I understand what you're
- 18 saying. I don't -- I don't know how you could
- 19 even have the omission ab initio if you don't
- 20 have the 303 statement, and it is from that
- 21 statement that we're talking about the omission,
- 22 the omission beyond -- nothing beyond that, a
- 23 material omission from the 303 statement.
- 24 MR. McDOWELL: Your Honor, that -- our
- 25 position is that if you have a material omission

- 1 from the 303 statement, that would be -- that
- 2 would give -- that could give rise to liability.
- JUSTICE THOMAS: Yeah.
- 4 MR. McDOWELL: And the reason for that
- 5 is because reasonable investors will expect the
- 6 MD&A to disclose all known trends or
- 7 uncertainties. So, when you omit one, then
- 8 you're violating those reasonable investor
- 9 expectations.
- 10 Now there's been some discussion about
- 11 the specificity of the statement required here.
- 12 But, as my colleague suggested, the ordinary
- meaning of "statement" includes a narrative
- 14 discussion and analysis like --
- 15 JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: How can -- how can
- the MD&A as a whole be misleading but not any
- 17 single statement within it?
- MR. McDOWELL: Your Honor, the MD&A as
- 19 a whole is misleading because reasonable
- 20 investors will assume that it is complete in
- 21 light of Item 303. There may also be individual
- 22 statements that are specifically misleading, as
- 23 my colleague suggested, but our position is the
- 24 categorical one that the entire MD&A is the
- 25 statement and that's what's been rendered

- 1 misleading by the omission.
- JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: And won't that
- 3 always mean then that a omission -- an Item 303
- 4 omission qualifies?
- 5 MR. McDOWELL: No, Your Honor,
- 6 because, first of all, it has to meet the -- the
- 7 standards of Item 303 itself, which requires
- 8 that the trend or uncertainty be currently
- 9 known, reasonably likely to occur, and
- 10 reasonably likely to be material.
- 11 JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: Right. But once
- 12 you have that?
- MR. McDOWELL: Once you have that,
- 14 then you would also have to show materiality
- under Basic, which is oftentimes a higher
- threshold, as well as scienter. So we're just
- talking about one element of the Rule 10b-5
- 18 claim.
- But, yes, as to the misleading
- 20 omission element, our position is that when
- 21 there is an Item 303 violation, that would
- 22 satisfy that one element.
- 23 And just to understand why we think
- the right way to think about the statement is
- 25 the MD&A as a whole, I want to give you an

- 1 example of a slightly more straightforward SEC
- 2 disclosure regulation, which is Item 401.
- 3 That requires companies to list all
- 4 the directors on the board of directors of the
- 5 company. If a company omits one of those
- 6 directors from the disclosure, that omission
- 7 doesn't render misleading the identification of
- 8 any other individual director, but it does
- 9 render misleading the company's larger statement
- 10 that this is our full board of directors.
- 11 The same analysis applies here. Item
- 12 303 requires companies to disclose all material
- 13 known trends or uncertainties. So, if you omit
- one, that doesn't render it -- the
- identification of any other one misleading, but
- it does render misleading the holistic statement
- 17 that these are all the known trends or
- 18 uncertainties affecting the company's financial
- 19 condition.
- 20 JUSTICE JACKSON: I don't see that.
- 21 And I -- I think Ms. Coberly agreed, but I guess
- 22 I'm trying to figure out the difference between
- 23 the language of 10b-5 with respect to this issue
- 24 and Section 11.
- The government's position it seems to

- 1 me renders those two the same in this context
- 2 because Section 11 says that you may sue when a
- 3 regulated party has "omitted to state a material
- 4 fact required to be stated."
- 5 And in this context, you're saying
- 6 that to the extent that Item 303 requires these
- 7 trends and uncertainties to be stated, if they
- 8 are omitted, we should consider that to count or
- 9 satisfy the additional language in Section 10b-5
- 10 that talks about your -- you needing to have a
- 11 misleading statement.
- MR. McDOWELL: With respect, Justice
- 13 Jackson, that's not correct because Section 11
- 14 goes on to say "or necessary to make the
- 15 statements therein not misleading." So Section
- 16 11 speaks to both pure omissions and half-truths
- 17 expressly.
- 18 JUSTICE JACKSON: Right.
- 19 MR. McDOWELL: Subsection --
- 20 JUSTICE JACKSON: And it's different
- than 10(b), which doesn't have that first part,
- 22 correct?
- MR. McDOWELL: That -- that's correct.
- 24 But -- but 10(b) does have the part that we are
- 25 relying on and they're agreeing.

- 1 JUSTICE JACKSON: No, I understand.
- 2 But, to the extent that 11 has two different
- 3 things --
- 4 MR. McDOWELL: Right.
- 5 JUSTICE JACKSON: -- right, the part I
- 6 read, "required to be stated," and the part that
- 7 is similar to 10b-5, I don't understand your
- 8 collapsing the two, and I feel like your
- 9 argument is doing that.
- MR. McDOWELL: No, Your Honor.
- 11 They're distinct categories. So a pure omission
- would occur, for instance, if a company did not
- 13 file an MD&A at all or, in the context of
- 14 Section 11, if they omitted an entire category
- within a registration statement.
- 16 By contrast, a -- a half-truth is when
- 17 you provide some disclosure under a particular
- 18 category but omit other parts of the disclosure
- 19 and that renders the entire statement within
- 20 that category misleading. So that's the
- 21 distinction here, and --
- JUSTICE JACKSON: And do you think the
- 23 Second Circuit appreciated that distinction in
- 24 its opinion? Because I -- I sort of thought
- 25 that they were saying the first.

1 MR. McDOWELL: So, Your Honor, the 2 Second Circuit's decision is unpublished. It has fairly limited reasoning. And I read it to 3 basically cite and adopt the Second Circuit's 4 precedential opinion on this issue, which is 5 6 Stratte-McClure. 7 And Stratte-McClure does rely on, as I read it, a half-truths theory because it says 8 that the -- an Item 303 violation renders the 9 financial statement misleading, which I take to 10 11 mean the MD&A, and that's exactly our position. 12 So I do think that the actual 13 precedent within the Second Circuit does agree 14 with our position, and I don't think it would do 15 any good to just say -- to just basically vacate 16 and remand and -- and let them take another look 17 because Stratte-McClure does decide this issue in the way that we think about it. 18 19 The other -- the other point I wanted 20 to make about the PSLRA's pleading standard is I think they're -- the other side is suggesting 21 2.2 that that pleading standard can substantively 23 limit the scope of subsection (b) of Rule 10b-5. 24 But that gets the analysis backwards because, if you look at the pleading standard and it's at 25

- 1 page 11 of the addendum to the red brief, the
- 2 pleading standard just tracks the language of
- 3 subsection (b) of Rule 10b-5. It doesn't
- 4 purport to change or restrict that language.
- 5 So I would read the PSLRA's pleading
- 6 standard in light of the longstanding provision
- 7 of subsection (b) of Rule 10b-5, not the other
- 8 way around.
- 9 JUSTICE GORSUCH: Counsel --
- MR. McDOWELL: So the only question --
- 11 JUSTICE GORSUCH: -- do you agree with
- 12 Ms. Coberly, though, that lower courts have
- understood the PLSRA to require a more specific
- 14 statement identification than you're proposing
- 15 here?
- MR. McDOWELL: No, Justice Gorsuch,
- 17 not in this context, because this --
- JUSTICE GORSUCH: No. No, no, no.
- 19 Put aside the 303 context. In all other
- 20 contexts --
- MR. McDOWELL: In the --
- 22 JUSTICE GORSUCH: -- as I understand
- 23 it, district courts have understood, lower
- 24 courts have understood generally that the PSLRA
- is more specific, has a more specific nuanced

- 1 requirement than you're proposing.
- 2 MR. McDOWELL: In -- in the context of
- 3 voluntary disclosures, yes. And that's --
- 4 JUSTICE GORSUCH: No, I understand
- 5 that --
- 6 MR. McDOWELL: -- that was -- that's
- 7 what I started with.
- 8 JUSTICE GORSUCH: -- I understand that
- 9 distinction.
- 10 MR. McDOWELL: Right.
- JUSTICE GORSUCH: But you agree that,
- 12 outside this context, that's the standard?
- MR. McDOWELL: Right, but -- yes, I
- 14 agree with that --
- JUSTICE GORSUCH: And the government
- 16 doesn't object to that standard in all -- in
- 17 other contexts?
- 18 MR. McDOWELL: In the voluntary
- 19 disclosure context, we do not.
- JUSTICE GORSUCH: Right.
- MR. McDOWELL: But that's -- that
- 22 distinction is critical because, when you have a
- 23 reg --
- JUSTICE GORSUCH: No, I -- I --
- MR. McDOWELL: Yes.

1 JUSTICE GORSUCH: -- I do understand 2 I just wanted to clarify. Thank you. 3 MR. McDOWELL: Yes. So -- and that distinct -- that distinction is critical 4 because, when you have a regulation like this 5 6 calling for all information in a particular 7 category, the omission of information in that category will necessarily be misleading. 8 9 And just to take a step back and put the MD&A in context, it's part of a Form 10-K. 10 11 And a Form 10-K document really is like a 12 Ouestion & Answer document with discrete 13 categories, and as with any Q&A document, you 14 can only understand an answer in light of the 15 question being asked. 16 So just to take it into a different 17 context, suppose a company's CEO were on a phone 18 call with an investor and the investor says, 19 what are all the big trends coming up for the 20 next year -- may I complete the sentence? 21 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: You may 2.2 complete the sentence, yes. 23 MR. McDOWELL: The investor asks, what 24 are all the big trends coming up for the next 25 year? If the -- if the CEO responded by listing

- 1 five positive trends but omitting a negative
- 2 trend, I think we would all understand that to
- 3 be misleading in the context of the question.
- 4 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Thank you,
- 5 counsel.
- 6 Sort of looking at things from the
- 7 30,000-foot level, I -- I thought we had, if we
- 8 haven't said it categorically and expressly,
- 9 indicated that we don't want to get any further
- into the business of implying private rights of
- 11 action. And, here, it seems to me that at -- at
- 12 least as presented, this is a question of
- whether or not we extend the existing private
- 14 right of action to cover 303 omissions. I'm
- 15 talking about the private actions of course.
- Why isn't that something that should
- 17 cause us to be reluctant to extend the -- the
- 18 right of action?
- 19 MR. McDOWELL: Mr. Chief Justice, I
- 20 actually think that this issue is exactly like
- 21 the issue you -- your opinion faces -- faced in
- 22 Halliburton. In Halliburton, the -- there was
- 23 an established element of reliance, and the
- 24 Court said that you can point to a different way
- of satisfying an established element after the

- 1 PSLRA.
- 2 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Well, but, I
- 3 mean, it was the same principle that was being
- 4 applied. Here, it's a different expansion under
- 5 303, an entirely different thing that we hadn't
- 6 mentioned in any of our prior implied right of
- 7 action jurisprudence.
- 8 MR. McDOWELL: With respect --
- 9 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: A substantive
- 10 addition rather than applying the same rule in a
- 11 different context.
- MR. McDOWELL: So I would make two
- points about that, Mr. Chief Justice.
- 14 First, we are not relying on a new
- theory. We're relying on the half-truth theory,
- 16 which has existed since 1942 when the SEC passed
- 17 Rule 10b-5. We're just saying that this fits
- 18 within the half-truth theory, just like in --
- 19 just like you said in Halliburton the basic
- 20 presumption of reliance fits within the
- 21 long-settled element of reliance.
- The other thing I would say about this
- is I think Petitioners are over-reading this
- 24 Court's decisions in Stoneridge and Janus. We
- 25 read those decisions to reject attempts to

- 1 expand the class of defendants who can be liable
- 2 under Rule 10b-5 after the PSLRA. We don't read
- 3 them to say that you can't simply plead an old
- 4 type of securities claim in a slightly new way.
- 5 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Thank you.
- 6 MR. McDOWELL: And so that's the
- 7 distinction.
- 8 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Justice
- 9 Thomas?
- 10 Justice Alito?
- 11 JUSTICE ALITO: Well, let me ask you
- 12 the same question I asked -- I asked Mr.
- 13 Frederick. What's your answer to the question
- on which we granted review? You changed the
- 15 question. What's the question -- what's the
- answer to the question we agreed to review?
- 17 MR. McDOWELL: The answer is that an
- 18 Item 303 violation can form the basis for a Rule
- 19 10b-5 claim. And Ms. Coberly I don't take to be
- 20 saying that.
- JUSTICE ALITO: Well, that wasn't the
- 22 question we granted review on. Even in the
- absence of an otherwise misleading statement.
- MR. McDOWELL: Right. And I read
- 25 "otherwise misleading" to be misleading in

- 1 its -- in its own -- on it -- by its own terms.
- 2 We are saying that it doesn't have to be
- 3 misleading on its own terms, but when you put it
- 4 in the context of Item 303 disclosures, that's
- 5 what makes it misleading.
- 6 JUSTICE ALITO: Well, don't you have
- 7 to identify a statement or a number of
- 8 statements, even if it's every single statement
- 9 in the 303, that is otherwise misleading to
- 10 bring -- to bring it within 10b-5(b)?
- MR. McDOWELL: You do have to identify
- 12 a statement, and we would say that the MD&A's
- 13 narrative is the relevant statement. And
- there's nothing atypical about reading
- 15 statements --
- 16 JUSTICE ALITO: Fine.
- 17 MR. McDOWELL: -- that way.
- 18 JUSTICE ALITO: Then there's an
- otherwise misleading statement, which is part of
- 20 the question.
- MR. McDOWELL: Well, with respect,
- Justice Alito, I don't think it gets you very
- far to answer the question that way because, as
- 24 I mentioned earlier, the Second Circuit has
- 25 already adopted our position on -- on the

1 half-truths --2 JUSTICE ALITO: Yeah. Well, do you 3 think the requirement to -- to identify the Question Presented means, particularly with 4 respect to an amicus, the question that you 5 6 would like us to address to provide guidance to 7 the bar or to advance your interests? Do you think that's what the requirement is? 8 MR. McDOWELL: No, Your Honor. We 9 10 answered the Question Presented by saying an 11 Item 303 violation can give rise to a Rule 10b-5 12 claim, and we presented two alternative theories 13 for that. One is the half-truth theory under 14 subsection (b), and one is the omission theory 15 under subsections (a) and (c). 16 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Justice 17 Sotomayor? 18 Justice Kavanaugh? 19 JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: Quick question. 20 The Commission enforces Item 303, correct? 21 MR. McDOWELL: That's right. 2.2 JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: And Mr. Frederick 23 referred to that as meager. Do you have a 24 response to that? 25 (Laughter.)

1 MR. McDOWELL: So I think -- so I do 2 have a response to that. I do think that the 3 SEC's resources in this area are -- are limited. This Court has repeatedly said that private 4 litigation under Rule 10b-5 is an essential 5 6 supplement to SEC enforcement actions. And that 7 applies with full force here. The SEC has a few hundred employees 8 that are tasked with reviewing tens of thousands 9 10 of forms from registered companies each year, 11 and it's simply not realistic to think that 12 those employees will be able to routinely detect, investigate, and penalize the many 13 14 disclosure violations that are taking place. 15 JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: Wouldn't someone 16 provide information to the SEC staff when they 17 think something was amiss? MR. McDOWELL: I -- I don't know that 18 19 they would. I mean, I think that's -- that's a 20 bit speculative to think that. But I -- it may 21 -- perhaps in some cases. But I would say also 2.2 that the difference here is between enforcing it 23 pursuant to Section 13 as opposed to Rule 10b-5, 24 and there are greater penalties that the SEC can 25 seek when they go under Rule 10b-5. And when

1 there is an intentionally deceptive disclosure violation, I think it makes good sense to allow 3 the SEC to pursue those additional penalties. 4 JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: Thank you. CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: 5 Justice 6 Barrett? 7 Justice Jackson? Thank you, counsel. 8 Rebuttal? 9 REBUTTAL ARGUMENT OF LINDA T. COBERLY 10 11 ON BEHALF OF THE PETITIONERS 12 MS. COBERLY: Your Honor, I thought it 13 was revealing that counsel is persisting in the 14 argument that any failure to comply with Item 15 303 is actionable because it makes the entire 16 MD&A misleading. Every company has to file 17 10-Ks and 10-Qs, every company, and every 18 company has to comply with Item 303 and provide 19 an MD&A. 20 Item 303 refers to the MD&A as a 21 whole, and its function and purpose is to allow 22 investors to see the company from the 23 perspective of management. So the rule that you 24 heard from both Moab and the government is 25 tantamount to a rule that we don't have to -- a

- 1 plaintiff doesn't have to identify a specific
- 2 statement, a specific misleading statement,
- 3 within the financial statements or the MD&A as
- 4 long as that information was required to be
- 5 disclosed by Item 303.
- 6 That is functionally the pure omission
- 7 theory that the Second Circuit adopted and that
- 8 we object to. It's also tantamount to a
- 9 requirement to -- to a definition of omission
- that includes the words "required to be stated,"
- which appears in Section 11 but conspicuously
- 12 not in Section -- in Rule 10b-5(b).
- 13 The Commission had as its model for
- Rule 10b-5(b) both Section 11 and Section
- 15 17(a)(2), and it didn't choose to follow the
- 16 omission definition in Section -- in Section 11,
- 17 and I think we need to attribute some
- 18 consequence to that.
- 19 Further, counsel referred to a
- 20 hypothetical that said, if you're required to
- 21 list all of your executives and you list most of
- 22 them, but you leave one out, that could be a
- 23 misleading statement. I agree, and that's the
- 24 statement that should be pleaded in the
- complaint, the paragraph, the sentence that

- 1 lists in -- that provides an incomplete list of
- 2 the executives.
- 3 The fact that something was required
- 4 to be disclosed actually doesn't add very much
- 5 to the analysis there. It -- the -- the
- 6 statement would be misleading on its face
- 7 whether or not there was a requirement to
- 8 disclose. So we think that actually supports
- 9 the notion that a specific statement needs to be
- 10 identified.
- 11 Now counsel for Moab argued that they
- did identify specific statements, and that's
- very interesting because the brief in opposition
- 14 doesn't mention them. Neither did the
- 15 paragraphs in the complaint that purported to
- 16 state this theory based on Item 303. Now I
- 17 assume that's because they were relying on the
- 18 Second Circuit's rule in Stratte-McClure that
- 19 said that you don't have to identify specific
- 20 misleading statements when you are pleading
- 21 something that is a violation of Item 303.
- 22 And if you look at those paragraphs in
- the complaint, paragraphs 277 and 278, they do
- 24 not refer to any specific misleading statement,
- any paragraph or sentence where a list was given

- 1 that was incomplete, for example.
- 2 In order for that kind of analysis to
- 3 -- analogy to apply here, there would need to be
- 4 a list that was incomplete, and the plaintiff
- 5 would need to identify it and point to it and
- 6 say that's why -- say why the statement is
- 7 misleading. And then we would have the
- 8 opportunity to address that statement in a
- 9 motion to dismiss.
- Now the theory that you heard counsel
- 11 for Moab articulate here is actually in some
- 12 ways the theory that they pleaded in their
- 13 complaint and that they lost in the district
- 14 court and in the Second Circuit. Their
- 15 complaint went through very specific statements,
- 16 listing them, and it was not only in the
- 17 voluntary statements, as counsel for the
- 18 government referenced.
- The plaintiff in this case followed
- 20 the common practice in district courts across
- 21 the nation, which is to list the specific parts
- of not only the transcripts of calls but the
- 23 10-Qs and the 10-Ks. It went on for pages and
- 24 pages. And they said here's a specific
- statement in the Ks and Qs, and here's why we

- 1 think it's misleading.
- 2 The district court looked at those
- 3 statements and it concluded that no claim had
- 4 been stated, and that's because many of the
- 5 statements were forward-looking, some of them
- 6 were statements of opinion, others in context
- 7 were not misleading by omission. The district
- 8 court dismissed the case based on those specific
- 9 statements.
- 10 The Second Circuit did not revive it,
- 11 with the exception of the two specific
- 12 statements that Justice Sotomayor pointed out,
- which the court found to be pleaded allegedly
- 14 misleading because of a very specific factual
- omission about the content of the base of
- 16 customers.
- 17 So that claim is proceeding. The
- 18 claim the -- the Second Circuit allowed to
- 19 proceed is a far broader claim that allows a --
- 20 a -- a case to proceed based simply on the
- 21 notion that there's an omission of something
- 22 required by Item 303. And we think the Court
- 23 needs to vacate.
- 24 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Thank you,
- 25 counsel.

| 1 | MS. COBERLY: Thank you. |
|----|-------------------------------------|
| 2 | CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: The case is |
| 3 | submitted. |
| 4 | (Whereupon, at 11:09 a.m., the case |
| 5 | was submitted.) |
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