1	IN THE SUPREME COURT OF	THE UNITED STATES
2		x
3	JOSE ANTONIO LOPEZ,	:
4	Petitioner	:
5	v.	: No. 05-547
6	ALBERTO R. GONZALES,	:
7	ATTORNEY GENERAL;	:
8	and	:
9	REYMUNDO TOLEDO-FLORES,	:
10	Petitioner	:
11	v.	: No. 05-7664
12	UNITED STATES.	:
13		x
14		
15	Wash	ington, D.C.
16	Tuesday	, October 3, 2006
17		
18	The above-entitled mat	ter came on for oral
19	argument before the Supreme Court	of the United States at
20	10:00 a.m.	
21	APPEARANCES:	
22	ROBERT A. LONG, JR., ESQ., Washing	ton, DC; on behalf of
23	the Petitioner Lopez.	
24	TIMOTHY CROOKS, ESQ., Assistant Fe	deral Public Defender
25	Houston, Texas; on behalf of	the Petitioner

1		Toledo-Flores.
2	EDWIN	S. KNEEDLER, ESQ., Deputy Solicitor General,
3		Department of Justice, Washington, DC; on
4		behalf of the Respondents.
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1	PROCEEDINGS
2	[10:00 a.m.]
3	CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: We'll hear argument first this
4	morning in Lopez vs. Gonzales and Toledo-Flores vs. United
5	States. Mr. Long.
6	ORAL ARGUMENT OF ROBERT A. LONG, JR.
7	ON BEHALF OF PETITIONER LOPEZ
8	MR. LONG: Mr. Chief Justice, and may it please the Court:
9	A drug trafficking crime is defined in 18 U.S. Code Section
10	924(C) as any felony punishable under the Controlled Substances
11	Act, or two other federal statutes. Punishable is a key term.
12	If that word is omitted, if the remaining phrase, any felony
13	under the Controlled Substances Act clearly refers to felony
14	violations of the Controlled Substances Act, the parties agree
15	that punishable means subject to criminal sanctions.
16	So drug trafficking crimes, under $924(C)$ , is conduct that
17	is subject to being punished under the Controlled Substances
18	Act. State felonies are not themselves punishable under the
19	Controlled Substances Act. It is not a federal crime to violate
20	state law. The defendant's conduct may be punishable under both
21	federal and state law, but a state felony is not a felony
22	punishable under the Controlled Substances Act.
23	JUSTICE KENNEDY: Do you agree that if there were a state
24	conviction for an offense that would have been punishable under
2.5	the federal law there both being felonies that enhancement can

- 1 apply in that instance, and if that does meet the definition.
- 2 MR. LONG: Yes, Justice Kennedy. Our position is, if the
- 3 conduct would violate a felony provision of the Controlled
- 4 Substances Act or one of the other two federal statutes, it then
- is a drug trafficking crime under 18 U.S. Code Section 924(C),
- 6 and therefore, it is an aggravated felony.
- 7 But there are three additional textual indications, in
- 8 addition to simply the felony punishable language that
- 9 misdemeanor offenses under the Controlled Substances Act are not
- drug trafficking crimes under Section 924(C).
- 11 The first one is there are other provisions of Section
- 12 924-E, G, and K, where Congress actually used very similar
- 13 language. It referred to conduct punishable under the
- 14 Controlled Substances Act or the two other statutes or offenses
- under the Controlled Substances Act, or the two other federal
- 16 statutes. But then it added an express reference to state
- offenses, so the implication is that when Congress meant to
- include state offenses, it said so.
- JUSTICE SCALIA: Where are those sections?
- MR. LONG: You can find them, they are in the appendix to
- 21 Lopez's blue brief, Justice Scalia, and the provisions are E, G
- 22 and K. 924 begins on page 3A of the appendix, and E begins on
- , and you can pick up G is on 6A, K is on 7A.
- JUSTICE SCALIA: What are the sections? V?
- MR. LONG: They are subsections E, G and K.

- 1 JUSTICE SCALIA: All right.
- 2 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: That doesn't carry too much weight,
- 3 though, because the provision that -- I'm looking at G3,
- 4 violates any state law relating to any controlled substance can
- 5 be broader than what's punishable under the federal Controlled
- 6 Substances Act.
- 7 MR. LONG: It is a bit broader, Mr. Chief Justice, but if
- 8 you look at all of these provisions, the implication is clearly
- 9 that Congress was referring to state law when it meant to
- include state law. I mean, if you looked at E, for example,
- 11 there it's a parallel construction. It's not broader.
- 12 I think perhaps the government would say, well, we are
- 13 talking about offenses. That's a little different from a
- 14 felony, but offenses is actually a broader term.
- 15 I'll mention an additional statute which was not in the
- appendix, 18 U.S. Code Section 3559(C)(2)(h). This provision,
- 17 it's a similar provision. It defines a serious drug offense as
- 18 an offense that is punishable under the specific sections of the
- 19 Controlled Substances Act, or an offense under state law that
- 20 had the offense been prosecuted in a court of the United States
- 21 would have been punishable under the CSA.
- 22 An additional textual indication is it's agreed, and this
- 23 Court has already said in Gonzales against the United States,
- that a drug trafficking crime under 924(C), under the criminal
- 25 statute, must be a federal crime. 924(C)(1)(a) refers to a

- 1 crime that may be prosecuted in a court of the United States.
- 2 And that clearly refers to a federal crime. The definition
- 3 of drug trafficking crime by its term says it is for purposes of
- 4 924(C), so there is no reason why Congress would have wanted to
- 5 include state felonies in a definition that applies to a federal
- 6 criminal provision that all concede applies only to federal
- 7 predicate offenses. And the government's interpretation would
- 8 significantly broaden Section 924(C) to include federal
- 9 misdemeanors.
- 10 JUSTICE ALITO: In 8 U.S.C. 1101(A)(43)(B), what in your
- 11 view does the first phrase, illicit trafficking in a controlled
- 12 substance add to the reference to a drug trafficking crime
- 13 defined by 924(C)?
- 14 MR. LONG: Justice Alito, in our view, illicit trafficking
- means any offense that has a trafficking element, that is,
- 16 distribution, possession with intent to distribute.
- JUSTICE ALITO: Are there any trafficking offenses that
- 18 would not fall within 924(C) if you define a trafficking offense
- 19 that way?
- 20 MR. LONG: Yes. Most offenses under the Controlled
- 21 Substances Act are trafficking offenses. There are a few that
- 22 are simple possession. There is a date rape drug that I will
- not try to pronounce but it's listed in 21 U.S.C. Section --
- 24 JUSTICE ALITO: There are mere possession offenses that are
- outlined by 924(C) but is it not the case that any, if you

- 1 interpret trafficking to mean trafficking in the way the word
- 2 would be used in ordinary speech that any state trafficking
- 3 offense you can think of would have a corresponding felony
- 4 violation under the Controlled Substances Act, so that if you
- 5 read the statute that way, the initial phrase is superfluous.
- 6 MR. LONG: I believe the government has a footnote in their
- 7 brief where they suggest there are some state trafficking
- 8 offenses that actually do not have a parallel in federal law,
- 9 soliciting I think may be one of them so I think there are in
- 10 fact some. And our position, of course, is that by adding
- 11 illicit trafficking, any trafficking offense state or federal
- 12 whether or not it is punishable under the Controlled Substances
- 13 Act is an aggravated felony.
- 14 JUSTICE ALITO: Let me ask the same question a different
- way. If, since 924(C) includes some mere possession offenses
- 16 and illicit trafficking of a controlled substance included all
- violations of 924(C), doesn't that show that the way Congress is
- 18 used illicit trafficking in a controlled substance is not in the
- 19 sense in which the term is used in ordinary speech but it's much
- 20 broader, so that it can include mere possession offenses.
- MR. LONG: Justice Alito, there is an argument that's
- 22 developed in the brief of the American Bar Association that
- 23 because illicit trafficking is the general category, that all
- the aggravated felonies in this category should have a
- trafficking component and therefore, the felonies punishable

- 1 under the Controlled Substances Act that are simple possession
- 2 offenses should not in fact be included. That is not an
- 3 argument that we have pressed in our brief. We read the phrase
- 4 to say illicit trafficking including any felony punishable under
- 5 the Controlled Substances Act, so I would agree with you to the
- 6 extent that if it is a felony punishable under the Controlled
- 7 Substances Act, Congress has said by definition that it is
- 8 included in the category of illicit trafficking.
- 9 JUSTICE BREYER: That's ambiguous. That's perfectly
- ambiguous. Because as the case as defined, it is a felony and
- is punishable under the Controlled Substances Act.
- 12 MR. LONG: Well, Justice Breyer, it is a misdemeanor
- 13 under --
- Justice Breyer: No, that's right. But it is a felony
- under South Dakota law. And what the statute says, and that's
- 16 the Government's argument, they say any felony punishable under
- 17 the Controlled Substances Act. They don't mean necessarily any
- 18 felony punishable as a felony under the Controlled Substances
- 19 Act.
- 20 MR. LONG: But --
- 21 JUSTICE BREYER: It might mean anything that is a felony
- 22 and it is also punishable; in which case you lose. But in the
- first case you win. So what am I supposed to look to to decide?
- MR. LONG: Well, you could look to the case of Jerome vs.
- 25 United States which was a unanimous decision of this Court in

- 1 which the Court held that just the phrase any felony in the
- 2 federal bankruptcy statute should be interpreted to mean any
- 3 federal felony.
- 4 JUSTICE BREYER: Ah, but you don't mean that, because
- 5 you're prepared to concede -- at least I thought you were until
- 6 your last argument -- you're prepared to concede that if a
- 7 person engages in a crime that is punishable as a felony under
- 8 South Dakota law and it is also punishable as a felony under
- 9 Federal law under 801, et seq, well, that counts.
- MR. LONG: Well, but I mean, the government --
- JUSTICE BREYER: Do you concede that or not?
- MR. LONG: The government accuses us of making that
- 13 concession --
- Justice Breyer: Your answer is that you don't make the
- 15 concession?
- 16 MR. LONG: We really don't. We concede that if the
- 17 Congress, I mean, 924 C, a criminal statute says nothing about
- 18 state law. It says nothing about any conviction under federal
- or state law. It is simply a question of whether the conduct is
- 20 punishable, capable of being punished under the Controlled
- 21 Substances Act.
- 22 JUSTICE KENNEDY: But I thought that was the concession you
- 23 made in response to my question.
- MR. LONG: Well, yes, but I just want to be careful about
- 25 the language in which we make --

- 1 JUSTICE STEVENS: But you make the concession as I
- 2 understand it because it's a federal felony, not because it's a
- 3 state felony, isn't that right?
- 4 MR. LONG: Right.
- 5 JUSTICE BREYER: Precisely.
- 6 JUSTICE GINSBURG: Is it, if this is an ambiguous statute,
- 7 what mileage do you get from Barrett? There is certainly an
- 8 argument that what Congress was trying to do was to codify that
- 9 practice of saying if there is analogous felony, if there is
- analogous crime under state law, that should be included, and
- 11 that made good sense.
- 12 MR. LONG: Yes. If it's ambiguous and you look to the
- 13 legislative history, I think we get considerable mileage from
- 14 Barrett. The Congress was pretty clear that what it was doing
- was codifying Barrett. The Barrett approach which was then
- 16 followed by the BIA for more than a decade was that they would
- 17 count state drug crimes but only if they were felonies under the
- 18 federal statutes, under the Controlled Substances Act. So I
- 19 think we get considerable mileage out of that.
- 20 JUSTICE KENNEDY: You've answered Justice Breyer by citing
- 21 the Jerome case. After Jerome, we decided United States vs.
- 22 Gonzales having to do with the consecutive or concurrent
- 23 sentencing terms. And are those two cases in some tension?
- 24 Gonzales didn't mention Jerome, I noticed that none of the
- 25 briefs mentioned it either. Is there some tension in the cases

- 1 and if so, is this a case where when we write the opinion,
- whatever the outcome, we should talk about that? And if that's
- 3 so, what should we say?
- 4 MR. LONG: I don't see any tension. Gonzales was just
- 5 about consecutive versus concurrent sentences under state versus
- 6 federal law. I mean the Court has applied that principle --
- 7 JUSTICE KENNEDY: But it does, it does seem to limit the
- 8 broad statement in Jerome without mentioning Jerome.
- 9 MR. LONG: Well, but I mean, with respect, Justice Kennedy,
- 10 I don't see how it limits it. There have other cases, Taylor is
- 11 an example, where the court adopted a single definition of
- 12 burglary for purposes of 924 E. That applies the Jerome
- 13 principle; I mean it's a principle that's has been applied in a
- 14 number of this Court's cases.
- 15 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: But has it ever been applied to a
- 16 statute that specifically says that the term aggravated felony
- applies to an offense described in this paragraph, whether in
- 18 violation of federal or state law? It would seem to me to be a
- 19 very express legislative repudiation of the Jerome principle.
- 20 MR. LONG: Well, when we get to that language, Mr. Chief
- 21 Justice, and I do think it helps the analysis to first decide
- 22 what is the definition of a drug trafficking crime under 924 C,
- 23 the criminal statute. Once you've decided that, now when you
- 24 move back to the INA, there is this language, the term
- aggravated felony applies to an offense described in 101 A 43

- 1 whether in violation of federal or state law or the law of a
- 2 foreign country.
- Now, we think that's pretty straightforward. It has to be
- 4 an offense described. So the simple example is money
- 5 laundering. The offense described in 18 USC Section 1956, Money
- 6 Laundering, is an aggravated felony. So a violation of state
- 7 law or the foreign law can be an aggravated felony but only if
- 8 it is the offense described in 1956. If states or a foreign
- 9 government has a broader definition of money laundering, that
- 10 can't count because it's not the offense described. And when
- 11 you turn to a drug trafficking crime, the way that offense is
- described in 101 A 43 is Congress picked up in its entirety and
- 13 without any modification the definition of drug trafficking
- 14 crime in 924 C, a felony punishable under the Controlled
- 15 Substances Act. So if you agree that in the criminal statute
- 16 that means a felony violation of the Controlled Substances Act,
- 17 the offense described is the felonies in the Controlled
- 18 Substances Act, not the felonies in the misdemeanors. And if
- 19 state and state law wants to call a something that's a
- 20 misdemeanor under federal law a felony they can do that, but
- 21 they can't expand the offense described. The offense described,
- 22 the way Congress did that.
- JUSTICE KENNEDY: Are you saying it would also include
- 24 state trafficking offense, because it's described in the word
- 25 trafficking?

- 1 MR. LONG: Yes. I'm focusing on the definition of drug
- 2 trafficking crime. Also there is the illicit trafficking piece
- of this and I should add any state offense that is illicit
- 4 trafficking is going to be an aggravated felony. We recognize
- 5 that. If there are no further questions I would like to reserve
- 6 the balance of my time.
- 7 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Thank you, Mr. Long. Mr. Crooks,
- 8 we'll hear now from you.
- 9 ORAL ARGUMENT OF TIMOTHY CROOKS
- 10 ON BEHALF OF PETITIONER TOLEDO-FLORES
- 11 MR. CROOKS: Mr. Chief Justice and may it please the
- 12 court. I would first like to address the government's
- 13 contention that Mr. Toledo-Flores' appeal is moot. His appeal
- of his sentence is not moot primarily because he is still
- subject to the sentence that is the subject of that appeal.
- 16 Even though Mr. Toledo-Flores was released from prison on April
- 17 21st of this year, and deported to Mexico, he is still subject
- 18 to the supervised release portion of his sentence because
- 19 supervised release is not automatically extinguished by
- deportation.
- 21 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: But there is no supervised release
- of people outside the United States.
- MR. CROOKS: There is no supervision of people outside the
- United States, Mr. Chief Justice, but he is still subject to the
- jurisdiction of the District Court and still subject to the

- 1 conditions of supervised release that are not dependent upon
- 2 supervision.
- 3 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Like what?
- 4 MR. CROOKS: For example, he should not use alcohol, he
- 5 should not associate with persons.
- 6 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: What's going to happen to him if he
- 7 does that?
- 8 MR. CROOKS: If the District Court learns about that he
- 9 could be violated and he could face up to a year more in prison.
- 10 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Has anything like that ever
- 11 happened before to people subject to supervised release who have
- 12 then beem deported? It would be the first time if the District
- 13 Court did that, right?
- 14 MR. CROOKS: There have been instances in the case law
- where people on supervised release have been extradited back
- 16 from foreign countries based on violations of their supervised
- 17 release. But the point is under the statutory scheme
- 18 Mr. Toledo-Flores is still subject to the District Court's
- 19 jurisdiction. The District Court refused jurisdiction to
- 20 modify his supervised release to change conditions or to cut the
- 21 supervised release. If the District Court learns of a violation
- 22 and a violation warrant is filed within the supervised release
- 23 period then the supervised release period is effectively tolled
- 24 and the district court --
- 25 JUSTICE GINSBURG: And that has how many months to run?

- MR. CROOKS: Until April 20th of next year, Your Honor.
- JUSTICE GINSBURG: You said you relied primarily on that
- 3 argument. Do you have another argument?
- 4 MR. CROOKS: Yes, we do, Your Honor. After April 20th, of
- 5 course, in accordance with this Court's decisions in Spencer V.
- 6 Kenya and Wayne V. Williams, the Court has to look for a
- 7 collateral consequence of a then-expired sentence. And in this
- 8 case we point to the possibility that a retrospective reduction
- 9 in the term of imprisonment, which of course will not give
- excess prison time back to Mr. Toledo-Flores, but even to reduce
- 11 the number of the sentence on paper could be a favorable factor
- 12 to him to get a waiver of inadmissibility, should he ever want
- to get a nonimmigrant visa in the future to come visit his U.S.
- 14 citizen children.
- JUSTICE SCALIA: We have a case involving standing which
- 16 says that -- you know, the doctrine of standing is more than an
- exercise in the conceivable. And this seem to me an exercise in
- 18 the conceivable. Nobody thinks your client is really, you know,
- 19 abstaining from tequila down in Mexico because he is on
- 20 supervised release in the United States, or is going -- is going
- 21 to apply having been deported from the country for criminal
- 22 offenses, he is going to apply to come back -- and look, these
- 23 are ingenious exercises in the conceivable. This is just not
- 24 the real world.
- MR. CROOKS: My answer to that, Justice Scalia, is that

- 1 this Court has never said that an appeal of a sentence may
- 2 become moot before that sentence is expired. And in cases like
- 3 Lane v. Williams and Spencer v. Kemna, the sentences were
- 4 completely expired and therefore the Court had to look for
- 5 collateral consequences of the now expired sentence. Here in
- 6 contrast, Mr. Toledo-Flores is still under the sentence, which
- 7 is a direct consequence --
- 8 JUSTICE SCALIA: That depends on whether you consider the
- 9 sentence to be effectively expired once he leaves the country,
- if the sentence is one of supervised release, which is
- 11 impossible once he leaves the country. Supervision being
- 12 impossible, supervised release is not a realistic consequence
- of -- of the prior conviction.
- 14 MR. CROOKS: That argument could be made with respect to a
- person who is in the United States, who is subject to a term of
- 16 probation where the only condition is that he not further
- 17 violate the law. In that instance --
- 18 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: In that instance, action can be
- 19 taken against him if he does further violate the law under the
- terms of probation. The point is that the jurisdiction of the
- 21 probation office or the district court doesn't extend to Mexico.
- 22 MR. CROOKS: That's true. But if we are talking about
- 23 future violations of the law, it is very often the case that
- 24 persons who are deported to Mexico do come back and do have
- 25 their supervised release --

- 1 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Well, you don't want to say that
- 2 your case is not moot because your client is going to violate
- 3 the law again in the future.
- 4 MR. CROOKS: No. Not at all, Your Honor, but I'm saying
- 5 that in the respect that you just talked about for the U.S.
- 6 citizen, it's not any different, that the court retains
- 7 jurisdiction to violate the supervised release, and to revoke it
- 8 and to send him back to prison.
- 9 JUSTICE BREYER: No, but it is different in the respect
- that he would first have to violate the law by entering the
- 11 United States.
- 12 MR. CROOKS: That is true. But in most cases, that is the
- only violation of supervised release for which they are later
- 14 revoked. In that respect, it would be no different than a
- person who violates his probation by driving while intoxicated
- or committing some other legal violation.
- JUSTICE GINSBURG: On collateral consequences, do you
- 18 have -- what is your best authority to say that it would keep
- 19 this case from being moot?
- 20 MR. CROOKS: We cited in our reply brief at page 4, Your
- 21 Honor, the Hamdi case, United States v. Hamdi, from the Second
- 22 Circuit, where the Second Circuit found that the possibility of
- 23 reducing the term of imprisonment even retrospectively could
- 24 have an impact on the ability to get a waiver of inadmissibility
- in the future.

- 1 JUSTICE GINSBURG: Because the length of the sentence
- 2 counts heavily in the Attorney General's assessment, is that
- 3 correct?
- 4 MR. CROOKS: That's correct, Your Honor. In Hamdi, they
- 5 pointed out that the length of the sentence goes to two of the
- 6 three factors that are evaluated by Immigration officials under
- 7 a decision called Matter of Heronka that are used in evaluating
- 8 whether a person should be granted a waiver of inadmissibility
- 9 in the discretion of the Attorney General.
- JUSTICE SCALIA: Do you think there is a realistic
- 11 possibility that this person is going to be readmitted? A
- 12 realistic possibility?
- MR. CROOKS: I do not know, Your Honor, he's --
- 14 JUSTICE SCALIA: Do you think there's a realistic
- possibility that he's going to try to get readmitted, so that he
- 16 can be subjected to really enforced supervised release?
- MR. CROOKS: Well, I think that there is a possibility that
- 18 he could qualify for a nonimmigrant visa at some point.
- JUSTICE SCALIA: Has he applied for such a visa? Has he
- expressed any intention to apply?
- 21 MR. CROOKS: He has not, Your Honor, but he does have U.S.
- 22 citizenship --
- JUSTICE SCALIA: Then it's an exercise in the conceivable,
- 24 it seems to me.
- MR. CROOKS: But this Court has never held that -- it would

- 1 be unfair to hold that an appeal of a sentence can be moot while
- 2 that sentence is still in effect, and when it can still have
- 3 consequences for Mr. Toledo-Flores. And that's what
- 4 distinguishes this case from all the other cases decided by this
- 5 Court is that the sentence itself is the concrete and continuing
- 6 injury that defeats --
- 7 JUSTICE STEVENS: May I ask this question? Supposing we
- 8 say it's not moot, and you prevail, could he be resentenced
- 9 without being present in court?
- MR. CROOKS: Yes, he could, Your Honor. We do resentencing
- 11 in abstention all the time in the Southern District effective --
- in circumstances that are similar.
- JUSTICE BREYER: Have you ever heard of or had a client, or
- 14 heard of a person from Mexico who has been deported because he
- 15 has been involved in drugs, so the government wants to bring him
- 16 back, because he may be a witness, maybe something develops,
- they would like his information.
- 18 MR. CROOKS: That does happen occasionally. People are
- 19 paroled in to testify in court proceedings or to cooperate with
- 20 federal or state.
- 21 JUSTICE BREYER: In other words, they pick up some friends
- of his who are engaged in drugs, the government might decide to
- 23 try to get him back.
- MR. CROOKS: That's correct, Your Honor.
- JUSTICE SCALIA: Is there any indication that that's in the

- works or is this just another conceivable thing?
- 2 MR. CROOKS: There is no indication in the record that that
- 3 is in the works. I do want to point out that --
- 4 JUSTICE BREYER: It's conceivable, I quess, that people
- 5 will break their parole. Often it doesn't happen. Sometimes it
- 6 does. Sometimes they want to get him back. Sometimes they
- 7 don't.
- 8 MR. CROOKS: That's all very true, Justice Breyer. I
- 9 wanted to point out that in Campo Serrano, which we've cited in
- our brief, this Court held that a deported alien's probation
- 11 term was a continuing criminal sentence that saved the case from
- 12 mootness. And the Court pointed to the fact that the deported
- 13 alien in Campo Serrano could, just like Mr. Toledo-Flores, have
- 14 his conditional release revoked, and he could be reimprisoned
- upon a finding that he had violated his conditions.
- 16 And we believe that Campo Serrano points very strongly in
- 17 the direction that this case is not moot. On the merits, I
- 18 would just like to point out that the interpretation that is
- 19 advanced by the petitioners hear promotes the very sort of
- 20 uniformity that this Court has found desirable in cases like
- 21 Jerome v. United States and its progeny, including Taylor v.
- 22 United States, in that the same conduct of conviction will have
- the same immigration and same federal sentencing consequences,
- 24 irrespective of the labels or maximum prison terms affixed by
- 25 the particular states that set out that conduct. And --

- 1 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Thank you, Counsel.
- 2 MR. CROOKS: Thank you.
- 3 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Mr. Kneedler.
- 4 ORAL ARGUMENT OF EDWIN S. KNEEDLER
- 5 ON BEHALF OF RESPONDONDENTS
- 6 MR. KNEEDLER: Mr. Chief Justice, and may it please the
- 7 Court:
- In order for a state drug offense to be an aggravated
- 9 felony under Section 1101(A)(43)(b) of the INA, there are two
- 10 requirements. The underlying conduct must be punishable under
- 11 the Controlled Substances Act or one of the other specified
- 12 federal statutes, and it must be a felony.
- Because the petitioner's underlying conduct here was
- 14 punishable under the Controlled Substances Act, and was a felony
- under state law, they were properly found to have committed
- 16 aggravated felonies. That conclusion follows not just from
- 17 Section 924 C but more important by the fact that what is
- 18 relevant here is what is the meaning of 1101 A 43 which is the
- operative provision which just happens to incorporate the
- definition of drug trafficking crime from 924 C, and there are
- 21 three features of 1101 A 34.
- JUSTICE KENNEDY: You say it just happens.
- MR. KNEEDLER: No. No.
- JUSTICE KENNEDY: It's a statute.
- MR. KNEEDLER: No. No. The statute incorporates it

- 1 in INA, and there are three features of that that we think
- 2 reinforce this conclusion. The first is that the consequences
- 3 of aggravated felony status under the INA determine whether one
- 4 is convicted, not whether they have committed the crime, and
- 5 that's true both with respect to the enhancement of sentences
- 6 under 1326 and the immigration consequences and we think it
- 7 makes particular sense when you are talking about a conviction
- 8 to look at how, to look at how the crime is treated under the
- 9 jurisdiction of conviction.
- 10 \*\*JUSTICE SCALIA: I thought the government has taken the
- 11 position and as far as I know all courts of appeals have bought
- 12 the government's argument that there, you do not need a
- 13 conviction.
- 14 MR. KNEEDLER: You do not need a conviction under Section
- 15 924 if you're bringing a prosecution under Section 924 C.
- 16 JUSTICE SCALIA: Yes.
- MR. KNEEDLER: You do not need a conviction but in order,
- 18 the immigration consequences --
- JUSTICE SCALIA: Yes, but 924 C is incorporated in 1101 A
- 20 43.
- MR. KNEEDLER: Right.
- JUSTICE SCALIA: It's incorporated. So, you
- want us to interpret 924(c) one way for criminal
- 24 convictions -- a criminal sentence -- that is, you don't
- 25 need a conviction in order to get the enhancement -- but

1 another way for --2 MR. KNEEDLER: No. 3 JUSTICE SCALIA: -- for the INA? 4 MR. KNEEDLER: Our point is not that 924(c) 5 requires a conviction when it's in the Immigration Act, 6 it's that the immigration consequences of that 7 incorporation turn on whether someone was convicted of an 8 aggravated felony. 9 JUSTICE SCALIA: Why is --10 MR. KNEEDLER: So --11 JUSTICE SCALIA: -- that? 12 MR. KNEEDLER: Well, the ground that deportation 13 -- that refers to "aggravated felony," refers to someone 14 who has been convicted of an aggravated felony. The 15 ineligibility for cancellation of removal turns on whether 16 someone has been convicted of an aggravated felony, and 17 the enhanced penalties under Section 1326, for someone 18 whose illegal reentry following aggravated felony, is for 19 a conviction for an aggravated felony. So, my point is 20 that, under the INA, the consequences turn on conviction, 21 and it makes sense to look at the jurisdiction of 22 conviction -- here, State law -- to see whether it -- to 23 look at the -- to determine the status of the crime. And 24 since State law determines it to be a felony, that's the 25

1	JUSTICE GINSBURG: Mr. Kneedler
2	MR. KNEEDLER: proper place to look.
3	JUSTICE GINSBURG: if there is room for more
4	than one construction of this statute, it seems to me
5	unseemly, in the immigration context, to say that two
6	people who have committed the identical act, one of them
7	is barred from ever coming back, it doesn't it doesn't
8	have any of the dispensations, and other does, because of
9	the happenstance of the States in which they were
10	convicted. That kind of disuniformity in an area where
11	the Constitution expressly charges Congress with authority
12	to make uniform laws, doesn't that uniform law, in the
13	Constitution, come in the direction of the interpretation
14	that Mr. Long was
15	MR. KNEEDLER: No, we think it does, for several
16	reasons. First, with respect to the constitutional
17	requirement, the uniformity provision applies to uniform
18	rules of naturalization that is, citizenship. This
19	we're not talking about citizenship here, we're talking
20	we're talking about the eligibility of aliens to remain in
21	the country. Beyond that, even where the Uniformity
22	Clause applies and there's, for example, a parallel
23	Uniformity Clause for bankruptcy that's never been
24	interpreted to mean that consequences of certain conduct
25	under State law can have no impact on bankruptcy law, and

- 1 that there can't a variation. The State-law homestead
- 2 exemption under the -- under the bankruptcy laws is a good
- 3 example of that.
- But, going beyond that with respect to the issue
- of uniformity generally, Congress has established uniform
- 6 standards in Section 1101, either in terms of identifying
- 7 the conduct in certain instances; in other instances, by
- 8 identifying the minimum sentence that was actually
- 9 imposed. In this case, we think, with respect to drug-
- trafficking crimes, it -- it's imposed a uniform standard,
- in terms of the length of the sentence; it has to be a
- 12 felony. That's -- that is uniformity.
- But the -- to answer your point more directly,
- it is a principle throughout 1101(a)(43) that one looks to
- 15 State law, not to -- not to a -- some supposed uniform
- standard of Federal law. And, for example, if you --
- several subparagraphs -- and if you'll -- 1101(a)(43) is
- set out at page 12(a) of the appendix to our brief --
- three subparagraphs -- (j), (q), and (t) -- refer to the
- sentence that may be imposed for a violation. Well, when
- 21 you're talking about a State conviction, that's clearly
- referring to the sentence that may be imposed under State
- law for a conviction. Four other subparagraphs -- (f),
- (g), (r), and (s) -- turn on the sentence that was
- 25 actually imposed. That means that, in the case of a State

- 1 crime, as we have here, that State law has to authorize
- the sentence, and that the State Court, applying State
- sentencing principles, has actually imposed a crime of --
- for -- of at least 1 year. So, it is -- it is infused in
- 5 Section 1101(a)(43) that, in fact, you do look to the
- 6 consequences of an offense under State law.
- JUSTICE BREYER: I'm prepared to accept perfect
- 8 ambiguity here, linguistically. And I thought of an
- 9 empirical question, that you may know the answer to, that
- might shed some light.
- Now, going along the way -- and maybe I'm making
- a mistake to point it out, if I am -- but I go to the key
- thing here, which is the word, from 924(c) -- What is a
- "drug-trafficking crime"? A "drug-trafficking crime" is a
- crime, "any felony punishable under the Controlled
- 16 Substances Act." That could mean an act, physically, that
- is a felony under some law, and is also punishable under
- the Controlled Substances Act as a misdemeanor. Felony
- under -- it could pick that up. And it also could mean
- any conduct which is punishable as a felony under the
- 21 Controlled Substances Act. And I could look at those
- words a thousand times and not have a clue which it means.
- So, I thought of an empirical test. This
- statute, 924(c), happens to be a statute that, if you
- engage in a drug-trafficking crime, as defined, and you

- 1 have a gun with you, you get mandatory 5 years. That's
- the point of it. And the Government does all the
- prosecuting. So, in how many cases where a person
- 4 committed a misdemeanor offense, simple possession, and
- 5 had a gun, did the Government insist that they get the 5-
- 6 years minimum? Now, if you're prepared to tell me "a lot
- of 'em," I'm prepared to tell you, the Government has
- 8 consistently interpreted the statute the way you are now.
- 9 But if you're prepared to tell me "zero," I would say I
- would be suspicious of an interpretation that comes along
- 11 now for the first time. And my mind is open on it. I'm
- quite interested in the answer.
- MR. KNEEDLER: To my knowledge, we have not
- brought crime -- prosecutions under 924(c)(1), based on
- the circumstances you posit, but that's --
- JUSTICE BREYER: But if --
- MR. KNEEDLER: -- but I don't think that that
- goes very far with respect to answering this question.
- 19 For one thing, as this Court pointed out in the Gonzales
- decision, the requirement that there be a Federal crime,
- and, therefore, a Federal felony under 924(c)(2), comes
- from the language in 924(c)(1) that says that the crime
- must be subject to prosecution in a court of the United
- States. And this Court, in Gonzales, said it's that
- language that renders the -- renders it a requirement that

- it be a Federal crime. The definition of --
- JUSTICE BREYER: No, no. We both agree. All --
- everybody agrees here. It doesn't have to be a Federal
- 4 crime.
- 5 MR. KNEEDLER: It doesn't have to be --
- 6 JUSTICE BREYER: And --
- 7 MR. KNEEDLER: -- under 1101 --
- JUSTICE BREYER: Correct, it doesn't have --
- 9 MR. KNEEDLER: Right.
- JUSTICE BREYER: -- to be. It could be conduct
- that violates the State law, but -- and punish it under
- 12 the State law, but the conduct involved would have to
- constitute what is a felony under the Controlled Substance
- 14 \_\_
- MR. KNEEDLER: Would have to -- in our view, it
- would have to constitute --
- JUSTICE BREYER: A felony or a misdemeanor.
- MR. KNEEDLER: It would have to be punishable
- 19 under the Controlled Substances --
- JUSTICE BREYER: Yes.
- MR. KNEEDLER: -- Act. But the important point
- 22 here is --
- JUSTICE BREYER: All right. So, I say it's
- suspicious.
- MR. KNEEDLER: But the question is not what

1 924(c)(2) means, standing alone or in the abstract; it's 2 what it means, as incorporated into 1101(a)(43). And --3 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: And so --4 MR. KNEEDLER: -- there --5 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: -- when you get to that, 6 it must give you pause that your analysis is of a term, 7 "drug-trafficking crime" or "illicit trafficking," and 8 your theory leads to the conclusion that simple possession 9 equates with drug trafficking. 10 MR. KNEEDLER: Well, the Petitioner has 11 conceded, as I understand it -- I heard Mr. Long, I think, 12 concede -- that possession offenses can constitute 13 aggravated felonies under this provision, that there is a 14 recidivist possession, there is the possession of the date rape 15 drug, there is possession of five grams or more of cocaine. All 16 of those are specified as being, of being felonies under 940 --17 or 844. But beyond that, it's important to take into account 18 that a lot of state statutes dealing with drugs do not, are not 19 patterned directly after the federal statute and there is no 20 reason why Congress would have insisted that they do so in order 21 for this statute to operate sensibly. And one notable example 22 for instance is when it comes to possession of a substantial 23 amount of drugs that that certainly would create a strong 24 implication that the defendant was engaged in trafficking 25 activities or intended to.

- 1 The federal statute deals with that by making it a felony
- 2 to possess with intent to distribute the drug. A number of
- 3 states don't do that. They instead have graduated possession
- 4 offenses based on the quantity of drugs that the defendant is
- 5 possessing, that above a certain quantity of drugs it would be a
- 6 felony. They are getting at the same problem but they have come
- 7 at it in a different way.
- 8 JUSTICE GINSBURG: And in those cases you can say the
- 9 conduct would constitute a felony under the federal statutes.
- But here if I recall correctly, the amount involved would not
- 11 have qualified for possession with intent to distribute under
- 12 federal law.
- 13 MR. KNEEDLER: Well, it would always be up to the jury to
- 14 decide that. Now, in Mr. Lopez's case, he was initially charged
- 15 with a series of offenses that went beyond the aiding and
- 16 abetting of possession that he ultimately pleaded guilty to, but
- as he testified in his, in his immigration hearing, his aiding
- 18 and abetting of possession was assisting someone in purchasing
- 19 drugs which was itself a trafficking element. And so this shows
- that the way the state crimes are defined or applied are often
- 21 getting at, at what federal law --
- 22 JUSTICE STEVENS: Yes. But we have a case we are assuming
- 23 for our purposes we just have possession. I understand the
- facts of this case. And I wanted to ask, I have two questions,
- 25 Mr. Kneedler. Now one of them, the second one I ask is you were

- 1 going to mention three different points, one about conviction.
- 2 You had two other points you didn't get to on, what those were.
- 3 But before that it seems to me that when you put the whole
- 4 statute, all the different statutory provisions together, you
- 5 really boil down and focus on 924 C 2 and the words for purpose
- of this subsection the term trafficking crime means any felony
- 7 punishable under the Controlled Substances Act. And if the word
- 8 federal had been inserted before the word felony in the statute,
- 9 would that not make the statute perfectly clear.
- MR. KNEEDLER: It probably would, but I think it's
- interesting that the version of 924 C that was in effect prior
- 12 to 1988 said exactly that. It said felony violation of federal
- 13 law.
- 14 JUSTICE STEVENS: So it was, the intention of the change
- 15 was -- merely --
- 16 MR. KNEEDLER: But Congress did change it in the 1988 act.
- 17 But it did it, and this is significant, it did it in connection
- 18 with two changes in the immigration law. One is the enactment
- of the definition of aggravated felony, which as I have
- 20 explained the definition of aggravated felony looks to state law
- 21 in a number of respects in terms of the severity of the offense
- or the punishment actually imposed. That was one change.
- The other change that was made in the 1988 act was to amend
- 24 Section 1326 with respect to illegal reentries and it did that
- by enhancing the penalty for conviction of any felony other than

- 1 an aggravated felony and an aggravated felony. And certainly
- 2 the conviction of any felony includes state law offenses in
- 3 this --
- 4 JUSTICE STEVENS: Again, Mr. Kneedler, focusing again on
- 5 that specific language, you're saying that in effect that that
- 6 phrase means any state or federal felony punishable under the
- 7 federal statutes.
- 8 MR. KNEEDLER: Yes. It says any felony and that is our --
- 9 what --
- JUSTICE STEVENS: And is it ever true that a state felony
- is punishable under federal statute?
- MR. KNEEDLER: The conduct is punishable.
- JUSTICE STEVENS: Do you have any instances where we have
- 14 said a state felony is punishable under a federal statute?
- 15 MR. KNEEDLER: I think not used in that sense but I think
- 16 it's important, it's important to look at the language as a
- whole. It does not say punishable as a felony under.
- 18 JUSTICE KENNEDY: The key to the case is how we read that
- 19 one sentence.
- MR. KNEEDLER: Well, no, I agree that it might be the key
- 21 to the case is in 1101 A 43, because if you look at the
- 22 structure of 1102 A 43 and this gets to the question you said,
- 23 you mentioned that I had three reasons. One is that under the
- 24 INA, the conviction consequences turn on the conviction of an
- aggravated felony. That only makes sense to look at the

- 1 jurisdiction of conviction to determine the nature of the crime
- whether it's a felony.
- 3 JUSTICE SCALIA: Well, but you don't look to the
- 4 jurisdiction. You're telling me require a conviction? I
- 5 thought you told me you don't require a conviction.
- 6 MR. KNEEDLER: No, under 924 C you don't. But under the,
- 7 if your bringing a federal prosecution under 924 C the term
- 8 aggravated felony has no role in that determination. It is a
- 9 separate federal crime. We are talking about here the
- 10 consequences of, the consequences of being an aggravated felon
- 11 under 1101 A 43 are, where does the definition of aggravated
- 12 felony apply? It applies under the INA if someone has been
- convicted of an aggravated felony. It only, you're only subject
- 14 to deportation for aggravated felony if you've been convicted,
- you're ineligible for cancellation or removal or you're subject
- 16 to sentence enhancement. All those things follow on conviction
- and we think it only makes sense to look to the jurisdiction of
- 18 conviction.
- JUSTICE SOUTER: All right, Mr. Kneedler, assuming that as
- I understand it, the answer you just gave, your second point, as
- 21 well as the point that you and Justice Stevens were debating,
- 22 turns in your view on a definition or a reading of the statute
- 23 that would work this way: that if under state law the act were
- 24 a felony, but under federal law, the action was merely a
- 25 misdemeanor, it would still for purposes of this definition be

- 1 an aggravated felony.
- 2 MR. KNEEDLER: That's correct.
- JUSTICE SOUTER: That, isn't that very strange that
- 4 Congress would have wanted a reading of the statute that would
- 5 turn its definition of a misdemeanor crime into an aggravated
- 6 felony for purposes of the immigration laws?
- 7 MR. KNEEDLER: I don't think so at all. Well, for one
- 8 thing, as I've mentioned the structure of the act as a whole, of
- 9 1101 A 43 and the numerous subsections, look to how the crime,
- what the authorized punishment was or look to how the person was
- 11 actually sentenced under state law, not under federal law.
- 12 JUSTICE SOUTER: And I also -- go ahead.
- 13 MR. KNEEDLER: I also haven't mentioned the explicit
- 14 provision that one of the other justices mentioned earlier, I
- think the Chief Justice, that the penultimate sentence of 1101 A
- 16 43 says that something, an offense constitutes an aggravated
- felony whether in violation of federal or state law.
- 18 JUSTICE SOUTER: Well, I know it says that. But that
- doesn't necessarily take you any further that saying that if the
- words of the statute refer to something that could be a state
- 21 law felony under the penultimate sentence it will count. It
- 22 does not necessarily answer the question that we have and that
- 23 is whether a particular reference in the statute is a reference
- to a federal felony or a state felony. So the penultimate
- sentence has work to do and in fact we can see the work being

- done in the very definition of drug trafficking but it doesn't
- 2 necessarily lead to the conclusion that you draw from it.
- 3 MR. KNEEDLER: Well, we think, we think it's quite, we
- 4 think it's a strong confirmation of the pattern in 1101 A 43
- 5 that the statute looks to what happened in state court and the
- 6 state punishment that was authorized there and the express
- 7 mention of that --
- 8 JUSTICE SOUTER: Even when the consequence in effect is to
- 9 turn for, or turn the gravity of the federal misdemeanor into
- 10 the gravity of felony that --
- 11 MR. KNEEDLER: But the federal Controlled Substance --
- JUSTICE SOUTER: -- happens to be a state felony.
- 13 MR. KNEEDLER: The federal Controlled Substances Act does
- 14 not occupy the field of drug control in the country other than
- any other federal crime occupies that field.
- JUSTICE SOUTER: No I realize that. But of we are asking
- 17 what is important in the mind of Congress for purposes of the
- immigration law, one would suppose that the most obvious
- 19 touchstone of importance is the way federal law deals with it.
- I.e., in the case of a crime whether the federal law calls it a
- 21 felony or federal law calls it a misdemeanor. And on your
- 22 reading when federal law calls it a misdemeanor if state law
- 23 calls it a felony it becomes a federal felony for the
- 24 immigration law. And that's what seems to me very odd given the
- 25 tension between the --

- MR. KNEEDLER: Right. And this is not the only place where
- 2 that consequence can rise. There are cases involving what's a
- 3 crime of violence which under subparagraph G is another
- 4 aggravated felony that the crime of violence is defined in 18
- 5 U.S.C. Section 16, subsection B of that, this court considered
- 6 that statute in Macau requires that the offense be a felony
- 7 which creates a serious risk of physical harm. The courts have
- 8 looked to the state law of conviction to determine whether
- 9 something is a felony.
- JUSTICE SOUTER: May I just ask one more.
- 11 JUSTICE SCALIA: Sure.
- 12 JUSTICE SOUTER: Where there is no other answer the problem
- 13 here is that state law and federal law are at odds in
- 14 determining the gravity of the offense. The federal law on my
- 15 hypothesis would say it is minor. It's just a misdemeanor. The
- 16 state says no, it is a felony. It seems to me very odd given
- 17 the tension between the state and federal classifications to say
- 18 that for federal purposes the state classification is going to
- 19 trump the federal classification and that's a different
- 20 situation from the one you posit.
- MR. KNEEDLER: Well, if I could just mention one other
- 22 example under the theft offense category in subsection, I think
- 23 it's F, where a theft offense is deemed to be an aggravated
- 24 felony of a sentence of at least one year was imposed, there are
- 25 misdemeanor offenses there that as a matter of federal law can

- 1 be a misdemeanor for certain types of theft offenses and yet
- there are other as aggravated felonies.
- JUSTICE SCALIA: Mr. Kneedler, can I ask you about your
- 4 assertion that you looked to the state of conviction. What do
- you mean by that for purposes of 1101? Does that mean if you're
- 6 convicted in state court of a misdemeanor and even though that
- 7 action would be a federal felony, it's not an aggravated felony?
- 8 MR. KNEEDLER: That is our position, yes. Because the
- 9 requirement --
- JUSTICE SCALIA: So it's a double inconsistency, not only
- 11 do you treat state, state actions that are, that are minimal --
- 12 I'm sorry, where the state treats it more seriously than the
- 13 Federal Government, not only do you follow the state, but where
- 14 the state treats it less leniently than the Federal Government,
- you also follow the state; is that right?
- MR. KNEEDLER: Well, yes.
- JUSTICE SCALIA: So to look to the state of conviction,
- 18 who? That's the purposes of the immigration law.
- 19 MR. KNEEDLER: Of the immigration law --
- 20 JUSTICE SCALIA: Do you do the same for purposes of the
- 21 felony enhancement provision?
- MR. KNEEDLER: 924 C, no you don't because the aggravated
- 23 felony question has no, has no, the aggravated felony term has
- no operative significance under 924.
- 25 JUSTICE SCALIA: That seems to me very strange. You would

- look to the, you would look to the state law for purposes of the
- 2 immigration section but for purposes of 924 C what would you
- 3 look to, either one? Either one?
- 4 MR. KNEEDLER: 924 --
- 5 JUSTICE SCALIA: For 924 whichever one would make it a
- 6 felony.
- 7 MR. KNEEDLER: No, under 924(C)(1), this Court in the
- 8 Gonzalez case said it that it has to be a federal crime, but not
- 9 because of the definition in 924(C)(2).
- JUSTICE SCALIA: If it's a felony under either one for
- 11 purposes of 924(C), you lose, right?
- MR. KNEEDLER: I don't think I --
- 13 JUSTICE SCALIA: If the act is either a state felony or a
- 14 federal felony, you lose? I mean, the defendant gets the
- enhanced sentence, right, under 924(C)?
- MR. KNEEDLER: No.
- 17 JUSTICE SCALIA: No.
- 18 MR. KNEEDLER: Under 924(C), the cases that have been
- 19 brought have all been situations where it is a federal offense.
- 20 But because -- not because of the language in 924(C)(2), but
- 21 because of the language in 924(C)(1).
- JUSTICE SCALIA: My question is a simple one. If -- it
- 23 seems to me what you're saying is, if it is either a felony
- 24 under federal law or a felony under state law, you get the
- enhanced sentence under 924(C), isn't that right?

- MR. KNEEDLER: My understanding, the way 924(C)(1) has
- 2 operated is that if it is a misdemeanor under federal law, but
- 3 maybe it would be a federal felony, it would not be -- it would
- 4 not give rise to the enhancement because it's not --
- 5 JUSTICE SCALIA: That's what the whole argument is about,
- 6 whether it has to be a felony under federal law. You're telling
- 7 me if it's a misdemeanor under federal law that you don't get
- 8 the enhanced sentence?
- 9 MR. KNEEDLER: But not under 924(C)(2), the definitional --
- JUSTICE SCALIA: You thoroughly confused me.
- 11 JUSTICE BREYER: 924(C) says that if you have a gun and you
- 12 have a drug trafficking crime, five years. Okay, now we go to
- 13 two, what's a drug trafficking crime. It means any felony
- 14 punishable under the Controlled Substances Act.
- Now, in your definition, we first look to see whether
- 16 simple possession is punishable under the Controlled Substances
- 17 Act. It sure is. It sure it, it's punishable as a misdemeanor.
- 18 So it meets that. Under your definition, is it a felony, yep,
- 19 it's a felony in South Dakota. Okay, so now we have a
- 20 prosecution in federal court in South Dakota and your reading of
- 21 the statute, that guy should get a bump up of five years.
- MR. KNEEDLER: No. That is not our reading of the statute.
- The only thing that is incorporated into 1101(A)(43) is the
- definition in (C)(2), not (C)(1), the definition in (C)(2) which
- 25 says felony punishable under the Controlled Substances Act.

- 1 That is what that's plugged into 1101(A)(43), along with all of
- the other provisions in 1101(A)(43) you look to state law in the
- 3 case of a state offense, the state of conviction, the
- 4 jurisdiction of conviction, to determine the nature of the
- 5 crime.
- 6 JUSTICE BREYER: But you still have to know whether that
- 7 word felony in (2) means any felony punishable as a felony under
- 8 the Controlled Substances Act.
- 9 MR. KNEEDLER: Right. And -- and a number --
- JUSTICE BREYER: You have to know the answer to that.
- 11 MR. KNEEDLER: And a number of courts of appeals that have
- 12 looked at this in the sentencing context over the years have
- 13 concluded that the absence of that language is very significant
- and the presence of the language that says any felony is also
- 15 significant.
- JUSTICE SCALIA: Never mind sentencing. Let's get back to
- 17 the immigration. If I understand what you're now saying, if
- 18 you're convicted in state court of an action that is a federal
- 19 felony, but it's just a state misdemeanor, right, you look to
- 20 the state of conviction. And it would be a misdemeanor and the
- 21 immigration provisions would not take effect, is that right?
- MR. KNEEDLER: Yes. That's not true.
- JUSTICE SCALIA: It would be --
- MR. KNEEDLER: That's not --- only true under this
- 25 provision of 1101(A)(43). The other -- the other provisions, F

- 1 and G and J and Q and T, that I mentioned that looked to the
- 2 sentence that may be imposed under state law or that was
- 3 actually imposed would likewise render someone in that situation
- 4 that was convicted of only a misdemeanor in state court, even
- 5 though it might be a felony under federal law, they would not
- 6 be, they would not be convicted of an aggravated felony because
- of the way Congress chose to write 1101(A)(43).
- JUSTICE KENNEDY: Is that a reasonable -- let's say the
- 9 statute is ambiguous, and you have convinced us there is no
- 10 constitutional requirement of uniformity, is it reasonable to
- 11 assume that Congress would want the different consequences to
- depend on the state of conviction.
- MR. KNEEDLER: I think it is.
- 14 JUSTICE KENNEDY: Is there anything in the legislative
- 15 history SUGGESTING that?
- 16 MR. KNEEDLER: As I say, I think it's on face of the
- 17 statute.
- 18 JUSTICE GINSBURG: Otherwise, if what Congress was trying
- 19 to do was to codify that practice of looking for an analogous
- 20 crime under state law, that's -- that seems to me at least what
- 21 Congress is trying do.
- 22 MR. KNEEDLER: The legislative history of the amendment in
- 23 1990 does not discuss the aspect of Barrett that went to the
- 24 comparison to decide what -- in what circumstances there would
- 25 be an analogous federal crime. It was clear that it wanted to

- 1 ratify the result that state crimes are covered.
- 2 But we think that that was evident from the 1988 amendments
- 3 to -- that both enacted the definition of aggravated felony,
- 4 revised the definition of drug trafficking crimes to delete the
- 5 requirement that it be a federal felony. That was deleted in
- 6 1988 and enhanced sentences under 1326 clearly by reference to
- 7 whether someone was convicted of a state felony without any
- 8 general federal --
- 9 JUSTICE GINSBURG: May I just switch gears for a moment
- because your time is almost up, and we do have to address the
- 11 mootness problem in Toledo-Flores.
- MR. KNEEDLER: In Toledo-Flores.
- JUSTICE GINSBURG: Is the sentencing wrong in U.S. v. Hamdi
- 14 because it seems to me that U.S. v. Hamdi is on all fours with
- 15 respect to mootness.
- MR. KNEEDLER: Yes. I think it's wrong under the Court's
- decision in Spencer V. Kemna. Discretionary judgment that may
- 18 be made by someone else there is too speculative to constitute a
- 19 real case or controversy. And that's what I understand
- Toledo-Flores to be arguing, is if you applied for discretionary
- 21 relief in the future it might, it might not because the sentence
- 22 might be reduced slightly.
- I should point out that in the district court,
- 24 Toledo-Flores conceded if you didn't get eight level sentence
- 25 enhancement, he would go four level sentencing enhancement,

- 1 because this is a felony in the guidelines that would mean 24 to
- 2 30 months.
- 3 He would then have gotten 24 months under that sentencing
- 4 guideline which at the very -- he did here. And the term of
- 5 supervised release was mandatory. And a one-year term of
- 6 supervised release was standard. You would have gotten the same
- 7 time of supervised relief if you got four-level enhancement
- 8 rather than the eight-level enhancement.
- 9 I also think that it's far-fetched, given the fact that
- 10 Toledo-Flores had more than 12 entries in the United States and
- 11 various state offenses, that the determination whether the
- 12 Attorney General would actually grant the special release would
- 13 turn in marginal discretion on the sentence of that particular
- 14 case.
- 15 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Thank you, Mr. Kneedler. Mr. Long,
- 16 you have four minutes remaining.
- 17 REBUTTAL ARGUMENT OF ROBERT A. LONG, JR.
- 18 ON BEHALF OF PETITIONER LOPEZ
- 19 MR. LONG: Thank you, Mr. Chief Justice.
- In answer to Justice Breyer's question, Mr. Kneedler said
- 21 that a federal misdemeanor is a federal drug trafficking crime
- 22 under Section 924(C) if the state punishes it as a felony. He
- 23 said, well, the federal government never prosecutes federal
- 24 misdemeanors under Section 924(C). He said the reason is
- because of 924(C)(1)(a), and the language there is it has to be

- 1 an offense for which the person may be prosecuted in a court of
- 2 the United States, but that language could be posited in the
- 3 court of the United States for a misdemeanor.
- 4 So the government is making an argument that to my
- 5 knowledge has never been accepted by any court, has not ever
- 6 been advanced by any government in a criminal context, and it
- 7 would significantly expand Section 924(C) and numerous other
- 8 criminal statutes that we cited in our brief that used the same
- 9 definition of drug trafficking crime.
- Mr. Kneedler also said that the related felony provisions
- in Section 1101(A)(43) referred to state law, but I think it's
- 12 just the opposite. There are two kinds. There are 21 of them.
- 13 Many of them say an offense described in 18 U.S. Code. That's
- 14 really what we are doing with one of those here, so it really
- goes to federal law to include an offense of aggravated felony.
- But clearly federal law is defining the offense. There are
- other categories such as murder and theft that are defined in
- 18 general terms, but the government's position, as I understand
- 19 it, is, again, you use a generic uniform definition. You don't
- 20 pick any definition that the states may have, but the court just
- 21 granted --
- 22 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: I thought you just conceded that a
- state offense could constitute illicit trafficking.
- MR. LONG: Yes, Mr. Chief Justice, and I think this would
- 25 be clear. And I think this is consistent with the government's

- 1 -- in other cases illicit trafficking, it would be some
- 2 commercial element would probably be the definition the court
- 3 hasn't decided. States can define it more broadly. But the
- 4 actual definition just gives the definition of burglary.
- 5 JUSTICE SOUTER: You think a federal definition of a theft
- 6 offense.
- 7 MR. LONG: In the Taylor case for burglary the court has a
- 8 case you sort of pick a generic position. It may not come from
- 9 a federal statute.
- JUSTICE ALITO: There is no revisions that would fall
- 11 within that, that theft offense.
- 12 MR. LONG: Well again the provision we are dealing with
- 13 looks to federal law the Controlled Substances Act and two other
- 14 statutes. My understanding of the government's position and
- it's consistent with this court's cases in Taylor is that even
- 16 when it's a generic offense you would still have a uniform
- definition and that is certainly consistent with the principle
- 18 of uniformity that applies both in criminal law and in
- immigration law. And if there is any ambiguity at the end of
- the day, ambiguities are supposed to be resolved in favor of
- 21 uniformity, uniform federal law, uniform federal criminal law
- 22 and uniform immigration law, effectively what the government is
- arguing is that states can banish noncitizens and can do so by
- 24 enacting drug laws deciding to make a simple possession offense
- 25 a felony. That's a decision that a state would make almost

Τ	certainly for reasons that have little or nothing to do with
2	immigration and it's highly unlikely that Congress would have
3	left that determination to states. Our uniformity of aggravated
4	felonies is a condition for citizenship. If you're convicted of
5	an aggravated felony you may not become a U.S. citizen. You are
6	foreclosed from establishing good moral character so in fact
7	citizenship is at stake here in the uniformity clause is in
8	play. If there are no further questions, thank you.
9	CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Thank you, Mr. Long, the case is
10	submitted.
11	[Whereupon, at 11:04 a.m., the case in the
12	above-entitled matter was submitted.]
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