SUPREME COURT OF THE UNITED STATES

IN IH	E SUPREME COU	IRI OF I	HE ONTI	ED STALES
WASHINGTON S	TATE)	
DEPARTMENT O	F LICENSING,)	
	Petitioner,)	
	v.) No	. 16-1498
COUGAR DEN,	INC.,)	
	Respondent.)	

Pages: 1 through 78

Place: Washington, D.C.

Date: October 30, 2018

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1	IN THE SUPREME COURT OF THE UN	NITED STATES
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3	WASHINGTON STATE)
4	DEPARTMENT OF LICENSING,)
5	Petitioner,)
6	v.) No. 16-1498
7	COUGAR DEN, INC.,)
8	Respondent.)
9		
10	Washington, D.C.	
11	Tuesday, October 30), 2018
12		
13	The above-entitled r	matter came on for
14	oral argument before the Supreme	e Court of the
15	United States at 10:04 a.m.	
16		
17	APPEARANCES:	
18	NOAH PURCELL, Washington State S	Solicitor General,
19	Olympia, Washington; on beha	alf of the Petitioner
20	ANN O'CONNELL, Assistant to the	Solicitor General,
21	Department of Justice, Wash	ington, D.C.; for
22	the United States, as amicus	s curiae, supporting
23	the Petitioner.	
24	ADAM G. UNIKOWSKY, ESQ., Washing	gton, D.C.; on behalf
25	of the Respondent.	

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1	PROCEEDINGS
2	(10:04 a.m.)
3	CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: We'll hear
4	argument first this morning in Case 16-1498,
5	Washington State Department of Licensing versus
6	Cougar Den.
7	Mr. Purcell.
8	ORAL ARGUMENT OF NOAH PURCELL
9	ON BEHALF OF THE PETITIONER
10	MR. PURCELL: Mr. Chief Justice, and
11	may it please the Court:
12	Washington's fuel tax taxes fuel, not
13	highway travel. The tax is non-discriminatory
14	and its incidence is off-reservation, so it
15	applies to Cougar Den unless preempted by
16	express federal law. Nothing in the Yakama
17	treaty preempts this tax. The treaty
18	guarantees the tribe the right in common with
19	others to travel by public highway, but it says
20	nothing that would preempt a generally
21	applicable tax on goods like this one.
22	The contract
23	JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: I'm sorry.
24	MR. PURCELL: I'm sorry, Your Honor.
25	.TIISTICE SOTOMAVOP: Could von tell me

- 1 could you tax the tribe's buying of the fuel in
- 2 another state?
- 3 MR. PURCELL: Well, the treaty --
- 4 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: They take the
- 5 truck, they leave your state, they go to
- 6 another state, they buy the fuel. Can you tax
- 7 them in the buying of that fuel?
- 8 MR. PURCELL: The other state could
- 9 certainly tax them on that, Your Honor.
- 10 They've conceded that. Whether we could tax
- 11 them as a matter of state law, I don't think
- 12 so, but -- but --
- JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: All right.
- MR. PURCELL: -- but not -- certainly
- 15 not under the treaty.
- JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: So the question
- is, in my mind, whether the travel rights to
- 18 freely use the highways permit you to tax them
- 19 for an incidence carrying the fuel from another
- 20 state on a highway through your state, correct?
- Now the court below called this an importation
- 22 tax.
- MR. PURCELL: Right.
- JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: You've been
- 25 resisting that, and you call it a use tax.

1 MR. PURCELL: Right. 2 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: But, if it's an 3 importation tax, it's not equally applied. 4 There are wholesalers of all kind who can 5 import without paying the tax, correct? 6 MR. PURCELL: Not if they lack a 7 license like Cougar Den, Your Honor. An unlicensed entity owes the tax when they bring 8 the fuel into the state regardless of how they 9 do so, and licensed entities that buy fuel in 10 11 the state pay the tax immediately within the 12 state. So this tax applies to fuel purchased 13 in Washington or outside of Washington --14 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: What is the -- the 15 license? Is it a way to get them not to pay? 16 Who pays for the fuel then once you're 17 licensed? You're a wholesaler, you bring it 18 in, I'm assuming by vessel or by pipeline. 19 MR. PURCELL: Well, then -- sorry. 20 Sorry, Your Honor. 21 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: Then the person 2.2 who buys the fuel uses it, correct? MR. PURCELL: Well, if you're bringing 23 it into a terminal or a refinery, then -- then 24 25 the tax is due when it's picked up at a

- 1 terminal or a refinery. Who actually pays the
- 2 tax is a complicated question depending on
- 3 whether the entity that owns the fuel in the
- 4 tank is a supplier or not.
- 5 But that's when the tax is due.
- 6 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: If we accept that
- 7 the travel provision entitled this tribe to
- 8 travel with goods back and forth to a market
- 9 without a tax, without a license, just like in
- 10 the fishing rights case, then what gives you
- 11 the right to charge them within the state?
- 12 Meaning they're traveling free of tax, free of
- license, they go to the reservation, you can't
- 14 tax them on the reservation.
- MR. PURCELL: Right.
- 16 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: So I'm not quite
- 17 sure what permits you to tax them at all.
- MR. PURCELL: Well, there's two
- 19 crucial --
- JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: If you can't tax
- 21 them when they picked up the fuel.
- 22 MR. PURCELL: There's two crucial
- 23 points about that, Your Honor. First of all,
- 24 Cougar Den concedes that we could tax a
- 25 purchase or sale that a Yakama member makes

- 1 outside of the reservation, even though that
- 2 would not have been taxed in 1855. What's
- 3 doing the work --
- 4 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: At the market.
- 5 MR. PURCELL: At the market, yes, but
- 6 -- but --
- JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: But you've just
- 8 admitted that at the market where they pick
- 9 this up, you couldn't tax them.
- MR. PURCELL: Well, the point is, Your
- 11 Honor, the treaty did not preserve everything
- exactly as it was in 1855. The key point here
- is that this Court has adopted a clear rule
- that as to off-reservation taxes,
- off-reservation state taxes can be applied to
- 16 tribes if -- if they're non-discriminatory and
- 17 -- and if the incidence is off-reservation.
- 18 And, here, that's the case, so --
- 19 JUSTICE KAGAN: Mr. Purcell --
- JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: Well, that --
- 21 JUSTICE KAGAN: -- there are a lot of
- issues in this case, but just to make it easier
- for me, could I ask you to assume a couple of
- them and then could -- we could focus on one?
- MR. PURCELL: Sure.

1 JUSTICE KAGAN: So you know one issue 2 is does the right to travel include the right to travel with goods, and I'm going to ask you 3 4 to just assume that it does. 5 MR. PURCELL: Okay. 6 JUSTICE KAGAN: And then another 7 question is, does this treaty preempt generally applicable taxes? And I'm -- that's -- you've 8 9 been talking a lot about that. And I'm just going to ask you to assume that it does. 10 11 MR. PURCELL: Okay. 12 JUSTICE KAGAN: In other words, you 13 know, if -- if -- if you have a toll on a road, 14 for example, the fact that it's generally 15 applicable, you still can't apply it to members 16 of the Yakama Nation. I'm just going to ask 17 you --MR. PURCELL: Okay. 18 19 JUSTICE KAGAN: -- to assume that, 20 okay? 21 MR. PURCELL: Uh-huh. 2.2 JUSTICE KAGAN: So, if both of those 23 things are true, then it seems to me we come -to me, the hardest issue, which is how do we 24

look at this tax? Do we look at it as a tax

- 1 that is preventing the Yakama from doing
- 2 exactly what they bargained for in this treaty;
- 3 in other words, it -- you know, it's not
- 4 preventing but burdening the Yakama from
- 5 traveling on roads with goods, or you keep on
- 6 saying, well, no, because it's not targeted at
- 7 that. It's not directed at that. It's a more
- 8 broad tax on the possession of fuel.
- 9 And I guess what I want to ask you is
- 10 why that matters. I mean, it -- it does seem
- 11 to me that from the Yakama's point of view, and
- they're, after all, the people who entered into
- the treaty, from the Yakama's point of view,
- this tax is burdening exactly what they
- 15 bargained to get, which is the ability to
- transport their goods without any burdens,
- 17 without a tax.
- 18 MR. PURCELL: No, Your Honor. This
- 19 tax applies to the fuel itself regardless of
- whether or how it's transported.
- JUSTICE KAGAN: I know -- maybe I'm
- 22 not making myself clear. You're sort of
- 23 saying, well, the tax applies in other
- 24 circumstances to people who aren't transporting
- 25 fuel. But I'm saying, from the Yakama's point

1 of view, they're transporting goods on the 2 road, exactly as the treaty says they can, and 3 why do they care if you apply your tax in other 4 circumstances as well? Why should they care? 5 Why does it matter what the full scope of the tax is if, from the Yakama's point of view, the 6 7 tax burdens exactly what they got as a result of its treaty? 8 9 MR. PURCELL: Because, Your Honor, this Court has never said that a person or a 10 11 company can make an activity exempt from state 12 law, an activity like fuel possession, by engaging in that activity while also engaged in 13 14 a treaty-protected activity like travel. 15 If that's the rule, then a Yakama 16 member could possess illegal firearms or 17 illegal drugs or diseased apples in their car, 18 to just gave a range of examples, and bring 19 them into the state and say your laws against 20 these things violate my right to travel by public highway. And that cannot possibly be 21 2.2 the right approach, or else it would preempt 23 any sort of state --JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: But even in the 24

fishing rights case, which you don't see as --

- 1 as comparable, but others might argue it is,
- 2 the state can regulate for public interest
- 3 conservation points.
- 4 The Indian tribe has conceded that you
- 5 can regulate for public interest on a highway.
- 6 That wasn't superseded by the treaty. But what
- 7 they bargained for was to -- to carry goods
- 8 back and forth from the market without a
- 9 burden. That was their bargain. Just as,
- 10 under the fishing rights treaty, they can go
- and collect fish without paying a tax or
- 12 getting a license for that fish.
- MR. PURCELL: Your Honor, in Tulee,
- 14 this Court said that the -- the state could not
- 15 tax the very right at issue, the right to fish.
- 16 But, here, that is not at all what's happening.
- 17 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: Or impose a toll
- 18 to do it.
- MR. PURCELL: Well, and the Court has
- 20 never said that the state can generally
- 21 regulate a fishing right in the public
- interest. It's only said that the state can
- 23 regulate for the conservation of fish. So --
- JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: Well, that's the
- 25 public interest.

MR. PURCELL: Well, but -- but -- but 1 2 Cougar Den is seeking to expand that to say the 3 State can do anything that would protect public 4 safety. And this Court has never said that 5 about the fishing right. So that's sort of a convenient addition that they've conceded, but 6 7 it's not found anywhere in the treaty text. And so they're -- they're essentially asking 8 this Court to -- to find kind of reasonable 9 regulations that are okay without any basis in 10 11 the treaty. 12 JUSTICE GORSUCH: Well, counsel, is 13 that so? I mean, I thought the interpretation of the phrase "in common with" by the district 14 15 court in Yakama Indian Nation was that it 16 allowed the state to impose certain regulations 17 that facilitate both native and non-native 18 travel along the same highways. So --19 MR. PURCELL: That's --20 JUSTICE GORSUCH: -- safety regulations, speed limits, would facilitate 21 2.2 travel in common. 23 MR. PURCELL: That's what the district court held in Yakama Indian Nation. 24 25 JUSTICE GORSUCH: Right.

MR. PURCELL: Of course, that wouldn't 1 2 cover something like, for example, regulating firearm possession or diseased apple 3 4 transportation. 5 JUSTICE GORSUCH: But it does regulate 6 the questions that we've been talking about in 7 terms of it does provide some safety regulations, for example, right? 8 MR. PURCELL: Well, presumably, that 9 would allow, for example, a speed limit but not 10 any other sort of regulation on the goods 11 12 themselves, which is what the state's trying to 13 do here. 14 I mean, what's odd under Cougar Den's 15 theory is that the state --16 JUSTICE GORSUCH: That's all, under 17 the Yakama Indian Nation holding, that's all 18 that the treaty would allow you to do. 19 And I guess I'm wondering in the first 20 instance why -- why you're not estopped from arguing a different position today? 21 2.2 MR. PURCELL: For a number of reasons, Your Honor. First of all, this Court has 23

always treated treaty interpretation as a

question of law for this Court to decide de

24

- 1 novo, and that's how this Court has always
- 2 approached treaty interpretation.
- 3 It has never considered itself bound
- 4 by legal conclusions reached by a lower court
- 5 even in the same case.
- 6 JUSTICE GORSUCH: Well, I -- I don't
- 7 feel bound. I wonder if you are, though.
- 8 (Laughter.)
- 9 MR. PURCELL: No, Your Honor. We
- 10 explained in our reply brief as a matter of
- 11 state law the argument is just completely wrong
- that we're bound by any of those statements in
- 13 the ALJ's ruling or the superior court ruling.
- But, more importantly, this Court has
- 15 never considered itself bound by what are
- 16 really legal conclusions in a district court
- 17 opinion.
- 18 And Yakama Indian Nation dealt with a
- very narrow issue of a fee as a precondition to
- 20 use the highway. That is not what we have
- 21 here.
- 22 Cougar Den and the Yakama Nation are
- free to use the highway and not pay this tax.
- 24 What they can't do is possess fuel and bring it
- 25 into the state or purchase it in the state

- 1 without paying the tax.
- 2 JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: But they were told
- 3 at the time of the treaty that you could go on
- 4 the roads to take your things to market, as if
- 5 you would be treated off-reservation, as if you
- 6 were still on the reservation.
- 7 MR. PURCELL: The first part they were
- 8 told, Your Honor. The second part they were
- 9 not. That is a misquote that the other side is
- 10 using from the -- the --
- JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: But the effect --
- 12 the effect was that, in taking your goods to
- market, which was the promise, in exchange for
- 14 a huge area of land, an area of land the size
- of the State of Maryland that was given up by
- 16 the tribe, that you could take your goods to
- 17 market.
- 18 And this burdens, as Justice Kagan
- 19 said, this burdens substantially their ability
- 20 to take goods to market.
- 21 MR. PURCELL: Your Honor, the Yakama
- remain entirely free to take goods to market.
- 23 And Cougar Den has conceded that the state can
- 24 tax their -- their trading of goods
- off-reservation, as they must. So the idea

- 1 that the treaty preserved things exactly as
- 2 they were in 1855, and the Yakama trading
- 3 practices, is just impractical.
- 4 JUSTICE KAGAN: But what the treaty
- 5 seems to present -- prevent is the state from
- 6 taxing either travel or, as Justice Kavanaugh
- 7 says, travel with goods.
- 8 Isn't that exactly what they got in
- 9 exchange for their land?
- MR. PURCELL: No, Your Honor, the best
- 11 reading of the treaty is that it does not
- 12 preempt non-discriminatory taxes that apply
- 13 equally to everyone. The treaty says it
- 14 guarantees a right in common with others to
- 15 travel by public highway.
- 16 And none of the reasons the Court
- deviated from that ordinary meaning in the
- 18 fishing cases apply here.
- 19 But even if the Court decided that it
- 20 guaranteed the Yakama some right beyond what it
- 21 guaranteed others in terms of traveling without
- 22 paying a fee for traveling, what we have here
- 23 is not a fee for traveling. The -- the -- this
- fee does not turn, this tax does not turn in
- any way on use of the highway.

1 It's paid on fuel purchased in state, 2 fuel purchased out of state. If Cougar Den brought this fuel into Washington and 3 4 immediately put it into a tank on the other 5 side of the state line, they would still owe 6 the tax even if they never traveled any 7 farther. JUSTICE KAGAN: Well, the -- the tax 8 legislation taxes a wide range of activities. 9 One is it taxes fuel that's removed in the 10 state from a refinery, but the one that's being 11 12 applied here is that it taxes motor vehicle 13 fuel entering into this state. 14 So entering into, this is a pretty 15 standard importation tax, which is to say that 16 it's taxing the travel of goods into the state, 17 which, again, seems to be what the Yakama got as a result of this treaty: the ability to 18 19 take goods to market and to take goods from 20 market, regardless where that market is. 21 MR. PURCELL: But, again, Your Honor, 2.2 the -- the fuel -- the tax applies to fuel 23 purchased inside Washington and outside of 24 Washington and brought into Washington by any 25 means. It would apply if they were bringing it

- 1 in by private toll road. It is not a tax on
- 2 using public highways.
- 3 And -- and the happenstance of where
- 4 the state line is was not certainly a factor in
- 5 the 1855 treaty negotiations.
- 6 What -- what Cougar Den is essentially
- 7 arguing --
- 8 JUSTICE KAGAN: Do you -- do you
- 9 contest -- I mean, if you said what is Cougar
- 10 Den doing, how would you describe what Cougar
- 11 Den is doing, what its activity is? Because
- 12 the way I would describe Cougar Den's activity
- is that it's bringing goods from market.
- MR. PURCELL: Well, two things about
- 15 that, Your Honor. First of all, the treaty
- 16 does not --
- 17 JUSTICE KAGAN: I just really asked
- 18 how would you describe Cougar Den's activity.
- 19 MR. PURCELL: Sorry. I would describe
- 20 it as possessing fuel in Washington, Your
- 21 Honor. That is why they paid a tax.
- 22 Keep in mind, Cougar Den is not even
- 23 doing the transferring here.
- 24 JUSTICE KAGAN: You would describe it
- as possessing fuel as opposed to transporting

- 1 fuel?
- 2 MR. PURCELL: They owe the tax because
- 3 they possess fuel. They are not transporting
- 4 the fuel in light of the facts of this case.
- 5 JUSTICE KAGAN: So if Jack says I'm
- 6 taking my pigs to market, and somebody says,
- 7 what are you doing, Jack? He says, well, I'm
- 8 taking my pigs to market. No, I think you're
- 9 possessing your pigs, Jack.
- MR. PURCELL: Well, if the state had a
- 11 rule that diseased pigs could not leave a
- 12 certain area, under the -- under Crudenser, the
- 13 state could not apply that rule.
- 14 And -- and so this is a regulation of
- the goods, a tax to the goods, not a tax on the
- 16 travel. That's the crucial point here.
- 17 That's -- that's one of the crucial
- 18 points. The other crucial point is, under the
- 19 best reading of the treaty, this is a
- 20 non-discriminatory tax that applies to
- 21 everyone. And so it would not be preempted
- 22 even if it were.
- JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: That -- that
- 24 reading of "in common with" was rejected by the
- 25 Court in the fishing cases.

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MR. PURCELL: It was, Your Honor, but
 1
 2
      none of the reasons the Court gave in those
 3
      cases apply here. So the Court really gave
 4
      three cases.
 5
               And in the Tulee case, the Court said
 6
      it was despite the phrase "in common with
 7
      others" that it was going to read the fishing
      right as creating a greater right for the
 8
      tribes than for non-Indians. And there were
 9
      sort of historical, textual, and practical
10
11
      reasons.
12
               And the practical reason, first and
13
      foremost, was an equal right would have left no
      fish for the Indians to take because they're so
14
15
      vastly outnumbered by non-Indians.
16
               And that's just not the case here.
17
      Allowing equal access to the highway --
18
               JUSTICE GORSUCH: Well, we -- counsel,
      we normally read a -- a -- a phrase to bear the
19
20
      same meaning in all of its applications. And
      we wouldn't normally read the term "in common
21
2.2
      with" to mean one thing when it's fishing and
23
      another thing when it's highways, would we?
24
      That would be kind of an extraordinary --
25
               MR. PURCELL: Fair --
```

1 JUSTICE GORSUCH: -- reading of a 2 statutory term. MR. PURCELL: Fair enough, Your Honor, 3 4 but in Tulee, this Court said it was sort of 5 deviating from the normal meaning. 6 JUSTICE GORSUCH: What -- what -- what 7 do you think about that, though? MR. PURCELL: I think you had good 8 reasons for deviating from the normal meaning 9 in Tulee that do not apply here. And so I 10 think the Court should give the phrase its 11 12 normal meaning. JUSTICE GORSUCH: But having adopted 13 14 one reading of it, why wouldn't we be 15 consistent? 16 MR. PURCELL: Because none of the 17 reasons you gave in those cases apply here --18 JUSTICE GORSUCH: Okay. MR. PURCELL: -- the textual reasons 19 20 and practical. 21 JUSTICE GORSUCH: The next -- next 2.2 concern would be then what do we do about the fact that this is also how the district court 23 concluded it after very careful reading in 24 25 Yakama Indian Nation about the history of the

1	treaty
2	MR. PURCELL: Well, it's the
3	JUSTICE GORSUCH: and looking at
4	the original understanding of both parties and
5	its original meaning at that time, and that the
6	Indians understood it not to mean a common
7	regulation applicable to everybody, but, again,
8	that they would be able to do the same things
9	that they've always done just with non-native
10	persons present?
11	MR. PURCELL: The meaning of the
12	treaty, of course, is a question of law for
13	this Court to decide de novo. And if the Court
14	doesn't want to reach that issue, of course,
15	you can simply say that whatever the treaty
16	means about travel, this is a tax on goods.
17	I'd like to reserve the remainder of
18	my time for rebuttal if I may.
19	CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Thank you,
20	counsel. Not not so fast.
21	(Laughter.)
22	CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: I did that
23	once too.
24	Ms. O'Connell.

1	ORAL ARGUMENT OF ANN O'CONNELL,
2	FOR THE UNITED STATES, AS AMICUS CURIAE,
3	SUPPORTING THE PETITIONER
4	MS. O'CONNELL: Mr. Chief Justice, and
5	may it please the Court:
6	Article III of the Yakama treaty does
7	not exempt tribal members from paying
8	Washington's motor fuel tax.
9	The treaty protects the right in
10	common with others to travel upon the public
11	highways. It does not give tribal members
12	immunity from excise taxes on goods that
13	they're carrying inside their trucks inside
14	that they're brought outside of the reservation
15	or obtained outside of the reservation for
16	trade or for any other purpose.
17	Respondent acknowledges that tribal
18	members are not exempt from the economic
19	framework for trading goods that has developed
20	outside of the reservation.
21	If Respondent had obtained this fuel
22	from a refinery in Washington, it could be
23	taxed for that transaction.
24	If Oregon had charged a tax on this
25	transaction, the Respondent would have to pay

- 1 it. Washington's tax is an -- is an economic
- 2 burden on the fuel that's being carried in the
- 3 truck. It's not a restriction on their ability
- 4 to use the highway in common with others.
- JUSTICE BREYER: Assume I think you're
- 6 mostly right, but what about the fact that it's
- 7 gasoline? I mean, can -- can the state impose
- 8 tolls on -- on the highway? Say they really
- 9 want people to use mass transit. We're going
- 10 to have a \$1,000 toll.
- MS. O'CONNELL: I don't --
- 12 JUSTICE BREYER: Can they do that?
- MS. O'CONNELL: The state -- well, the
- state could impose a \$1,000 toll if it was
- 15 doing that for everybody. I think that --
- 16 JUSTICE BREYER: Yes, doing it for
- 17 everybody. Now, by the way, nobody, or hardly
- 18 anyone, can use the highways, including the
- 19 tribe.
- 20 MS. O'CONNELL: I think that -- that
- 21 hypothetical is quite unlikely simply because
- 22 the --
- JUSTICE BREYER: I believe that they
- 24 are unlikely to impose it. That's why it's a
- 25 hypothetical.

1 MS. O'CONNELL: There's -- there's an 2 antidiscrimination rule built into --3 JUSTICE BREYER: No, no, everyone has 4 to pay the thousand. 5 MS. O'CONNELL: Right. So I guess --JUSTICE BREYER: Including the tribe. 6 7 And then, if you were going to say they can do that, I really do find it difficult to 8 9 distinguish this issue. 10 MS. O'CONNELL: There -- there could be some restrictions, Justice Breyer, like --11 12 JUSTICE BREYER: There could? 13 MS. O'CONNELL: -- if you imposed a, 14 you know, a million dollar tax on everybody's 15 use --16 JUSTICE BREYER: No, no, it's \$1,000, 17 and, of course, as soon as you agree to that, I'm going to say it's only 50, and then I'm 18 19 going to say it's 10. 20 MS. O'CONNELL: Right. 21 JUSTICE BREYER: And then, when I'm 22 driving up, I would have thought they can't do 23 that, but if they can't do that, this is 24 gasoline. And maybe all those Oregon and --25 and California and other places and everybody

- 1 pays it, that's true, but if you pay a high
- 2 gasoline tax, it's pretty hard to travel.
- And they're supposed to be able to
- 4 travel on the highway, just as if you get all
- 5 the salmon out of the river, it's pretty hard
- 6 to fish.
- 7 MS. O'CONNELL: I suppose there could
- 8 be circumstances where the restriction that's
- 9 placed on travel on the highway are so severe
- 10 that it undermines --
- 11 JUSTICE BREYER: In Oregon, you say
- 12 that they have -- they cannot take steps to
- 13 remove significant numbers of salmon from the
- 14 steam -- stream, and they cannot take steps
- 15 sufficient to significantly limit the right to
- 16 travel on the highway. Why these people? Do
- 17 what you want for the other citizens.
- MS. O'CONNELL: So I think there's a
- 19 couple of distinctions that we need to -- to
- 20 draw between what you're hypothesizing and what
- 21 is happening here. The first is that, yes,
- 22 there could be circumstances in which the
- restriction that's imposed is so severe that it
- 24 burdens the actual ability or right to travel
- on the highway. But there's --

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1
               JUSTICE BREYER: How much is the tax?
 2
               MS. O'CONNELL: Excuse me?
 3
               JUSTICE BREYER: How much is the tax?
 4
               MS. O'CONNELL: Well, we don't think
 5
      that -- I mean, I -- I --
 6
               JUSTICE BREYER: I know you don't
 7
      think it's relevant, but if I happen to think
      it was relevant and asked the question how much
 8
      is the tax, what would the answer be?
 9
10
               MS. O'CONNELL: I -- I don't have a --
11
               JUSTICE BREYER: You don't know?
12
               MS. O'CONNELL: -- a number to give
13
            I think the, you know, district court
14
      could determine what -- what was too burdensome
15
      and actually --
16
               JUSTICE BREYER: But they didn't make
17
      any of these arguments.
18
               MS. O'CONNELL: No, that's correct.
19
      And I think the other thing is, even if you
20
      thought that the treaty preempted things like
21
      fees to use the highway, such as a toll or a
2.2
      licensing fee that was issue -- at issue in
23
      Cree, so you adopted the Ninth Circuit's rule
24
      of what kinds of things are preempted, it still
25
      wouldn't preempt this tax, which isn't a fee to
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- 1 use the highway; it's a tax, an economic burden
- 2 on the goods that are being carried in the
- 3 truck.
- 4 The -- the text of Article III secures
- 5 to the -- the Yakamas only the right in common
- 6 with others to travel upon the public highways.
- 7 And that right, by its plain terms, doesn't
- 8 protect activities other than highway travel.
- 9 There's nothing in the negotiating history
- 10 either that indicates --
- JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: Well, there's one
- 12 central part, which is they traveled the
- 13 highways for free. They weren't burdened by
- 14 economic -- by economic manner in traveling the
- 15 highway.
- So we go back to Justice Breyer's
- 17 question, which is whether it's 50 cents or a
- million dollars, you're saying if it's 50 cents
- or 5 or 10, presumably, it's okay, you can
- 20 burden them with that. You just can't burden
- 21 them -- and I presume you would say every other
- 22 citizen -- by imposing a million dollars? Is
- 23 that your point?
- MS. O'CONNELL: Well, I don't -- I
- 25 don't think the state is ever going to impose a

- 1 tax that is so burdensome that nobody can
- 2 travel on the highways, but our -- yes, we
- 3 believe that --
- 4 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: So you're going
- 5 back to the point that Justice Gorsuch ended
- 6 with, which is that you're reading "in common
- 7 with all others" differently in this context
- 8 than in the fishing rights context?
- 9 MS. O'CONNELL: Yes. And I think the
- 10 reason that it's different in this context than
- in the fishing context is because of the right
- 12 at issue. I think there are textual
- differences and historical differences between
- 14 those two clauses of the treaty.
- 15 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: Well, the one
- difference that you can't get around is they
- didn't sign a treaty and give away that much
- 18 real estate to get nothing in return, to be
- 19 treated exactly like every other citizen in
- traveling the highway.
- 21 MS. O'CONNELL: No, I think one -- one
- 22 thing that is really -- really important about
- 23 this right to travel provision, the right to
- 24 use the public highways, is that the -- the
- 25 tribe was receiving an assurance from Governor

- 1 Stevens that if they gave up the rest of the
- 2 land in exchange for the reservation, they
- 3 would still be able to leave the reservation,
- 4 they would still be able to travel throughout
- 5 the area, and that they would be able to do so
- 6 without discrimination against them, without
- 7 taxes imposed or without rules imposed that
- 8 were unique to Indians.
- 9 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: You just said it:
- 10 without taxes imposed.
- MS. O'CONNELL: Without taxes imposed
- that were not applied to everybody else.
- JUSTICE GORSUCH: What kind of --
- 14 JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: It doesn't say
- 15 that.
- 16 JUSTICE GORSUCH: -- what kind of
- 17 promise is that? Given the constitutional
- 18 rights to travel and equal protection, is that
- 19 a -- is that a -- is that an illusory promise,
- the promise you've just described?
- MS. O'CONNELL: No. I mean, I think
- 22 at the time it was -- it was just a reassurance
- 23 to the tribe that Governor Stevens was giving.
- 24 There are examples cited on page 38 of the
- 25 Petitioner's brief where, at the time, in the

- 1 mid-1800s, there were restrictions on tribal
- 2 members leaving reservations. There are
- 3 instances where people would report back to
- 4 Congress that the -- the Indian agent on the
- 5 reservation would issue a pass and tell the
- 6 tribal members how long they could be gone from
- 7 the reservation and for what purposes.
- 8 JUSTICE GORSUCH: Do you think any of
- 9 that would hold up today?
- MS. O'CONNELL: No.
- JUSTICE GORSUCH: Okay.
- MS. O'CONNELL: Certainly not. But,
- 13 at the time, it was a reassurance from Governor
- 14 Stevens that the tribe member --
- JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: The -- the purpose
- 16 wasn't -- the purpose wasn't just to leave the
- 17 reservation, though. The purpose, as I
- 18 understand it, was to leave for the -- for
- 19 trade. And if you so burden the trade, that
- 20 seems inconsistent with the purpose.
- MS. O'CONNELL: I -- I don't think,
- 22 Justice Kavanaugh, that -- that Respondent is
- even arguing that the trade can't be burdened
- 24 once they leave the reservation. They
- 25 acknowledge that the transaction, if they

- 1 purchased the fuel in Washington, could be
- 2 taxed, that it could be taxed if -- if Oregon
- 3 were to impose a tax here. So it's not that
- 4 they're exempt from the economic framework for
- 5 trade that's going on outside the reservation.
- If we could go back to the fishing
- 7 cases for just a moment --
- 8 JUSTICE KAGAN: But I think what is at
- 9 issue is the transport of goods to and from the
- 10 market, which is what it seems the Yakama is
- 11 engaging in here.
- MS. O'CONNELL: That's true. I mean,
- they are transporting goods from market and
- 14 they are -- when they come back from Oregon
- 15 with the fuel, but that's not -- the treaty
- just protects the right in common with others
- 17 to use the public highways.
- 18 JUSTICE KAGAN: But if -- if I
- 19 disagree with you on that -- and I hadn't
- 20 understood that you were taking that position
- 21 in your brief -- but if I disagree with you on
- 22 that and I use -- and I understand "in common
- with the way Tulee understood "in common"
- 24 with, " then it seems, well, there they are,
- 25 they're doing what this treaty says that the --

- 1 that this -- they're doing exactly what this
- 2 treaty protects, which is transporting goods to
- 3 and from market.
- 4 MS. O'CONNELL: I think that, under
- 5 that view, Justice Kagan, the -- the most you
- 6 could get is to the Ninth Circuit's line where
- 7 they've said that the state can't impose a fee
- 8 like a licensing fee or a toll or something
- 9 like that to use the highway, even if it's
- 10 being imposed across the board.
- 11 What's happening here is a different
- type of restriction. It's an economic burden
- on the goods that are being transported to and
- 14 from market that the Respondent concedes it
- 15 could be taxed for at the -- at the purchase
- 16 point.
- 17 JUSTICE KAGAN: But not because of the
- 18 -- but not at the movement point, not -- not
- 19 when it -- the -- the goods go from one state
- 20 to another on the highway.
- MS. O'CONNELL: Right. But the -- the
- 22 distinction between those things, I think, is
- 23 pretty thin. Oregon could have -- could have
- 24 taxed this transaction. It doesn't because
- 25 Oregon, like Washington, doesn't place a tax on

- 1 fuel that's headed out of the state. They
- 2 assume that it will be taxed once it gets to
- 3 the next state.
- 4 JUSTICE KAGAN: Well, it might be
- 5 thin, but shouldn't we say that the state has
- 6 to do things the right way, which is to say the
- 7 state has to do things without violating the
- 8 treaty. And if the state has another way to do
- 9 it, go for it.
- 10 MS. O'CONNELL: I think the -- the
- 11 state has tried many different ways to impose
- 12 this tax that have been struck down by various
- 13 courts. What the state has done here is
- 14 basically followed this Court's advice in
- Wagnon, which is to move the incidence of the
- 16 tax up the supply chain to off the reservation.
- 17 Now --
- 18 JUSTICE KAGAN: But what the state has
- done is to tax exactly the activity that's
- 20 protected under the treaty, which is the --
- 21 which is the transportation of goods to and
- 22 from market.
- MS. O'CONNELL: I -- I don't think so.
- 24 There's -- I think there's a distinction
- 25 between -- if you think that -- that the -- the

- 1 tribe wouldn't be subject to a uniform tax if
- 2 it taxed the very thing that they were trying
- 3 to preserve, which was the ability to use the
- 4 public highways, then that would just -- it
- 5 would just mean that you couldn't charge them a
- 6 fee to use the highway or something like that,
- 7 not that you couldn't tax the goods that are in
- 8 the truck. I think one -- thank you.
- 9 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Thank you,
- 10 counsel.
- 11 Mr. Unikowsky.
- 12 ORAL ARGUMENT OF ADAM G. UNIKOWSKY
- ON BEHALF OF THE RESPONDENT
- MR. UNIKOWSKY: Mr. Chief Justice, and
- 15 may it please the Court:
- The Yakama treaty preempts the
- 17 application of the fuel tax to Respondent for
- 18 two reasons. The first reason is that, when
- 19 Respondent transports fuel, it exercises the
- 20 right to travel secured by the Yakama treaty.
- 21 As such, it has right -- the right to do that
- 22 without incurring a tax obligation, regardless
- of whether this tax is styled as one on
- 24 possession or transportation.
- 25 Second, even if this case turned on

- 1 what the tax is on, this really is a tax on
- 2 transportation because that's what the statute
- 3 says and that's how the state court construed
- 4 it as a matter of state law.
- 5 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: So if -- if
- 6 this -- these were apples coming into the State
- 7 of Washington and there was a fee to -- but
- 8 they inspected the apples to make sure they
- 9 weren't diseased and the people who owned the
- 10 apples had to pay that fee, is that problematic
- if it wasn't motor fuel, oil, but just apples,
- 12 a fee to inspect the apples, prevent disease
- from spreading to other Washington apples?
- MR. UNIKOWSKY: Your Honor, we
- 15 wouldn't object to the inspection at all. We
- 16 -- we might object to the fee. But the
- inspection is appropriate.
- 18 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Well, that's
- 19 kind of the -- well, in other words, everybody
- 20 else bringing apples in has to pay the fee to
- inspect the apples, but the tribe doesn't, even
- 22 though -- or the -- the fee can't be assessed
- 23 if the tribe is transporting the apples?
- MR. UNIKOWSKY: Yeah, I think that if
- 25 all the tribe is doing is transporting the

- 1 apples, we absolutely agree the -- the apples
- 2 can be inspected. We agree that, for
- 3 regulatory purposes, that's fine.
- 4 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: But -- but --
- 5 but no fee can be assessed if the tribe is
- 6 transporting the apples?
- 7 MR. UNIKOWSKY: Yeah, I think that a
- 8 fee that goes into the -- you know, the general
- 9 treasury of the state cannot -- cannot be
- assessed on the tribe when they're exercising
- 11 the treaty right. But --
- 12 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Even if the
- apples don't belong to the tribe? They're
- bringing them to somebody -- you know, they're
- just bringing them down the road?
- 16 MR. UNIKOWSKY: Well, it would depend
- on who has to pay the tax. So they're -- in
- 18 this particular tax, if you just appoint an
- 19 agent to transport it for you, you, the
- importer who appoints the agent, pays the tax.
- 21 So I think that if the tax was levied on the
- 22 person who -- so if the taxpayer was the person
- who owned the apples and they just hired an
- 24 Indian and a truck to bring it --
- 25 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Yeah.

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1
               MR. UNIKOWSKY: -- but the state --
 2
      yeah, then I think that the --
 3
               CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Isn't that
 4
      what's going on here? I thought --
 5
               MR. UNIKOWSKY: No.
 6
               CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: -- it was the
 7
      owner -- I thought it was the owner of the fuel
      that is taxed, not the --
 8
 9
               MR. UNIKOWSKY: Yes, that's Cougar
10
      Den.
11
               CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: -- not the
12
      transporter?
13
               MR. UNIKOWSKY: Yes, that's Cougar
14
      Den, Your Honor. That's Respondent. The
15
      Indian owns the fuel.
16
               CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: So it's not
      who owns -- it -- it's not a -- a separation
17
18
      between the goods and the transport, right?
19
               MR. UNIKOWSKY: No, Your Honor, what
20
      the statute does is it says it's the
      transportation that's taxed, but the tax is
21
2.2
      imposed on the owner.
23
               So, if you hire someone in a truck to
24
      transport something for you, it makes perfect
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sense that the state wouldn't want the trucker

- 1 to have to pay this tax which will probably
- 2 exceed the fee he's getting for transporting
- 3 it.
- 4 So the state -- the statute imputes
- 5 the act of transportation to the owner of the
- fuel. That's in the definition of motor
- 7 vehicle fuel importer.
- 8 And so, in this case, Cougar Den
- 9 transports the fuel both via an agent, which is
- 10 a contractor, and also it uses its own trucks.
- 11 There's a declaration in the record that says
- 12 that sometimes it uses its own trucks,
- 13 sometimes it hires a contractor, but Cougar Den
- 14 --
- 15 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: So -- so, if
- it's the owner, why do you -- why does it
- interfere with a right to travel?
- MR. UNIKOWSKY: Well, it's -- it's the
- 19 -- it's the owner's transportation either
- 20 itself or via an agent. The states never
- 21 distinguish, by the way, the transportation via
- 22 Cougar Den's own trucks and via its agent.
- 23 That's just the argument the state did not make
- 24 in its brief.
- And, you know, so, ultimately, it's

- 1 the owner that pays the tax. And the idea is,
- 2 if you hire a trucker, that's not different
- 3 from just using the trucks that you own.
- 4 The point is the sine qua non of
- 5 taxation under the statute is the
- 6 transportation of goods to market. And whether
- 7 you do it with your own truck or you hire
- 8 someone else and a truck, it doesn't change the
- 9 fact that you need to pay the tax.
- 10 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Does it make a
- 11 difference -- I think this is the argument on
- 12 the other side -- that it's assessed per
- gallon, in other words, that suggests as
- opposed to per mile that you're carrying it?
- MR. UNIKOWSKY: No.
- 16 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: It suggests
- 17 that it's -- it's based on possession if it's
- 18 based on right there at that moment how much do
- 19 you have. They don't care where it's going.
- 20 They don't care if you use it all up right at
- 21 the border or -- or whatever. It has nothing
- 22 to do with -- with travel. It's purely on the
- 23 good itself.
- 24 MR. UNIKOWSKY: Well, I don't agree --
- 25 I don't think that you can just say a tax is on

- 1 a good. I think this Court has always required
- 2 an analysis of the precise activity engaged in
- 3 by the taxpayer.
- 4 So the Wagnon case, the argument that
- 5 the tribe made in that case was that really
- 6 this is a tax on the fuel that's sold at
- 7 retail.
- 8 And the test this Court adopted was
- 9 you've got to have this focused analysis of
- 10 what is the taxpayer doing that triggers the
- 11 application of the tax.
- 12 And in this case, the thing that the
- 13 taxpayer is doing is importing the fuel. By
- its terms, the statute says that the taxable
- event is the entry of fuel into the state, so
- 16 the traveling with the fuel.
- 17 And the taxpayer under the statute is
- 18 defined as the importer. And so I think that
- 19 just has to be a tax on importation.
- 20 And, incidentally, it's not even just
- 21 that it's the importer that pays the tax. The
- 22 tax actually distinguishes for licensed
- 23 importers between people who use highways and
- 24 people who don't use highways. And --
- 25 JUSTICE ALITO: I'm sorry. What if

- 1 the -- I mean, what if the statute said the
- 2 first entity to possess the fuel in the state
- 3 must pay the tax?
- 4 MR. UNIKOWSKY: So we would still say
- 5 that's preempted, although our legal analysis
- 6 might differ a little bit.
- 7 JUSTICE ALITO: Why would that be
- 8 preempted?
- 9 MR. UNIKOWSKY: Well, first of all, I
- 10 think that, as applied to fuel that comes in
- 11 from out of state, really, first possession
- just is inherently importation.
- In other words, you can't be the first
- 14 possessor of fuel, at least that originates out
- of state, unless you're the one hauling it into
- 16 the state.
- 17 So, in that context, I just think
- 18 first possession kind of means it.
- 19 JUSTICE ALITO: Well, I thought you
- just said we have to focus on what the statute
- 21 says is being taxed, so if the statute says
- 22 expressly possession is being taxed, that
- doesn't matter.
- MR. UNIKOWSKY: Okay. So we have two
- arguments in our brief, a broader argument and

- 1 a narrower argument. The broader argument
- 2 actually doesn't depend on what the statute
- 3 says. It depends on what the tribal member is
- 4 doing.
- 5 So, if the tribal member can show that
- 6 the only thing that they're doing is exercising
- 7 a treaty right, which is to say transporting
- 8 goods to market, then they don't pay the tax,
- 9 no matter how the statute is styled.
- 10 JUSTICE ALITO: Well, then that's very
- 11 artificial and you get into this metaphysical
- 12 question of what they're doing. They're doing
- many things. When they're -- you know, when
- 14 the farmer is bringing his pigs to market, he's
- doing many things. He's traveling with the
- 16 pigs. He's possessing the pigs. He's
- 17 breathing. He may be doing all kinds of other
- 18 things.
- MR. UNIKOWSKY: Well, yeah, but I
- 20 think that things that are inherent in
- 21 transportation, like breathing while you're
- 22 transporting it, I think would be sort of
- 23 wrapped up in transportation.
- I mean, on the facts of this case,
- 25 what we have here is an Indian distributor

- 1 transporting fuel to an Indian reservation to
- 2 be sold to an Indian retailer on the
- 3 reservation and potentially to Indian
- 4 customers.
- 5 Really, the only connection that
- 6 Cougar Den has off-reservation is that it's
- 7 hauling this fuel.
- 8 JUSTICE BREYER: The -- the thing I
- 9 don't understand is that many states have laws
- 10 against bringing in diseased apples, all kinds
- of things. All right? So, if they don't bring
- it in, you can't transport it at all.
- So, if your point is that they have a
- 14 right to transport things, I would have thought
- 15 you would have said a ban was worse because --
- 16 but you don't. You say a ban is okay, but a
- 17 tax isn't. That's your argument?
- MR. UNIKOWSKY: Yes, that is our
- 19 argument, Your Honor.
- 20 JUSTICE BREYER: Okay. Now, if you
- 21 tax what they do in this state, is they have a
- 22 tax that says if you buy goods to use in your
- 23 house somewhere else, you have to -- you have
- 24 to pay a use tax when you bring it into our
- 25 state.

1 And then another state says we're 2 going to legalize marijuana, but we tax it 3 pretty high, and another state says we have --4 you know, I can go on and on and on. And 5 you're saying, well, this tribe, it doesn't 6 have to pay the tax on marijuana. It doesn't 7 have to pay the ordinary sales tax, which take 8 the form of a use tax in the state. And I could probably think of 10 other examples. 9 10 And, my goodness, I say why -- why 11 Is that your position, what I said? not? 12 MR. UNIKOWSKY: No, it is not our 13 position. I'm not saying that at all. 14 JUSTICE BREYER: Good. Now, fine. 15 I'm glad it isn't because my own position I had 16 a good argument against. 17 (Laughter.) 18 JUSTICE BREYER: But I'd like -- I'd 19 like -- like to -- I'd like to know what your 20 position is then. 21 MR. UNIKOWSKY: We are not claiming 2.2 exemption from sales taxes. We draw a 23 distinction between the acquisition of something, which is not travel, and the 24 25 transportation of something that is.

1 So if you --2 JUSTICE BREYER: So especially for 3 qas? 4 MR. UNIKOWSKY: Yeah, so if you buy --5 JUSTICE BREYER: I didn't see that in 6 your brief. I put the argument to them and I 7 just didn't see that in your brief that you were saying but a tax on gas interferes with 8 9 transportation. 10 MR. UNIKOWSKY: That-- that's not our 11 position. 12 JUSTICE BREYER: That's not your 13 argument either. 14 MR. UNIKOWSKY: Our position is not 15 based on the fact that it's --16 JUSTICE BREYER: Okay. What is your 17 argument? 18 MR. UNIKOWSKY: Our argument is that 19 if you buy fuel and the state imposes a sales 20 tax, as Your Honor referred to, then the acquisition of a good -- it could be fuel, it 21 22 could be apples, it could be anything -- that 23 could be taxed. That's not travel. But, here, 24 that's happening out of state. 25 I don't think there would be a treaty

- 1 problem with the taxation of that, but the
- 2 state hasn't tried to tax that purchase in
- 3 Oregon, and so that's -- that's out of the
- 4 case.
- 5 And so the only thing that the state
- 6 is taxing in the State of Washington is the
- 7 transportation. So it's actually --
- 8 JUSTICE BREYER: What do you mean the
- 9 transportation? Does it say it taxes the
- 10 transportation?
- 11 MR. UNIKOWSKY: I think it does. I
- 12 mean, it talks about --
- 13 JUSTICE BREYER: It does?
- MR. UNIKOWSKY: -- taxable --
- 15 JUSTICE BREYER: You know the statute
- 16 better than I. Does the statute say we impose
- 17 a tax on the transportation of gasoline?
- 18 MR. UNIKOWSKY: Your Honor, I'll tell
- 19 you the words of the statute and then what the
- 20 state court said.
- JUSTICE BREYER: What's the answer,
- 22 yes or no?
- 23 MR. UNIKOWSKY: It doesn't use the
- 24 word transport, but the state court said it
- 25 taxes transportation, and the state court

- 1 authoritatively construes state statutes.
- 2 JUSTICE KAGAN: Well, it uses the word
- 3 enter.
- 4 JUSTICE BREYER: What is the word?
- 5 JUSTICE KAGAN: Enter is a --
- 6 MR. UNIKOWSKY: Yeah, it uses enter.
- 7 It says entry of fuel.
- JUSTICE KAGAN: It's a movement.
- 9 MR. UNIKOWSKY: The taxpayer is "the
- 10 importer," and the state court --
- JUSTICE BREYER: No, what is the word
- of the statute?
- 13 JUSTICE KAGAN: Enter.
- MR. UNIKOWSKY: That is the taxable
- 15 entry into the state.
- 16 JUSTICE BREYER: You get a tax. A tax
- is imposed when a good enters.
- 18 MR. UNIKOWSKY: Yes.
- 19 JUSTICE BREYER: A tax is imposed of
- 20 90 percent when marijuana enters this state,
- and you just told me that would be okay.
- MR. UNIKOWSKY: The taxpayer is
- 23 defined as the importer and the state court
- 24 construed the statute as a tax on
- 25 transportation.

1 JUSTICE BREYER: An importer of 2 marijuana must pay a tax of 90 percent. MR. UNIKOWSKY: Yes. I think that --3 4 JUSTICE BREYER: You say that is legal 5 or illegal? 6 MR. UNIKOWSKY: I think if it was a 7 tax on marijuana --JUSTICE BREYER: I just -- what I just 8 said. 9 10 MR. UNIKOWSKY: I don't see a different between marijuana --11 12 JUSTICE BREYER: Is it legal or 13 illegal? 14 MR. UNIKOWSKY: If it was just a tax, 15 it probably would be illegal, Your Honor. 16 JUSTICE BREYER: You heard what I 17 said. A tax -- the statute says a tax on 18 marijuana is imposed. Now what were the words 19 you used -- I wanted to use the same ones -upon entry of the marijuana into the state. 20 That's all. I'm just trying to --21 2.2 MR. UNIKOWSKY: Yes. Our position 23 does not depend on the good that's being imported. If it's a tax on fuel or a tax on 24

marijuana, it would be the same thing.

1 JUSTICE BREYER: All right. So now 2 what you're claiming is that -- and this is 3 what's bothering me and I'm trying to get to 4 it -- you're saying that the tribe, unlike 5 anyone else in the state, can refuse to pay taxes that really have nothing to do with 6 7 transportation but have to do with drug regulation, which have to do with keeping 8 certain bad things out, which have to do with 9 raising money for other reasons. 10 11 Now that -- you see what I'm saying? 12 I'm saying the common sense of it is why would this treaty give a tribe the right not to pay 13 14 taxes that have really nothing to do with 15 transportation, that's just the way, et cetera. 16 MR. UNIKOWSKY: All right. Let me 17 answer that in two ways. 18 JUSTICE BREYER: Yes. 19 MR. UNIKOWSKY: The first answer is if it's truly a regulatory fine, if it's like you 20 can't possess marijuana and we are punishing 21 2.2 you, then we don't view that as a tax. We view 23 that as a regulation. 24 JUSTICE BREYER: All right. 25 MR. UNIKOWSKY: I think that, you

- 1 know, the distinction between taxes and fines
- 2 might in some cases be difficult to identify.
- 3 Not in this case. This is definitely a -- a
- 4 tax.
- 5 JUSTICE ALITO: So where do you get
- 6 the difference between a regulation and a --
- 7 and -- and a tax under the words of the treaty?
- 8 MR. UNIKOWSKY: So I -- so we're
- 9 following this Court's decision in Tulee and
- 10 Yakama Indian Nation. I'm not trying to evade
- 11 your question.
- 12 The words of the treaty, I think it's
- the in common with language that opens the door
- to certain types of regulatory rules, I think
- that, by implication, the fact that the Yakama
- 16 ceded rights in all of this land probably opens
- 17 the door to the state to protect public safety
- 18 in that land. Right?
- So, if a person's carrying a firearm
- or diseased apples, which is going to cause
- other people to die, then there's a similar
- 22 justification for permitting those laws as
- 23 permitting speed limits.
- 24 JUSTICE ALITO: Where does that come
- 25 from? There's -- you -- you -- you prohibit

- 1 certain things. You tax certain things. Where
- 2 does that come from?
- 3 MR. UNIKOWSKY: Well, so this is the
- 4 line the Court drew in the Tulee case with
- 5 respect to the fishing clause and in the
- 6 Puyallup case. There's like explicit language
- 7 saying we distinguish between the two.
- 8 So we're following the Court's lead on
- 9 this issue. And the Court has essentially said
- 10 that a tax isn't necessary in the relevant
- 11 sense. And so you don't need the tax to ensure
- 12 that non-Indians can use the resource in common
- 13 with Indians.
- 14 And, similarly, I don't think you --
- 15 you need a tax to ensure, you know, public
- 16 safety in the relevant sense, whereas I think
- that you really need to prevent, you know,
- diseased apples or firearms in order to protect
- 19 public safety.
- 20 JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: If an
- off-reservation sales tax is okay, as you say
- 22 it is, why is an off-reservation possession tax
- 23 not okay?
- 24 MR. UNIKOWSKY: Well, I don't think
- 25 this is a possession tax, Your Honor. I think

- 1 it's a -- it's a transportation tax.
- 2 JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: Suppose it is a
- 3 possession tax. Is that then okay?
- 4 MR. UNIKOWSKY: So we -- we have a
- 5 broader argument --
- 6 JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: An off-reservation
- 7 possession tax?
- MR. UNIKOWSKY: So we have a broader
- 9 argument in our brief and a narrower one. So
- 10 the broader one it's not, and the narrower one
- 11 it is. So the broader argument in our brief is
- 12 you've got to look at what the tribal member is
- doing. And because he can't -- it's like a tax
- on breathing, right? You can't transport
- something without possessing it, just like you
- 16 can't transport it without breathing it.
- 17 JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: That seems to be
- an argument that it's a sham, that it's really
- 19 getting to transportation. "Sham" might be too
- 20 strong a word, but it's not -- it's really
- 21 about transportation, not possession. What if
- it's really about possession?
- MR. UNIKOWSKY: So I think, under the
- 24 broadest possible version of our argument, we
- 25 probably -- but I'm not going to push this very

- hard -- I think it would be preempted, but I'm
- 2 not going to push it very hard because I think
- 3 that this really is a transportation tax.
- I think it's actually quite helpful to
- 5 look at why the statute is written the way it
- 6 is, to understand why we really think this is a
- 7 transportation tax. So I get that the overall
- 8 goal of the state is to ensure that all fuel
- 9 sold at retail is subject to a tax.
- 10 But the natural way to do that is just
- 11 to tax the retail sale, but this Court has held
- in the Chickasaw Nation case that those types
- of taxes are preempted. And, in fact, some
- 14 Washington taxes were preempted.
- 15 And so what the state decided to do
- is, as my colleague states, move the incidence
- 17 outside the reservation. But the thing is, for
- 18 tax -- for fuel like this, when you have an
- 19 Indian distributor hauling it from out of state
- 20 to the Indian reservation, to sale to an Indian
- 21 retailer, the only connection between this fuel
- and off-reservation activity is that you're
- 23 hauling it across this stretch of land. That's
- 24 it.
- 25 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Well, what if

- 1 you have the -- the tank where the fuel is
- 2 going to go in is -- is right by the border and
- 3 it's a tax on fuel that goes into the tank?
- 4 They don't care what you do with it; you can
- 5 transport it, you can -- whatever you want to
- 6 do with it. And it's owned by Cougar Den, the
- 7 -- the -- the tank, and they then use it,
- 8 transport it in their trucks.
- 9 In other words, the state doesn't care
- 10 about transportation. It just wants -- as soon
- as it comes into the border, with no
- 12 involvement by Cougar Den, it comes into --
- it's taxed in their tank, and then that's it.
- 14 End of story as far as the state's concerned.
- 15 MR. UNIKOWSKY: I understand that
- 16 overall the state just wants the money in some
- 17 sense. But the reason it's structured this tax
- 18 this way is because it knows --
- 19 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: No, I'm
- 20 talking about my hypothetical tax, okay? It --
- as soon as it goes into a tank, not one of the
- 22 tanker trucks, then it's taxed on that. As
- 23 soon as you -- it enters into a tank at the
- 24 border and it's taxed, is that okay? Nothing
- 25 to do about transportation at all.

1 MR. UNIKOWSKY: Well, if you're 2 referring to like taking the -- the fuel from the truck and putting it into a big tank off 3 4 the reservation at the border, if that's the 5 hypothetical --6 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: A non- --7 non-Indian truck. MR. UNIKOWSKY: Yeah, that -- if 8 that's the hypothetical, then that wouldn't be 9 transportation. That would be delivery to some 10 11 retailer, to some other tank, or something like 12 that. So I think that we draw a -- you have to look at the taxable event. If the event is the 13 14 transportation, there's one result. If it's 15 the delivery to a big tank, outside the 16 reservation --17 JUSTICE BREYER: It doesn't say 18 transportation. MR. UNIKOWSKY: -- it's a different 19 20 one. 21 JUSTICE BREYER: It says bulk entry or 2.2 something like that, non-bulk entry. And what 23 I'm actually bothered about is people are going to buy millions of things online. And so a 24

state says the following: We just want our

- 1 sales tax. And so they pass a statute that
- 2 looks like this. When something you've bought
- 3 online enters into the state, a tax is due.
- 4 You know, that's pretty close to this statute.
- 5 And what I'm having trouble is seeing
- 6 how your argument -- that's why I have this
- 7 other argument, where it's just fuel. But you
- 8 don't accept that. Okay.
- 9 How your argument would permit the
- 10 state to -- it would deny the state the right
- 11 to tax the Indian tribe when they've done what
- 12 everybody else has done, just bought things
- online, and they haven't yet paid the use tax
- or haven't yet paid the comparable sales tax.
- Now that's what's really bothering me.
- 16 And -- and if you can give me a minute or so on
- 17 that, I would be helped.
- MR. UNIKOWSKY: Yeah, I'm happy to.
- 19 So on -- on the hypothetical of buying things
- 20 online, I think it would depend on how the
- 21 statute defined the taxable event. So, of
- 22 course, there's -- there's some recent
- 23 developments in the law, in the Wayfair case
- involving out-of-state taxation.
- 25 So, if the state is capable of taxing

- 1 the sale, in other words, the taxable event is
- the transaction itself, that wouldn't be a
- 3 treaty issue. There might be other issues,
- 4 dormant Commerce Clause, whatever. That
- 5 wouldn't be a treaty issue. So if that -- that
- 6 is the incidence, in some sense, of the tax,
- 7 that's the thing that's being taxed, then that
- 8 wouldn't necessarily be a treaty problem. So
- 9 if --
- 10 JUSTICE GINSBURG: Incidence is --
- 11 you're -- you're shipping -- shipping something
- 12 into the state from out of state. That's what
- it was in the -- in the sales and compensating
- 14 use tax case.
- MR. UNIKOWSKY: Yes, Your Honor. So
- if -- in other words, it depends on what's
- being taxed. So, if it's the shipment on the
- 18 highway and it's an Indian who's paying the
- 19 tax, then I think that that would -- that would
- 20 restrict the right to travel because --
- JUSTICE GINSBURG: But it's a shipment
- of goods into our state. You're selling
- something to a state resident, you have to pay
- 24 the tax on the goods that are sold to an
- 25 in-state resident.

1 MR. UNIKOWSKY: I think that, again, 2 this Court has really drawn a -- has not really 3 talked about in terms of a tax on goods. The 4 Court has analyzed it in terms of a tax on the 5 relevant activity. So there's a tax on the 6 sale or a tax on the transportation, but you've 7 got to look at what the taxpayer is -- is specifically doing. 8 9 I think that's what the Wagnon -- so I don't mean to evade your hypothetical. I just 10 -- I -- it just really depends on exactly how 11 12 the statute is structured. 13 JUSTICE ALITO: Suppose the --14 JUSTICE KAGAN: Mr. Unikowsky --15 JUSTICE ALITO: -- suppose the fuel 16 arrives by tanker and it is taxed when it 17 reaches the -- the port of Seattle, but everybody knows that, at that point, it's going 18 19 to be transferred to trucks owned by Cougar 20 Den. Would that be -- what would your position 21 be? 2.2 MR. UNIKOWSKY: That would not be 23 preempted. First of all, it would probably be 24 a non-Indian taxpayer who pays the tax because 25 -- assuming the tanker truck is owned by

- 1 someone who isn't an Indian.
- JUSTICE ALITO: Well, suppose it's
- 3 somebody in the tribe.
- 4 MR. UNIKOWSKY: Even so, I don't think
- 5 so. I think that -- the Wagnon case really, I
- 6 think --
- 7 JUSTICE ALITO: Why -- why would it
- 8 not be?
- 9 MR. UNIKOWSKY: Because the taxable
- 10 transaction isn't the transportation of the
- 11 fuel. We don't read this treaty, as the state
- 12 claims, to have -- to just have this broad
- 13 umbrella protection of any trade that's in any
- way facilitated by highway travel. What we say
- is that you've got to have a very focused look
- 16 at what precisely is being taxed.
- 17 JUSTICE ALITO: Why does it matter
- whether it arrives by sea or across the border
- 19 from Oregon?
- 20 MR. UNIKOWSKY: Well, if the -- if the
- 21 relevant taxable event is the entry into a port
- 22 by a --
- JUSTICE ALITO: If the relevant
- 24 taxable event is the possession, the first
- 25 possession within the border of Washington?

MR. UNIKOWSKY: Well, it depends -- in 1 2 that scenario where it arrives by a tanker 3 truck, the first possessor is someone who's 4 using a big boat and is not traveling on public 5 highways. So that possessor is not exercising 6 any right under the treaty. 7 Now I understand there might be downstream economic consequences on Cougar Den, 8 9 but I think that we're just trying to follow the analysis in the Wagnon case, which has 10 11 required this specific analysis of what's being 12 taxed. I think the Wagnon --13 JUSTICE KAGAN: Mr. Unikowsky --MR. UNIKOWSKY: Yes. 14 15 JUSTICE KAGAN: -- it seems to me you 16 can look at this in one of two ways, and which 17 way you look at it, in part, you know, suggests 18 who should win. 19 The first is you -- you could say: 20 What is the taxpayer here doing? Is what the taxpayer here doing within the terms of the 21 2.2 treaty? And there, it just seems to me that 23 you win because what the taxpayer is doing is 24 transporting goods to and from market. You can 25 say he's possessing the goods. You can say

- 1 he's breathing while he's transporting the
- 2 goods. But what he's doing is transporting
- 3 goods to and from market. So -- so that
- 4 suggests that you should win, where the focus
- 5 is on the activity taxed.
- 6 But what I hear the state and the SG
- 7 in its brief saying is you shouldn't focus on
- 8 the thing that the taxpayer is doing, you
- 9 should instead sort of look to the purpose of
- 10 the state. You should look to what is the full
- scope of activities that the state is trying to
- 12 tax and why they have this tax. And according
- 13 to them, they have this tax because they want
- 14 to get to every single taxpayer who possesses
- 15 fuel in the state. And this is what's
- 16 necessary to get to Yakama taxpayers.
- 17 So what should we focus on: the
- 18 activity that's -- the taxpayer is doing or the
- 19 purpose of the state legislation?
- MR. UNIKOWSKY: So, of course, I think
- 21 it's the activity. And I think that your
- 22 question is really what this case boils down
- 23 to.
- 24 And I think there's a lot of reasons
- 25 why the former answer is correct and the latter

- 1 is not. First of all, I just think that the
- 2 treaty right focuses on the Indian's right. It
- 3 says the Indian has the right to trade and --
- 4 to travel, excuse me. I don't see a focus on
- 5 sort of the holistic intent of the state and
- 6 why it's enacting a particular tax.
- 7 Also, I think in the Wagnon case, the
- 8 whole argument by the tribe in that case is
- 9 that what the state was really trying to do was
- 10 burden things on the reservation. The Court
- 11 said we don't look at these broad assessments
- of purpose. We -- we look at this formal
- analysis of the thing that's being taxed. And
- that's really just the analysis that we're
- 15 asking the Court to do here.
- And, actually, in the right to fish
- 17 cases, the Court has done the same thing. The
- 18 Court has understood the right to fish as
- 19 essentially providing an easement on private
- 20 property to fish that preempts any state laws
- 21 that would prevent you to going on the
- 22 property. Those laws were the ultimate
- 23 generally applicable laws. They applied to
- 24 Indians and non-Indians. They applied
- 25 regardless of whether you're going on the

- property to fish or to do something else.
 They had absolutely nothing what
- 2 They had absolutely nothing whatsoever
- 3 to do with fishing, but they were still held to
- 4 be preempted because you looked at what the
- 5 Indian was trying to do, which is fish, and the
- 6 Court held that the treaty gave the Indian the
- 7 right to do that.
- I think that's also true, by the way,
- 9 with like the on-reservation tax versus
- 10 off-reservation tax distinction. Like in
- 11 Chickasaw Nation, this Court held that a tax on
- 12 -- on on-reservation activity was preempted.
- 13 The tax at issue had -- was not targeting
- 14 Indian reservations. It was a generally
- 15 applicable tax that applied to everybody, but
- 16 as applied to protected activity, in that case
- on-reservation activity, the tax was preempted.
- JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: Counsel, do you --
- 19 JUSTICE GINSBURG: But these retailers
- 20 -- these are off-reservation, the retailers of
- 21 the fuel, they are off-reservation or
- 22 on-reservation?
- MR. UNIKOWSKY: The retailers are
- 24 exclusively on the reservation. That's why the
- 25 state doesn't -- isn't able to tax the sale,

- 1 because it's an Indian retailer. All of the
- 2 retailers that Cougar Den sells to are Yakama
- 3 retailers on the reservation.
- 4 JUSTICE GINSBURG: And they sell to
- 5 not people, not exclusively people on the
- 6 reservation, right?
- 7 MR. UNIKOWSKY: That's true. But we
- 8 haven't disputed that the state can collect --
- 9 order the retailer to collect the tax from
- 10 non-Indian consumers.
- So, if the state is concerned about
- 12 collecting that tax, we haven't disputed that's
- 13 the way to do it. And this is what the Court
- 14 said in Chickasaw Nation. It says if the state
- 15 wants to make sure this tax is collected from
- 16 non-Indian consumers, it could just amend its
- 17 laws to -- to provide that. And we haven't
- 18 disputed --
- 19 JUSTICE BREYER: I'm not talking about
- 20 non-Indians. I'm talking about the Indian
- 21 consumers.
- I've now read the statute again, and
- 23 it seems there are four relevant words. The
- tax on fuel applies when the fuel enters into
- 25 this state.

- And now all I have to do is substitute
 for the word "fuel" things bought online, which
- 3 could be anything at all, and then we can have
- 4 diseased things or I don't know what,
- 5 marijuana, and you are saying -- and I think
- 6 you are saying this -- that this statute, which
- 7 had to do with travel on the roads, applies to
- 8 all those things as long as they use the words
- 9 "the tax applies when it enters into this
- 10 state."
- Now I hope I'm wrong -- or maybe I'm
- 12 right -- I don't know. I want to hear your
- answer.
- MR. UNIKOWSKY: That's not exactly our
- position because there was a few other things
- 16 that have to be true.
- So, first of all, the tax --
- JUSTICE BREYER: Yes, it also, by the
- way, has to be the case that it goes by FedEx
- or it goes by UPS or it goes by a truck or
- 21 something like that. It can't just go by an
- 22 airplane and be delivered by a drone. I've got
- 23 that. Now what else?
- MR. UNIKOWSKY: So, again, we have a
- 25 broader argument and a narrower argument. We

- do have one specific argument in our brief
- 2 which focuses on the fact that this -- this
- 3 traveled through the ceded area.
- 4 Now I think that it would still be
- 5 preempted even if it was outside the ceded
- 6 area, but sort of the narrowest argument in our
- 7 brief goes like this, right? To look at what
- 8 the Indians secured, you have to look at what
- 9 they had. And they had something special on
- 10 this particular stretch of land, which is a tax
- immunity, and, therefore, if you want to look
- 12 at what they kept, it's an immunity that
- applies specifically when the truck is going
- 14 across that land.
- Now I will say that for off -- for --
- 16 for travel off the ceded area, I probably still
- would be arguing preemption given that the
- 18 treaty by its terms applies to all public
- 19 highways.
- 20 But the narrowest version of our
- 21 argument in our brief really only applies to
- this particular travel because of the special
- 23 rights that the tribe enjoyed on that stretch
- of land at the time of the treaty.
- 25 JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: The language of

1 the treaty does not distinguish, though --2 MR. UNIKOWSKY: That's correct. 3 JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: -- between the 4 ceded area and the other areas. 5 MR. UNIKOWSKY: So the textual hook for that would be the word "secured," which 6 7 this Court has construed as requiring looking at what they already possessed. 8 9 JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: And another question, which is your -- your position 10 11 depends on disaggregating possession and 12 transportation, but you could possess something 13 without transporting. You can obviously 14 transport without possessing fuel. 15 So the tax -- why -- why can't we 16 disaggregate possession of transportation? 17 MR. UNIKOWSKY: Well, first of all, I 18 think that in many ways these are state law 19 questions. Like there's this fundamental 20 dispute in this case about whether this is just like one statute on first possession or a whole 21 2.2 bunch of different subsections that are taxing 23 different types of things, one of which is 24 transportation. 25 And it's kind of like a philosophical

- 1 question. But I think that ultimately that's a
- 2 state law question, not a federal question. It
- 3 seems to me if the state court is construing
- 4 authority to --
- 5 JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: So, if a state
- 6 court construed it differently from this state
- 7 court, you would have a different position?
- 8 MR. UNIKOWSKY: I mean, I think I'd
- 9 probably still try to argue preemption, but I
- 10 think it would be much harder than the argument
- 11 I'm currently making to you today, because the
- 12 Court has held that the incidence of the tax is
- 13 a question of state law.
- It just seems to me that if -- if the
- 15 state court is saying that this is a
- 16 transportation tax, and transportation is
- 17 treaty-protected activity, it just kind of
- 18 follows like almost, like, inevitably that
- 19 there's -- there's preemption because, you
- 20 know, you're taxing treaty-protected activity
- 21 based on the statute as it's authoritatively
- 22 construed by the state court.
- I just would like to say one thing
- 24 about why I think that, you know, this -- what
- 25 the state is doing here is quite inconsistent

- 1 with what I think the expectation of the tribe
- 2 would have been in 1855, because the tribe was
- 3 actually specifically concerned about
- 4 transporting fuel along this route, right? And
- 5 so Governor Stephens promised in the treaty
- 6 minutes, you can take your goods to market to
- 7 the river, which is a reference to the Columbia
- 8 River. And this actually used to be their
- 9 land.
- 10 So sort of as consideration for giving
- 11 up this stretch of land, which at the time was
- 12 their land, that they agreed that they would
- 13 continue to -- to travel across it. They'd
- 14 have the right to travel.
- 15 And so I think it is a little bit of a
- bait and switch to the Yakamas to say, well,
- 17 now we're going to basically exploit the fact
- 18 that you have to travel across this stretch of
- 19 land to impose this tax that we wouldn't
- otherwise be able to impose, and, by the way,
- 21 the effect of the tax is to mimic in a tax on
- the reservation -- on on-reservation retailers.
- 23 And I think that, you know, I haven't
- 24 talked about the treaty canon so far because I
- 25 think neutral principles are more than

- 1 sufficient to resolve this case for Respondent,
- 2 but at least under the -- the generous
- 3 interpretation principles for Indians, I don't
- 4 think that's what the Indians thought they were
- 5 getting, that this exploitation of the travel
- on the very land they gave up, securing for
- 7 themselves the right to travel across it.
- 8 I think that it's very natural and
- 9 consistent with what I think the expectation of
- 10 the Yakamas would have been, that they could
- 11 continue traveling across that land with their
- 12 goods as they were already doing it at the
- 13 time, and -- and that means -- that means
- transporting without paying a fee or owing an
- obligation to the states.
- 16 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: Does it mean
- 17 anything that this tax is literally on
- traveling the route, importing by a highway?
- 19 There is no similar tax on importation by
- licensed people. They don't pay the tax. Only
- 21 the user who buys it pays the tax, correct?
- MR. UNIKOWSKY: Yes. I think that's
- 23 actually a very important point in this case,
- 24 because the state cast this as a first
- possession tax, but, honestly, that's just the

- 1 state's gloss on it. That's not what it says.
- 2 And, in fact, that's not even how it operates,
- 3 because if you're the first possessor via
- 4 highway, you pay the tax. But, if you're a
- 5 licensed importer and you're a first possessor
- 6 via a boat, you don't.
- 7 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Well, you want
- 8 to characterize it as a transport tax, and the
- 9 statute doesn't say that either.
- 10 MR. UNIKOWSKY: Well, I think that the
- 11 state court is responsible for construing state
- 12 law. It says import, which is the importer
- 13 pays the tax. On page 121 of the Joint
- 14 Appendix, the taxpayer is defined as the
- 15 importer. And the state court said, which I
- 16 think is intuitive, that importation is a
- 17 species of transportation.
- 18 And so there is an authoritative
- 19 decision that this statute taxes
- 20 transportation. So --
- JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: The problem is
- 22 it's not consistent. You're right, the
- 23 wholesalers, licensed wholesalers are the
- importers, but they don't pay the tax.
- 25 MR. UNIKOWSKY: Yeah. So this is not

1 a tax on first possession. It just doesn't 2 work that way. And -- and the state is just 3 adding this gloss that this is just one big tax 4 on first possession, even though, obviously, 5 when you just look at the words of the statute, it isn't one. And that's why I think the Court 6 7 should just use the words of the statute which talk about importation and entry and the 8 9 construction of that by the state court, rather 10 than determining preemption, essentially by the 11 gloss placed on the state's attorneys based on 12 words that are not in the statute, nor did the 13 state court think those things to be true. 14 JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: To state the 15 obvious, the value, current value of the land 16 the tribe gave up is enormous, right? 17 MR. UNIKOWSKY: It's a third of the State of Washington, I believe, Your Honor. 18 19 Thank you. 20 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Thank you, 21 counsel. Four minutes, Mr. Purcell. 2.2 23 REBUTTAL ARGUMENT OF NOAH PURCELL 24 ON BEHALF OF THE PETITIONER 25 MR. PURCELL: Thank you, Mr. Chief

- 1 Justice.
- 2 I'd like to point out two crucial
- 3 facts about what will happen if you accept
- 4 Cougar Den's position.
- 5 First to Justice Breyer's point, if
- 6 you accept their position, Yakama members can
- 7 transport goods nationwide without taxation or
- 8 regulation. That's why you see such a broad
- 9 coalition of states joining an amicus brief on
- 10 our side.
- 11 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: They don't have a
- 12 treaty with everybody.
- MR. PURCELL: They have a treaty with
- 14 the United States, Your Honor. And as counsel
- just said, the right to travel says on all
- 16 public highways. It makes no sense to limit it
- 17 to the ceded area.
- 18 Even historically, it wouldn't make
- 19 any sense because the Yakama traveled beyond
- 20 the ceded area. And -- and, also, Cougar Den
- is trying to use the history when it helps them
- by trying to limit the geography, but then not
- when it hurts them, like, you know, what goods
- 24 can be transported or how it can be
- 25 transported. Of course, the fuel and the

- 1 highway, and these roads, did not exist at the
- 2 time.
- 3 The second crucial point --
- 4 JUSTICE KAGAN: But on -- on that one,
- 5 didn't Mr. Unikowsky say, consistent with our
- 6 case law, that there's a difference between
- 7 taxation and regulation?
- 8 MR. PURCELL: And -- and that's just a
- 9 misrepresentation of the case law. The fishing
- 10 cases have have said the state can regulate
- 11 fishing to conserve the fish, the very thing
- 12 that's the subject of the treaty. There's no
- 13 similar -- there's no similar rationale here.
- 14 The Court has never said that we can
- 15 regulate fishing more generally than that.
- 16 There's no distinction in this Court's cases in
- 17 treaty cases between taxing and regulation.
- 18 More broadly, Mescalero actually rejected
- 19 exactly that argument.
- The second point is that, under their
- 21 theory, we could completely ban the
- transportation of fuel by highway if we did it
- for a regulatory reason, like we decided it's
- 24 not safe. We could just ban it outright and --
- and that would be fine. But we can't impose a

- 1 generally applicable tax on goods like fuel
- 2 because it happens to apply when Cougar Den
- 3 travels on the highway. That makes absolutely
- 4 no sense.
- 5 There's no plausible way to read the
- 6 treaty that would lead to that result. This is
- 7 a tax on fuel possession. It is not a tax on
- 8 highway travel. The state court explicitly
- 9 said it would apply regardless of whether
- 10 Cougar Den uses the highway.
- It is not a tax on transportation. It
- is a tax on the fuel itself.
- So -- so even if you accept much of
- 14 Cougar Den's position here, it does not lead to
- 15 a ruling in their favor.
- 16 And you can tell, as Justice Kavanaugh
- 17 pointed out, that you can disaggregate
- 18 transportation from possession here because the
- 19 statute does and, in fact, on the facts of this
- 20 case they are disaggregated. Cougar Den is
- 21 paying the tax even though they were not
- 22 transporting fuel. They have possessed the
- 23 fuel. They owned the fuel. So, for all the
- 24 reasons -
- 25 JUSTICE GORSUCH: Has Washington

- 1 considered taxing non-tribal members for their
- purchases on tribal lands?
- 3 MR. PURCELL: Your Honor, that is the
- 4 system that we had before we adopted this
- 5 system. And it was struck down by a federal
- 6 court in Washington. And then we adopted this
- 7 tax, modeled on what this Court said was okay
- 8 in Wagnon.
- 9 I'd also like to address Wagnon just
- 10 does not address the issue in this case.
- 11 Wagnon was about who the tax applies to and
- where the incidence of the tax is.
- In this case those things are
- 14 undisputed. Cougar Den owes the tax and it's
- 15 off reservation. So the rule is that the tax
- 16 can apply unless preempted by express federal
- 17 law.
- And here there's nothing in the Yakama
- 19 treaty that preempts this tax. There is just
- 20 no plausible way to read the right to travel by
- 21 public highway in common with others to preempt
- 22 a tax on goods.
- So -- so, you know, Wagnon just does
- 24 not do what they're asking it to do. Wagnon
- described the tax that the City of Washington

1	modeled its tax on.			
2	And and I just think it's crucial			
3	also to understand that even their limited			
4	ceded area argument does not work.			
5	It does not work. It's it's			
6	contrary to the treaty text which says a right			
7	to travel on all public highways, and it's			
8	and it's also refuted by the history that had			
9	the Yakama traveling beyond the ceded			
10	territory.			
11	So if there is no further questions we			
12	would ask the Court to reverse the state			
13	state supreme court and hold that the tax			
14	applies to Cougar Den. Thank you.			
15	CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Thank you,			
16	counsel. The case is submitted.			
17	(Whereupon, at 11:05 a.m., the case			
18	was submitted.)			
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