| 1 | IN THE SUPREME COURT OF THE UNITED STATES |
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| 3 | BERNARD L. BILSKI AND RAND A. : |
| 4 | WARSAW, : |
| 5 | Petitioners : |
| 6 | v. : No. 08-964 |
| 7 | DAVID J. KAPPOS, UNDER : |
| 8 | SECRETARY OF COMMERCE FOR : |
| 9 | INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY AND : |
| 10 | DIRECTOR, PATENT AND : |
| 11 | TRADEMARK OFFICE. : |
| 12 | x |
| 13 | Washington, D.C. |
| 14 | Monday, November 9, 2009 |
| 15 | |
| 16 | The above-entitled matter came on for oral |
| 17 | argument before the Supreme Court of the United States |
| 18 | at 1:00 p.m. |
| 19 | APPEARANCES: |
| 20 | J. MICHAEL JAKES, ESQ., Washington, D.C.; on behalf of |
| 21 | the Petitioners. |
| 22 | MALCOLM L. STEWART, ESQ., Deputy Solicitor General, |
| 23 | Department of Justice, Washington, D.C.; on behalf of |
| 24 | the Respondent. |
| 25 | |

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| 1 | PROCEEDINGS |
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| 2 | (1:00 p.m.) |
| 3 | CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: We will hear |
| 4 | argument this afternoon in Case 08-964, |
| 5 | Bilski v. Kappos. |
| 6 | Mr. Jakes. |
| 7 | ORAL ARGUMENT OF J. MICHAEL JAKES |
| 8 | ON BEHALF OF THE PETITIONERS |
| 9 | MR. JAKES: Mr. Chief Justice, and may it |
| 10 | please the Court: |
| 11 | The Federal Circuit's rigid and narrow |
| 12 | machine-or-transformation test for all patent-eligible |
| 13 | methods should be reversed. The requirement that any |
| 14 | and all methods must be either tied to a particular |
| 15 | machine or transform specific subject matter doesn't |
| 16 | find any basis in either the language of Section 101 or |
| 17 | anywhere in the patent statute. |
| 18 | It's not required by this Court's |
| 19 | precedence, and it's contrary to the established |
| 20 | principle that Section 101 should be read broadly to |
| 21 | accommodate unforeseen advances in the useful arts. |
| 22 | There are recognized exclusions from Section 101 from |
| 23 | that broad language, such as laws of nature, natural |
| 24 | phenomenon, and abstract ideas. Those may not be |
| 25 | patented. |

| 1 | But these exceptions, which are drawn from |
|----|--|
| 2 | the Court's precedent, including this Court's Diehr |
| 3 | case, also finds support in the statutory language, |
| 4 | which says that any process must be new and useful. |
| 5 | So the prohibition against patenting laws of |
| 6 | nature or abstract principles, it applies equally to all |
| 7 | four categories of subject matter under 101, but, here, |
| 8 | the Federal circuit has created a new test just for |
| 9 | processes that are not bound in the statute or required |
| 10 | by this Court's decision. |
| 11 | JUSTICE SCALIA: Well, if the government |
| 12 | says that the that the term on which it hangs its hat |
| 13 | is the term useful arts and that that meant, originally, |
| 14 | and still means manufacturing arts, arts dealing with |
| 15 | workmen, with you know, inventors, like Lorenzo |
| 16 | Jones, not not somebody who writes a book on how to |
| 17 | win friends and influence people. |
| 18 | What is wrong with that analysis, that |
| 19 | that's what "useful arts" meant, that it always |
| 20 | always was thought to deal with machines and inventions? |
| 21 | MR. JAKES: Certainly, "useful arts" |
| 22 | encompasses industrial processes, manufacturing |
| 23 | processes, but it has never been limited just to those |
| 24 | types of processes. I'll admit that during the |
| 25 | Industrial Revolution most of the inventions concerned |

- 1 machines and manufacturing processes. But we have cited
- 2 counter-examples that show that business was also within
- 3 the useful arts.
- 4 It's also up to Congress to decide how to
- 5 implement the patent system and the statutory --
- 6 JUSTICE BREYER: Well, if you leave
- 7 something out, Congress can put it back in, tailoring
- 8 the protection to what they feel is necessary. But if
- 9 it covers everything under the sun, I've never seen a
- 10 case where Congress would take something out.
- Now, if we are relying on Congress, I guess
- 12 the circuit would say, let's go narrow, and we
- 13 wouldn't -- you know -- since you referred to Congress,
- 14 I thought I would bring that up and see what you think.
- 15 MR. JAKES: Congress has acted in certain
- 16 circumstances. One of them is in section 273, to
- 17 provide prior user rights for business methods. Another
- 18 area is 287(c), where medical activities are also
- 19 exempted from remedies under the statute.
- There has been a bill introduced to exempt
- 21 tax avoidance methods, but that has not yet been passed.
- JUSTICE GINSBURG: But you say you would say
- 23 tax avoidance methods are covered, just as the process
- 24 here is covered. So an estate plan, tax avoidance, how
- 25 to resist a corporate takeover, how to choose a jury,

- 1 all of those are patentable?
- 2 MR. JAKES: They are eligible for patenting
- 3 as processes, assuming they meet the other statutory
- 4 requirements.
- 5 JUSTICE BREYER: So that would mean that
- 6 every -- every businessman -- perhaps not every, but
- 7 every successful businessman typically has something.
- 8 His firm wouldn't be successful if he didn't have
- 9 anything that others didn't have. He thinks of a new
- 10 way to organize. He thinks of a new thing to say on the
- 11 telephone. He thinks of something. That's how he made
- 12 his money.
- And your view would be -- and it's new, too,
- 14 and it's useful, made him a fortune -- anything that
- 15 helps any businessman succeed is patentable because we
- 16 reduce it to a number of steps, explain it in general
- 17 terms, file our application, granted?
- 18 MR. JAKES: It is potentially patentable,
- 19 yes.
- JUSTICE BREYER: Okay. Well then, if that
- 21 were so, we go back to the original purpose of the
- 22 Constitution. Do you think that the framers would have
- 23 wanted to require anyone successful in this great, vast,
- 24 new continent because he thinks of something new to have
- 25 had to run to Washington and to force any possible

- 1 competitor to do a search and then stop the wheels of
- 2 progress unless they get permission?
- 3 Is that a plausible view of the patent
- 4 clause?
- 5 MR. JAKES: No, Your Honor. I wouldn't
- 6 characterize it that way, but I do believe that --
- 7 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: So how do we limit it to
- 8 something that is reasonable? Meaning, if we don't
- 9 limit it to inventions or to technology, as some amici
- 10 have, or to some tie or tether, borrowing the Solicitor
- 11 General's phraseology, to the sciences, to the useful
- 12 arts, then why not patent the method of speed dating?
- MR. JAKES: Well, first of all, I think,
- 14 looking at what are useful arts, it does exclude some
- 15 things. It does exclude the fine arts. Speaking,
- 16 literature, poems, I think we all agree that those are
- 17 not included, and there are other things as well. For
- 18 example, a corporation, a human being, these are things
- 19 that are not covered by the statutory categories.
- JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: So why are human
- 21 activities covered by useful arts?
- MR. JAKES: Human activities are covered.
- JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: Well, you are saying
- 24 they are covered, but why should they be?
- MR. JAKES: I believe the statute provides

- 1 for them to be covered by defining them as a process. I
- 2 can give you a -- one good example, which would be a
- 3 surgical method performed by a doctor. Those are
- 4 patentable. They are patent eligible. In section
- 5 287(c), Congress has carved out and said, you can't go
- 6 after the doctor for infringement, but that is an
- 7 entirely human activity, and it has long been
- 8 patentable.
- 9 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: Do you think that there
- 10 is some benefit to society from patenting a method to
- 11 cure someone that involves just human activity, as
- 12 opposed to some machine, substance, or other apparatus
- 13 to help that process?
- MR. JAKES: Yes.
- 15 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: Do you believe that that
- 16 was the intent of the patent law?
- 17 MR. JAKES: I believe that falls within the
- 18 useful arts, and I believe that there is an advantage to
- 19 that. There are really two advantages to the patent
- 20 system. One is encouraging people to come up with new
- 21 things, such as a surgical method or method of hedging
- 22 consumption risk.
- The other is the disclosure aspect. A
- 24 doctor might choose to keep it secret.
- JUSTICE BREYER: So you are going to answer

- 1 this question yes. You know, I have a great, wonderful,
- 2 really original method of teaching antitrust law, and it
- 3 kept 80 percent of the students awake. They learned
- 4 things --
- 5 (Laughter.)
- 6 JUSTICE BREYER: It was fabulous. And I
- 7 could probably have reduced it to a set of steps and
- 8 other teachers could have followed it. That you are
- 9 going to say is patentable, too?
- 10 MR. JAKES: Potentially.
- 11 JUSTICE BREYER: Okay. Fine. Now, suppose
- 12 I reject that view, hypothetically, and suppose I were
- 13 to take the view that this is way too far, that that is
- 14 not the purpose of the statute. Suppose for
- 15 hypothetical's sake I'm still a little nervous about
- 16 that -- that circuit's decision there. Have you any
- 17 suggestion for me?
- 18 MR. JAKES: I think that we should go back
- 19 to the first principles that were enunciated in Diehr
- 20 and other cases, that abstract ideas per se are not
- 21 patentable. That's my position, and what I would
- 22 advocate in this case and any case, as long as you're --
- 23 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: What -- I'm looking
- 24 at your Claim 1, in Joint Appendix page 19 to 20. How
- 25 is that not an abstract idea? You initiate a series of

- 1 transactions between commodity providers and commodity
- 2 consumers. You set a fixed price at the consumer end,
- 3 you set a fixed price at the other end, and that's it.
- I mean, I could patent a process where I do
- 5 the same thing. I initiate a series of transactions
- 6 with sellers. I initiate a series of transactions with
- 7 buyers. I buy low and sell high. That's my patent for
- 8 maximizing wealth.
- 9 I don't see how that's different than your
- 10 claim number 1.
- 11 MR. JAKES: If that was a novel and
- 12 unobvious method, then it should be patentable, but it's
- 13 eligible as subject matter --
- 14 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Well, but your Claim
- 15 1 it seems to me is classic commodity hedging that has
- 16 been going on for centuries.
- 17 MR. JAKES: Your Honor, if that were true,
- 18 then we should run afoul of the obviousness provision
- 19 under section 103. Now, the Patent Office did initially
- 20 allow some of our claims over the prior art.
- JUSTICE KENNEDY: But you know, the
- 22 insurance industry -- the insurance business, as we know
- 23 it, really began in England in 1680, when they
- 24 discovered differential calculus, and they had
- 25 expectancy and actuarial tables, actuarial for life,

- 1 expectancy for shipping, and this really created a whole
- 2 new industry.
- In your view, I think, clearly those would
- 4 be patentable, the -- the explanation of how to compile
- 5 an actuarial table and -- and apply it to risk. That
- 6 certainly would be patentable under your view, and
- 7 it's -- it's difficult for me to think that Congress
- 8 would want to -- would have wanted to give only one
- 9 person the capacity to issue insurance.
- 10 MR. JAKES: I think that method would be
- 11 patent eligible. But, as you said, it would have to be
- 12 reduced to a concrete set of steps, like our claim 1.
- 13 Now, claim 1 may be written in broad terms and it may
- 14 some day run into the prior art, but it does require
- 15 people to do actual things.
- 16 I think even the Patent Office agreed that
- 17 there are physical steps in our method here. And in the
- 18 insurance method --
- 19 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: I'm sorry.
- 20 Just what are the physical steps? Initiating a series
- 21 of transactions between commodity provider and market
- 22 participants?
- MR. JAKES: That would be one.
- 24 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: You get on the phone
- 25 and you call the baker and you get on the phone and you

- 1 call the grocer and say: I can set up a deal for both
- 2 of you?
- 3 MR. JAKES: It could be. It could be done
- 4 that way because it does take a person acting to do
- 5 that. It's not purely --
- 6 JUSTICE KENNEDY: And so in the insurance
- 7 case it takes a person to go over to the Bureau of
- 8 Statistics and compile statistics on -- on life -- on
- 9 life expectancy.
- 10 MR. JAKES: That could be. Now, the patent
- on the data, that's another category that's not included
- 12 in the subject matter of those four categories. The
- 13 data itself is not patentable, but if it is a series of
- 14 steps, it should be eligible as long as it meets the
- other statutory requirements as a process.
- 16 There is nothing in the useful arts -- now,
- 17 we have heard the word "technology." That can be a
- 18 difficult term, because technology in its broadest sense
- 19 means the application of knowledge as opposed to general
- 20 knowledge.
- 21 JUSTICE GINSBURG: Isn't that the basis on
- 22 which the patent law rests in Europe, in other
- 23 countries? They do not permit business method patents.
- 24 It has to be tied to technology, to science or
- 25 technology. So if other systems are able to work with

- 1 the notion of technology-based, why not ours?
- 2 MR. JAKES: I would agree, Your Honor.
- 3 There are those systems that do have a requirement like
- 4 that. Ours does not. Ours speaks in very broad
- 5 terms about having --
- 6 JUSTICE GINSBURG: But I was talking about
- 7 -- you said that technology-based, that wouldn't work
- 8 because there are so many definitions. I'm simply
- 9 asking you the question: Does it work with these other
- 10 systems? That they -- they exclude business methods,
- 11 they include technology-based --
- 12 MR. JAKES: That's right. But they have
- 13 also defined "technology" in such a way as to exclude
- 14 business methods. And I don't think we can do that.
- The fields of operations research,
- 16 industrial engineering, even financial engineering,
- there has been an explosion in these particular fields,
- 18 and to now call them non-technological because they
- 19 didn't exist over 100 years ago wouldn't make --
- JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: Are you suggesting they
- 21 didn't exist because we didn't give them patents
- 22 100 years ago?
- MR. JAKES: No.
- 24 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: Or they exist because
- 25 computers have increased --

- 1 MR. JAKES: It's very much related to our
- 2 current economy and state of technology, with computers
- 3 and the Internet and the free flow of information. But
- 4 that's what --
- 5 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: But a patent limits the
- 6 free flow of information. It requires licensing fees
- 7 and other steps, legal steps. So you can't argue that
- 8 your definition is improving the free flow of
- 9 information.
- 10 MR. JAKES: Your Honor, I would, because of
- 11 the disclosure requirement of the patent laws. It
- 12 requires people to disclose their inventions rather than
- 13 keeping them secret, so there is a second benefit to the
- 14 patent system just other than encouraging people to
- 15 invent, and that is to have that information get to the
- 16 public generally. And in exchange for that --
- 17 JUSTICE SCALIA: Even though the public
- 18 can't use it, right, until the patent expires?
- 19 MR. JAKES: Until the patent expires, if a
- 20 valid patent issues on that, yes.
- 21 But that's our system. We do give exclusive
- 22 rights in exchange for that information being provided
- 23 to the public.
- 24 JUSTICE STEVENS: May I ask this question?
- 25 What do you think the strongest case from our

- 1 jurisprudence is to support your position?
- 2 MR. JAKES: I would say it's the Diehr case.
- JUSTICE STEVENS: Which one?
- 4 MR. JAKES: Diehr. Diamond v. Diehr.
- JUSTICE STEVENS: Diehr?
- 6 MR. JAKES: Yes.
- 7 JUSTICE STEVENS: That was nothing like this
- 8 patent.
- 9 MR. JAKES: No, it's not, but I think it --
- 10 JUSTICE STEVENS: There's language in the
- 11 opinion.
- MR. JAKES: It outlines the general
- 13 principles and also tells us that there are only these
- 14 specific things that are not included within the subject
- 15 matter.
- 16 JUSTICE STEVENS: But is it correct that
- 17 there's none -- none of our cases have ever approved a
- 18 rule such as you advocate?
- 19 MR. JAKES: I don't think this particular
- 20 subject matter has been ruled on by the Court.
- Now, in Dann v. Johnston in the 70s, there
- 22 was a case that could have been decided on the grounds
- 23 that it was a method of doing business, and instead the
- 24 Court close to decide that case based on obviousness.
- 25 And really --

- 1 JUSTICE SCALIA: You know, you mention that
- 2 there are all these -- these new areas that didn't exist
- 3 in the past because of modern business and what-not, but
- 4 there are also areas that existed in the past that don't
- 5 exist today. Let's take training horses. Don't you
- 6 think that -- that some people, horse whisperers or
- 7 others, had some, you know, some insights into the best
- 8 way to train horses? And that should have been
- 9 patentable on your theory.
- 10 MR. JAKES: They might have, yes.
- JUSTICE SCALIA: Well, why didn't anybody
- 12 patent those things?
- MR. JAKES: I think our economy was based on
- 14 industrial process.
- 15 JUSTICE SCALIA: It was based on horses, for
- 16 Pete's sake. You -- I would really have thought
- 17 somebody would have patented that.
- 18 MR. JAKES: There are also issues with
- 19 enforcement. I can't really answer why somebody
- 20 wouldn't have.
- 21 There are teaching methods that were
- 22 patented. There are a number of them that we've
- 23 included in our brief where there were patents issued
- 24 for teaching methods, and I don't think that we've had a
- 25 serious enforcement problem with people being sued for

- 1 using teaching methods. But there have been those
- 2 people who have sought to patent them rather than keep
- 3 them as secrets or just use them.
- 4 JUSTICE SCALIA: How old -- how old were
- 5 those, those cases?
- 6 MR. JAKES: They range. Some of them go
- 7 back quite a ways, to the last century.
- 8 JUSTICE STEVENS: May I ask this general
- 9 question, too? I have always admired Judge Rich, who
- 10 was very active in drafting the '52 amendments.
- MR. JAKES: Yes.
- 12 JUSTICE STEVENS: Has he written anything on
- 13 this particular issue.
- MR. JAKES: He has written a number of
- 15 things. And I think one of the things that the
- 16 Solicitor General quotes in their brief is from an
- 17 article that he wrote.
- 18 But he also wrote the Alappat decision and
- 19 the State Street Bank case as well. And those I think,
- 20 stand as his views, his latest views on what was
- 21 patent-eligible subject matter, looking at the State
- 22 Street Bank case.
- JUSTICE KENNEDY: In the Diehr case, the
- 24 Court said that in the end the abstract idea must be in
- 25 a process that, oh, implements a proposal that the

- 1 patent laws were designed to protect, which brings you
- 2 almost back to the beginning.
- 3 MR. JAKES: It does.
- 4 JUSTICE KENNEDY: You don't -- you don't
- 5 know much from that language. But that was something
- 6 that you could touch, that you could see, that looked
- 7 like a machine, the substance was different before the
- 8 process and after the process. And -- and none of
- 9 that's applicable here. It's --
- 10 MR. JAKES: The Diehr invention was an
- 11 industrial process of the conventional type, because it
- 12 was a method of curing rubber. But today the raw
- 13 materials are just as likely to be information or
- 14 electronic signals, and to simply root us in the
- 15 industrial era because that's what we knew I think would
- 16 be wrong and contrary to the forward-looking aspect of
- 17 the patent law.
- 18 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: Well, isn't the
- 19 manipulation of electronic signals a substance that is
- 20 different in kind from just a method of how to go about
- 21 doing business or a method of how to approach a
- 22 particular problem?
- Isn't there -- isn't that what the Federal
- 24 Circuit was trying to explain, which is that there has
- 25 to be something more substantive than the mere exchange

- 1 of information; that it has to involve -- it used the
- 2 word "transformation." It hasn't defined the outer
- 3 limits of what it means by that.
- 4 MR. JAKES: I think there is a difference.
- 5 But by rigidly looking at that transformation test, what
- 6 you do is you exclude lots of other things where the
- 7 transformation is not required --
- 8 JUSTICE BREYER: That's exactly what I --
- 9 maybe I can get you to inadvertently help my -- my
- 10 hypothesis you don't like. That's why I say it's
- 11 inadvertent.
- 12 You said there are two things. There are
- 13 actually four things in the patent law which everyone
- 14 accepts. There are two that are plus and two that are
- 15 minus. And the two that are plus is by giving people a
- 16 monopoly, you get them to produce more. As you said,
- 17 you get them to disclose.
- 18 The two minuses are they charge a higher
- 19 price, so people use the product less; and moreover, the
- 20 act of getting permissions and having to get permission
- 21 can really slow things down and destroy advance. So
- 22 there is a balance.
- In the nineteenth century, they made it one
- 24 way with respect to machines. Now you're telling us:
- 25 Make it today in respect to information. And if you ask

- 1 me as a person how to make that balance in respect to
- 2 information, if I am honest, I have to tell you: I
- 3 don't know. And I don't know whether across the board
- 4 or in this area or that area patent protection will do
- 5 no harm or more harm than good.
- 6 So that's the true situation in which I find
- 7 myself in respect to your argument. And it's in respect
- 8 to that, I would say: All right, so what do I do?
- 9 MR. JAKES: I think the answer is to follow
- 10 the statute.
- 11 JUSTICE BREYER: Well, thank you. I thought
- 12 that was the issue, not the answer.
- 13 (Laughter.)
- MR. JAKES: Congress has spoken in broad
- 15 terms and given us those four categories, and by looking
- 16 at those I think that answers the question.
- JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: But it doesn't, because
- 18 we don't work in a vacuum. We work in a context.
- 19 MR. JAKES: Yes.
- JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: And so it begs the
- 21 question, because we go around in a circle: What does
- 22 "process" mean in a patent law that was passed in 1952
- 23 that had one set of manufacturing and other items that
- 24 are technologically tied and this is not? So how do we
- 25 discern Congress's intent, other than by the use of the

- word "process" in context?
- 2 MR. JAKES: I think that "process" is not by
- 3 itself. It says "any new and useful process." And so
- 4 we have -- we can look at those words and understand
- 5 that natural phenomena, laws of nature, which are not
- 6 really new because they are part of the storehouse of
- 7 knowledge available to everyone, and "useful," meaning
- 8 there has to be a practical application.
- 9 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: But the word "knowledge"
- 10 is not used in there. So it's not just useful
- 11 knowledge.
- MR. JAKES: No.
- JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: It's useful knowledge in
- 14 relationship to something.
- 15 MR. JAKES: Practically applied, yes, in the
- 16 real world, whether that's the exchange of information
- 17 or electronic data transformation. One of the problems
- 18 with the transformation test is that it would exclude
- 19 some valuable inventions that I think everyone would
- 20 agree are technological under any test such as data
- 21 compression, such as FM radio. Even Bell's claim, the
- 22 claim to transmitting sound using undulating current,
- 23 wouldn't necessarily pass the transformation test. So I
- 24 think we need to look at --
- JUSTICE KENNEDY: But it would be different,

- 1 it seems to me, than what you are -- let's assume you
- 2 can't patent an alphabet. I assume that is true. And
- 3 you can take an alphabet to make beautiful words, and --
- 4 and so forth. You -- you want to say that these --
- 5 these electronic signals can be used in a way just like
- 6 the alphabet can be used.
- 7 And many of the scientific briefs say that
- 8 their process is different, that they are taking
- 9 electronic signals and turning them into some other sort
- 10 of signal. But that's not what you are doing.
- 11 MR. JAKES: That may be, but those signals
- 12 could also be transmitted. On -- on your question about
- 13 the alphabet you said look at the Morse claim 5, which
- 14 was an alphabet to Morse Code. That's exactly what it
- 15 was.
- 16 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: So you reject -- you
- 17 reject the substitute. You think you can patent an
- 18 alphabet because it is a process of forming words.
- MR. JAKES: It could be, yes. Now, I think
- 20 you run into all kinds of other problems. And that's
- 21 really where the focus of the patent statute should be,
- 22 so that we have the fair give-and-take, the bargain that
- 23 is necessary, that we -- too much overpatenting as
- 24 opposed to too little. The test there is obviousness.
- 25 That's where it takes place, not at this threshold.

- 1 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: Morse's Code was not
- 2 obvious.
- 3 MR. JAKES: What is that?
- 4 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: Morse's Code was not
- 5 obvious, and yet --
- 6 MR. JAKES: No, it wasn't.
- 7 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: As I understand that
- 8 case, the only thing patented was the use of his code
- 9 with respect to the telegraph machine that he proposed.
- 10 The Patent Office rejected -- maybe I am reading the
- 11 case wrong, but it rejected all of the claims except
- 12 those that related to the use of the code with a
- 13 particular machine.
- MR. JAKES: It -- it does say used in
- 15 connection with telegraphy.
- 16 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: Of his claims --
- MR. JAKES: Yes.
- JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: -- that was the only one
- 19 that was accepted, correct?
- MR. JAKES: Right.
- 21 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: The same thing with --
- 22 well, Bell's patent was --
- MR. JAKES: In Morse's claims, I believe it
- 24 was claim 8 was the one that was rejected, and the rest
- 25 of them were accepted. Claim 8 was the very broad claim

- 1 to transmitting information over a distance, however
- 2 accomplished.
- JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: Let's not skip over
- 4 that, because the rest of the claim in Bell related to
- 5 how to transmit over the wire, correct?
- 6 MR. JAKES: His disclosure did, but his
- 7 actual claim was interpreted as being using undulating
- 8 current to transmit sound, however that was
- 9 accomplished. It was very broad, and that's why --
- 10 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: And that was what was
- 11 rejected.
- 12 MR. JAKES: No. Bell's claim was not
- 13 rejected. That one was approved, yes. The Morse claim,
- 14 claim 8, was the broad claim that really we would
- 15 probably look at today as being -- as having inadequate
- 16 disclosure because --
- 17 JUSTICE SCALIA: Well, it was -- it was
- 18 transforming sound into electrical current and then at
- 19 the other end electrical current back into sound. I
- 20 mean it met the transformation test, didn't it?
- 21 MR. JAKES: It might have. It might have.
- JUSTICE SCALIA: It clearly did.
- MR. JAKES: Well, it's not that clear from
- 24 the Federal Circuit's transformation test whether that
- 25 would apply or not, because although the Federal Circuit

- 1 has said transformation of data might qualify, it said
- 2 it has to represent something physical, something -- a
- 3 real object. And sound doesn't necessarily have to be
- 4 that. Sound can be generated artificially. So --
- 5 JUSTICE SCALIA: Sound -- sound is not
- 6 physical, and electric current is not physical?
- 7 MR. JAKES: I think electric current is
- 8 physical.
- 9 JUSTICE SCALIA: Yes, I think so.
- 10 MR. JAKES: Yes.
- 11 JUSTICE SCALIA: Sound is, too.
- MR. JAKES: It can be, but when it's
- 13 transmitted over a wire, it's not. It's something else.
- 14 It's an electrical current then.
- 15 JUSTICE SCALIA: Sound is not transmitted
- 16 over the wires. Sound has been transformed into
- 17 current, and current is transmitted over the wire and
- 18 then transformed back at the other end into sound.
- MR. JAKES: Yes, and I would agree --
- 20 JUSTICE SCALIA: I think it clearly --
- 21 clearly would have been covered by -- by the test the
- 22 government --
- MR. JAKES: I think that's more in the
- 24 nature of transmission, much like our data transmission.
- 25 You might transmit data in a packet without actually

- 1 changing the underlying data, and that should be allowed
- 2 as well.
- If there are no questions, I will reserve
- 4 the rest of my time. Thank you.
- 5 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Thank you, Mr.
- 6 Jakes.
- 7 Mr. Stewart.
- 8 ORAL ARGUMENT OF MALCOLM L. STEWART
- 9 ON BEHALF OF THE RESPONDENT
- 10 MR. STEWART: Mr. Chief Justice, and may it
- 11 please the Court:
- 12 Let me start by following up on the
- 13 discussion of the Morse and the telephone cases, because
- 14 it's certainly our view that those would come out the
- 15 same way under our test as -- as they actually did in
- 16 practice.
- 17 JUSTICE SCALIA: I certainly hope so.
- 18 MR. STEWART: And you know, Justice Scalia,
- 19 you mentioned how to win friends and influence people.
- 20 I think at a certain level of generality you could
- 21 describe both Dale Carnegie and Alexander Graham Bell as
- 22 people who devised methods of communicating more
- 23 effectively.
- The reason that Bell's method was patentable
- 25 was that it operated in the realm of the physical. Bell

- 1 had devised a process implemented through machines by
- 2 which sound was transformed into electronic current.
- 3 The current was then transmitted over a distance and
- 4 transformed back into sound.
- 5 Innovations as to new techniques of public
- 6 speaking, new techniques of negotiations, techniques
- 7 that go to the substance of what is said may be
- 8 innovative. They may be valuable. They are not patent
- 9 eligible because they don't deal in the realm of the
- 10 physical --
- 11 So while the industrial processes that we
- 12 discussed at some length in our brief were at the time
- of the framing the paradigmatic patent eligible
- 14 processes, they were -- they are not the only processes
- 15 that can be patented.
- 16 JUSTICE ALITO: Near -- near the end of your
- 17 brief you argue that -- that the patent here is -- is
- 18 not -- is unpatentable on the independent ground that it
- 19 would preempt the abstract idea of hedging consumption
- 20 -- consumption risk. If you -- if you are right about
- 21 that, is this a good case for us to get into the -- into
- the very broad issue that Petitioner has raised?
- MR. STEWART: I -- I think we would
- 24 certainly prefer to win on our primary ground, and let
- 25 me say a couple of things about that. First, we would

- 1 fairly vigorously resist the notion that the rule that
- 2 was announced by the Federal circuit is rigid or
- 3 inflexible. That is, all that the Federal circuit has
- 4 really said is that to have a patent-eligible process
- 5 you have to identify some link to a machine or a
- 6 transformation of matter. And the Federal circuit has
- 7 said with respect to some processes the link to the
- 8 machine may be so attenuated, the machine part of the
- 9 process may be such a small segment of the process as a
- 10 whole, that this wouldn't be enough. But the Federal
- 11 circuit said: We leave for another day the hard
- 12 questions that will arise when part of the process is
- 13 machine-implemented and another part is not.
- 14 And in order for the PTO and the Federal
- 15 circuit to go about the business of devising more
- 16 precise rules as to when particular links to machines
- 17 are sufficient to create patent eligibility, we first
- 18 need to establish the -- the basic principle that some
- 19 link to a machine or transformation is necessary. So I
- 20 think we -- we have made the alternative argument in our
- 21 brief, and I think it is a basis for affirmance.
- But if the Court decided the case on that
- 23 basis, we would lose at least the -- the limited clarity
- 24 that the Federal circuit's opinion has provided; that
- 25 is, it would still be open to people in the future to

- 1 devise new contractual arrangements designed to allocate
- 2 risks, new methods of teaching antitrust, and --
- JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: How about if we say
- 4 something as simple as patent law doesn't cover business
- 5 matters instead of what the Federal circuit has begun to
- 6 say, which is technology is tied to a machine or a
- 7 transformation of the substance, but I have no idea what
- 8 the limits of that ruling will impose in the computer
- 9 world, in the biomedical world, all of the amici who are
- 10 talking about how it will destroy industries? If we ar
- 11 unsure about that, wouldn't the safer practice be simply
- 12 to say it doesn't involve business methods?
- 13 MR. STEWART: I think that would be
- 14 incorrect, and it would create problems of its own.
- 15 That is, the -- the innovation that was held to be
- 16 patent eligible in State Street Bank was not a process.
- 17 The Federal circuit was not construing the statutory
- 18 term "process." It was construing the statutory term
- 19 "machine." And it said, in essence, a computer that has
- 20 been programmed to perform various calculations in
- 21 connection with the operation of this business is a
- 22 machine.
- It went on to say the opposing party in that
- 24 case had not raised any objection under section 102 or
- 25 103, and, therefore, the Federal circuit --

- 1 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: No ruling in this case
- 2 is going to change State Street. It wasn't looking at
- 3 process or the meaning of "process." It was looking at
- 4 something else.
- 5 MR. STEWART: Well, again, I think that the
- 6 invention that was held to be patent eligible in State
- 7 Street is commonly described as a business method, even
- 8 though it was held to be patent eligible as a machine
- 9 rather than as a process.
- 10 So to say that business methods are
- 11 categorically ineligible for patent protection would
- 12 eliminate new machines, including programmed computers,
- 13 that are useful because of their contributions to the
- 14 operation of businesses. And similarly, the court --
- 15 the Federal Circuit in other cases has held that a claim
- 16 to new and innovative computer software may be held
- 17 patentable as a process, as a method of accomplishing
- 18 particular tasks through the use of a computer and those
- 19 might be business-related tasks. So to say that
- 20 business methods were ruled out would itself be a fairly
- 21 sweeping holding.
- 22 JUSTICE SCALIA: Also you could say business
- 23 methods apart from machines are not patentable. How
- 24 about that?
- MR. STEWART: If the Court said that in the

- 1 limited area of business methods, if there is no machine
- 2 or transformation there is no patent eligibility --
- JUSTICE BREYER: Suppose you say this. I'm
- 4 just sort of testing things out. Start with Diehr. I
- 5 mean, and Diehr has these words in it, similar words, it
- 6 just says e.g. -- are you following me?
- 7 MR. STEWART: Yes.
- 8 JUSTICE BREYER: Now, you say what is it
- 9 they have done in this case in the Federal Circuit?
- 10 They have pulled back. That's a move. That's a move.
- 11 They pulled back insofar as they are pulling back from
- 12 business methods, not machines, dah, dah, dah, dah, dah.
- 13 Okay, we see no problem with that.
- Now, they have left much unresolved. One,
- 15 transformation; how broad or narrow is that? We don't
- 16 know. Many people's problems will be solved if it's
- 17 broad on the one hand or narrow in the other.
- 18 Two, are you automatically patented -- in
- 19 the patent statute, if you just sort of reduce this to a
- 20 machine by adding a computer on at the end? They've
- 21 flagged that as a problem. They haven't answered it.
- 22 Could there ever be a situation where it doesn't meet
- 23 this test but still is patentable? We are not sure.
- MR. STEWART: Let me take those points --
- JUSTICE BREYER: Do you see what I'm trying

- 1 to do? I'm trying to note the things that have been
- 2 raised in these 80 briefs, insofar as possible say there
- 3 is a lot there for the future that we can't really
- 4 decide but say as a pull back, okay.
- 5 MR. STEWART: Let me address those points in
- 6 order. The first thing is that in Diehr when you had
- 7 the e.g. cite, it was "e.g. transforming an article into
- 8 a different state of -- state or thing. And I think
- 9 the obvious inference is "e.g." was used because the
- 10 other prong of the machine-or-transformation test is use
- 11 as a machine. That is, in the context of Mr. Morse's
- 12 invention or Mr. Bell's invention, there is
- 13 transformation of a sort, but it wouldn't naturally be
- 14 characterized as transformation of matter.
- Those things were held to be patent eligible
- 16 not because they transformed matter, but because they
- 17 involved the use of a machine. And so, what the Court
- 18 in Diehr said transformation of a matter or an article
- 19 into a different state or thing is the clue to the
- 20 patentability of a process that doesn't involve a
- 21 particular machine.
- 22 And the -- the type of process it had in
- 23 mind was the process that was described in Corning v.
- 24 Burden or the process in Cochrane v. Deener, situations
- 25 in which an individual had devised a method of, in one

- 1 sense -- one case, it was manufacturing flour, and in
- 2 another case it was rolling puddle bowls, of
- 3 manufacturing items. And that person said, here is the
- 4 series of steps that you have to go through, but it is
- 5 not essential that you use any particular tool or
- 6 machine for each of these steps. That was why the
- 7 word --
- 8 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Mr. Stewart, I
- 9 thought I understood your argument up until the very
- 10 last footnote in your brief. And you say this is not --
- 11 simply the method isn't patentable because it doesn't
- 12 involve a machine. But then you say but it might be if
- 13 you use a computer to identify the parties that you are
- 14 setting a price between and if you used a microprocessor
- 15 to calculate the price. That's like saying if you use a
- 16 typewriter to type out the -- the process then it is
- 17 patentable. I -- I -- it -- that takes away everything
- 18 that you spent 53 pages establishing.
- 19 MR. STEWART: Well, I quess there -- there
- 20 were two different places, I believe, at which we
- 21 identified ways in which this sort of hedging scheme
- 22 might be made patent eligible. The first is we
- 23 described a hypothetical interactive website in which
- 24 people -- parties and counterparties could essentially
- 25 find each other by the computer and could agree to terms

- 1 on that basis. And in that situation, the -- the
- 2 computer would be at the heart of the innovation. It
- 3 would be --
- 4 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: No, no. That's just
- 5 saying instead of looking at the -- in the Yellow Pages,
- 6 you look on the computer; and that makes all the
- 7 difference to you?
- 8 MR. STEWART: I think an -- an interactive
- 9 computer technique, one in which you sign on and can
- 10 find people without tracking them down specifically, can
- 11 simply identify yourself on the website as somebody
- 12 whose interested in engaging in a particular transaction
- and a potential counterparty can find you, is different
- 14 from the Yellow Pages.
- 15 But I quess the fundamental point I would
- 16 make is -- and this is really responsive to the second
- 17 part of Justice Breyer's question -- I think it is both
- 18 a virtue and a vice of the test that the Federal Circuit
- 19 has announced and that we are advocating that it doesn't
- 20 solve all the hard questions. That is, the Federal
- 21 Circuit has said since this particular patent applicant
- 22 didn't identify any machine or any transformation that
- 23 would be necessary to the accomplishment of its method,
- 24 that person is out of luck, and therefore, it's
- 25 inappropriate for us to go on to decide kind of the

- 1 precise level of substantiality that a
- 2 machine-or-transformation must play --
- 3 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: But if you look at
- 4 your footnote, that involves the most tangential and
- 5 insignificant use of a machine. And yet you say that
- 6 might be enough to take something from patentability to
- 7 not patentable.
- 8 MR. STEWART: And all we've said is that it
- 9 might be enough; that is, hard questions will arise down
- 10 the road as to where do you draw the line, to what
- 11 extent must the machine or the transformation be
- 12 central --
- 13 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: So you think it's a
- 14 hard question. If you develop a process that says look
- 15 to the historical averages of oil consumption over a
- 16 certain period and divide it by 2, that process would
- 17 not be patentable. But if you say use a calculator,
- 18 then it -- then it is?
- 19 MR. STEWART: I think if it's simply using a
- 20 calculator for its preexisting functionality to crunch
- 21 numbers, very likely that would not be enough. But what
- 22 we see in some analogous areas is that the computer will
- 23 be programmed with new software, it will be given
- 24 functionality it didn't have before in order to allow it
- 25 to perform a series of calculations, and that gets

1 closer to the line. And again --2 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Well, your footnote -- I don't mean to dwell on it -- it says to 3 4 identify counterparties to the transactions. So that if 5 what you're trying to get is the -- the baker who sells 6 bread, because you are going to hook him up with the 7 grocer who sells, you know, in the grocery store, if you 8 punched in in your search station, you know, give me all the bakers in Washington, that would make it patentable? 9 10 MR. STEWART: Again, we are -- we are not 11 saying it would be patent eligible. We would have to 12 review those facts, and the PTO would have to review 13 those facts in the context of an actual application. 14 I guess the point I'm trying to make is 15 simply that we don't want the Court, for instance, in 16 the area of software innovations or medical diagnostic 17 techniques to be trying to use this case as the vehicle 18 for identifying the circumstances in which innovations 19 of that sort would and would not be patent eligible, 20 because the case really doesn't present any -- any 21 question regarding those technologies. And therefore, 22 we --23 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: Now, if it veers the other way, which is by saying that we exclusively rely 24

on the machine-or-transformation test, that we're

25

- 1 precluding applications of the patent law in those
- 2 fields, the things we can't imagine. Once you announce
- 3 an exclusive test, you're shoe-horning technologies that
- 4 might be different.
- 5 MR. STEWART: I guess I would say a couple
- 6 of different things. The first is that it seems
- 7 unlikely, even with new and rapidly emerging
- 8 technologies, that somebody would come up with a system
- 9 that seems for patent purposes analogous to the
- 10 inventions that have been patent eligible in the past
- 11 that didn't involve any machine and that didn't involve
- 12 any transformation.
- 13 Having said that, I would note that in both
- 14 Benson and in Flook the Court held open the possibility
- 15 that some unforeseen event could take place that
- 16 would -- as to which the application would be patent
- 17 eligible, even though the machine-or-transformation
- 18 test --
- 19 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: So help us with a test
- 20 that doesn't go to the extreme the Federal Circuit did,
- 21 which is to preclude any other items, something we held
- 22 open explicitly in two other cases, so we would have to
- 23 backtrack and say now we are ruling that we were wrong,
- 24 and still get at something like this?
- 25 MR. STEWART: Well, I think the Court could

- 1 say -- could do essentially what was done in Benson and
- 2 Flook, namely acknowledge that there had never been a
- 3 case up to this point in which a process had been held
- 4 patent eligible that didn't involve a machine or a
- 5 transformation. It could leave open the possibility
- 6 that some new and as yet unforeseen technology could
- 7 necessitate the creation of an exception.
- 8 But -- and the point we would also make is
- 9 this seems to be a very unlikely candidate for such an
- 10 exception, because the hedging method that Petitioners
- 11 have -- for which they have sought a patent is in no
- 12 sense different in kind from risk management techniques
- 13 that have been undertaken for centuries.
- JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: Well, that -- that goes
- 15 back to, not 101 but 102 and 103. That goes back to
- 16 obviousness or the standard weeding mechanisms for
- 17 patent.
- 18 MR. STEWART: Well, this may or may not be a
- 19 novel or nonobvious method. But even if we assume that
- 20 this is obvious for purposes of Section 103, in that it
- 21 represent as sufficient advance over the prior art, that
- 22 people skilled in the art would not necessarily have
- 23 come up with it, it still is a different in kind from
- 24 risk management techniques that have taken place in this
- 25 country for -- for 200 years. It is -- it is --

- JUSTICE GINSBURG: Mr. Stewart, did you --
- 2 does the government put forward this
- 3 machine-or-transformation test? Was that your test, or
- 4 was it the Federal circuit's on its own?
- 5 MR. STEWART: The Federal circuit, sua
- 6 sponte, set the case for hearing en banc. I believe the
- 7 case had been argued to a panel, but had not been
- 8 decided, and the Federal circuit set the case for
- 9 reargument en banc, posed a number of questions to
- 10 the -- the parties and the government did advocate the
- 11 machine-or-transformation test.
- 12 JUSTICE GINSBURG: Tell me what --
- 13 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: I'm sorry. Did or
- 14 did not?
- 15 MR. STEWART: Did, it did advocate the
- 16 machine-or-transformation.
- JUSTICE GINSBURG: You did -- and if you
- 18 read Judge Mayer's opinion, it has a simplicity to it.
- 19 It says, if it's technology, then its within the realm
- 20 of patent, and if it's not technology, it isn't, if it
- 21 is based on science or technology, and that seems to be
- 22 what is used in other places.
- MR. STEWART: I don't know that our tests --
- 24 I think our test, in a sense, has a shorthand version of
- 25 that. I don't know that focusing the inquiry directly

- 1 on whether technology is involved would make the inquiry
- 2 easier, and that is so for two reasons.
- First, people could dispute whether
- 4 particular advances are properly regarded as
- 5 technological advances, and second, we would still have
- 6 the difficult problems that the Chief Justice has
- 7 referred to, where you have a process that is described
- 8 as involving technology at some step along the way, and
- 9 courts will still have to make the determination, is
- 10 that sufficiently substantial step to make the process,
- 11 as a whole, a technological one.
- So I don't think that, by adopting a
- 13 technological arts test, the Court would avoid the
- 14 difficulties that it has appropriately identified with
- 15 the machine-or-transformation test. The other thing I
- 16 would say about the machine-or-transformation test is
- 17 this is not a government position of recent vintage;
- 18 that is, the government's brief to this court in
- 19 Gottschalk v. Benson, or its reply brief which was filed
- 20 around 1971, basically said that, although this Court
- 21 has never announced machine-or-transformation of the
- 22 test, that is the principle that can be abstracted from
- 23 the totality of the Court's decisions.
- 24 JUSTICE KENNEDY: Was the State Street case
- 25 a machine-or-transformation test?

- 1 MR. STEWART: It would.
- 2 JUSTICE KENNEDY: You talk about the State
- 3 Street case in your brief, and it's complicated because
- 4 of the Federal statute that follows it, but if you had
- 5 just the facts of State Street before us, and forgetting
- 6 the Federal statute was enacted after it, how would you
- 7 decide this case?
- 8 MR. STEWART: Oh, it would come out the same
- 9 way. I mean, State Street Bank --
- 10 JUSTICE KENNEDY: That's what I thought.
- 11 And is it -- is it machine-or-transformation, in your
- 12 view?
- MR. STEWART: Well, it was machine -- that
- 14 is, in State Street Bank, the claim was not to a process
- 15 within the meaning of Section 101. The claim was not to
- 16 a method of accomplishing things by means of a computer,
- 17 which would be, potentially, a process. It was to the
- 18 computer itself, the programmed computer, that the
- 19 innovation in State Street Bank was that the devising of
- 20 new computer programs that allowed the computer to
- 21 perform various tasks in association with the carrying
- 22 out of the hub-and-spokes investment -- investment
- 23 method. And, certainly --
- 24 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: So what did that --
- 25 what did that transform?

- 1 MR. STEWART: It didn't transform anything,
- 2 but it would fit -- the transformation part would be
- 3 irrelevant because the machine-or-transformation test
- 4 is, in our view, the appropriate rubric to apply in
- 5 construing the statutory term process, that is, when the
- 6 person doesn't say, I have invented a new machine, but,
- 7 rather, says, I've identified a new process for
- 8 accomplishing things.
- 9 If a person claims to be -- to have invented
- 10 a new machine, then that -- it is either a machine or it
- 11 isn't. A computer is certainly a machine. Really, the
- 12 only -- I think the --
- 13 JUSTICE STEVENS: I don't understand how
- 14 that can be a patent on a machine if the only thing
- 15 novel is the process that the machine is using.
- 16 Isn't -- isn't the question -- really, the question
- 17 there was whether the new process was patentable.
- 18 MR. STEWART: Well, I think what -- the
- 19 argument that the other side, the person challenging the
- 20 patent in State Street could have made, but apparently
- 21 didn't, was the person could have said, of course, the
- 22 computer is a machine, but a computer programmed with
- 23 new software to perform different functions is not a new
- 24 machine.
- 25 It's not a different machine from the one

- 1 that has always -- not always, but that has already
- 2 existed, and therefore, it doesn't satisfy Section 1 or
- 3 Section -- 102 or Section 103, but that --
- 4 JUSTICE KENNEDY: Well, that was one of the
- 5 reasons I asked you about it, I suppose. Just looking
- 6 at the whole case, do you think the State Street
- 7 holding -- the State Street invention was patentable?
- 8 MR. STEWART: It was -- the way I would put
- 9 it is: The State Street Bank analysis of the question
- 10 that was actually presented to it was correct; that is,
- 11 the argued was made, the programmed computer is
- 12 patentable as a --
- JUSTICE KENNEDY: How would you come out in
- 14 the State Street case today, if all of the arguments
- 15 were made under your test?
- 16 MR. STEWART: Well, under our test, we would
- 17 come out the same way because the computer would be a
- 18 machine. The only question would be whether the
- 19 programming of the computer with new software caused it
- 20 to be a patentable different machine from the one that
- 21 existed previously.
- 22 Now -- now, we do think that software
- 23 innovations can have the effect of causing the computer
- 24 to be a different, special purpose computer, as the
- 25 phrase --

- 1 JUSTICE STEVENS: I'm sorry. I must be
- 2 awfully stupid. You say it would come out the same way.
- 3 In the same way the court did or this way you argued?
- 4 MR. STEWART: I think the same -- the
- 5 Federal circuit's decision in State Street would come
- 6 out the same way under our test.
- 7 JUSTICE STEVENS: And you think it should?
- 8 You think it should?
- 9 MR. STEWART: Yes, but, again, the point I
- 10 would emphasize --
- 11 JUSTICE STEVENS: I don't understand why
- 12 that isn't just the application of a process, which --
- 13 which is not itself patentable subject matter, to a
- 14 particular machine that can use process --
- 15 JUSTICE KENNEDY: That's -- that's a problem
- 16 I have.
- MR. STEWART: Well, I guess -- let me
- 18 backtrack. If you look at the text of the statute that
- 19 is reproduced at Page 2 of -- of the Blue Brief, and it
- 20 says -- it's right in the middle of the page. "Whoever
- 21 invents or discovers any new and useful process,
- 22 machine, manufacture, or composition of matter is
- 23 potentially entitled to" --
- JUSTICE BREYER: So I thought you were
- 25 saying that the correct argument for the people

- 1 attacking the patent in that case was to say, this is
- 2 not a machine. The machine there is a computer. This
- 3 is a program that changes switches, and that is a
- 4 different process for the use of the machine.
- Now, whether that process is or is not
- 6 patentable depends upon a lot of things that we don't
- 7 have to go into in this case. Is that right?
- 8 MR. STEWART: I don't -- no.
- 9 JUSTICE BREYER: Okay. Well, then what is
- 10 right?
- 11 MR. STEWART: I don't think that's what I
- 12 saw saying. What I was saying is that -- and I guess
- 13 the -- the first point I would make is, when somebody
- 14 claims to have invented a new machine, the
- 15 transformation test really has nothing to do with the
- 16 inquiry because a -- a better television or a better DVD
- 17 player can be patented as a machine, even though
- 18 transformation of matter is no --
- 19 JUSTICE STEVENS: It's not on a computer,
- 20 which the only difference from the old computer is it's
- 21 using a new program. You can't say that's a new
- 22 machine.
- MR. STEWART: Well, but my -- I think --
- 24 first, I think you can because I think if you -- if you
- 25 improved the hardware of the computer in order to enable

- 1 it to perform --
- 2 JUSTICE STEVENS: But that patent didn't
- 3 require any change in the hardware, as I remember it
- 4 correctly.
- 5 MR. STEWART: But I -- but I think the
- 6 argument that has been made with success -- and PTO
- 7 agrees with this -- is that programming a computer by
- 8 means of software to produce -- to perform new functions
- 9 can create a novel --
- 10 JUSTICE BREYER: But then all we do is every
- 11 example that I just gave, that I thought were examples
- 12 that certainly would not be patented, you simply patent
- 13 them. All you do is just have a set of instructions for
- 14 saying how to set a computer to do it. Anyone can do
- 15 that. Now, it's a machine.
- 16 So all the business patents are all right
- 17 back in. Now, that -- what I think we were looking
- 18 for was -- or at least I was -- was why that isn't so,
- 19 and how you are going to later, down the road, deal with
- 20 this situation of all you do is you get somebody who
- 21 knows computers, and you turn every business patent into
- 22 a setting of switches on the machine because there are
- 23 no businesses that don't use those machines.
- 24 MR. STEWART: Well, first of all the only
- 25 ruling that we're -- backtrack a bit, to say, we oppose,

- 1 sir, in this case because we recognize that there are
- 2 difficult problems out there in terms of patentability
- 3 of software innovations and medical diagnostics.
- JUSTICE KENNEDY: You thought we -- you
- 5 thought we would mess it up.
- 6 MR. STEWART: I didn't think --
- 7 (Laughter.)
- 8 MR. STEWART: We didn't think the Court
- 9 would mess it up. We thought that this case would
- 10 provide an unsuitable vehicle for resolving the hard
- 11 questions because the case doesn't involve computer
- 12 software or medical diagnostic techniques, and
- 13 therefore, we thought the Court would arrive at the
- 14 position that I think, at least some members are feeling
- 15 that you have arrived at, that you will decide this
- 16 case, and most of the hard questions remain unresolved.
- 17 And, frankly, we think that's true.
- 18 JUSTICE GINSBURG: But this case could be
- 19 decided without making any bold steps.
- 20 MR. STEWART: Again, I don't -- I don't
- 21 think it would be a bold step to say that
- 22 machine-or-transformation is the test. That is, we have
- 23 gone for --
- 24 JUSTICE GINSBURG: But even the Federal
- 25 circuit didn't say it was a retest. It said it is for

- 1 now. We know that things that we haven't yet
- 2 contemplated may be around the corner, and when they
- 3 happen, we will deal with them.
- 4 MR. STEWART: And we would -- we would be
- 5 entirely content with a ruling like that. And we would
- 6 say that the claimed hedging method here is not the sort
- 7 of Space Age innovation that might cause Justices to
- 8 say: This is just different in kind from anything that
- 9 the drafters of the patent statute could have imagined.
- 10 The other point I would make about the
- 11 programmed computer is, to follow up on my television
- 12 and DVD example, that when you claim a machine or a
- 13 manufacture, as the committee reports to the 1952 act
- 14 said, those words are broad. They encompass everything
- 15 under the sun that is made by man. And so a television
- 16 is indisputably a machine, even though its function is
- 17 not to transform matter. It's only when you get to the
- 18 term "process" that you are left with -- that the
- 19 machine-or-transformation test kicks in.
- 20 And really, the argument on the other side
- 21 is: The term "process" in ordinary speech is extremely
- 22 broad. It can literally be read to encompass any series
- of steps, whether or not linked to technology, whether
- 24 or not linked to a machine or transformation. And the
- 25 other side argues you should construe it that way in the

- 1 patent statute.
- I guess the -- the three reasons we would
- 3 say that's not so are: First, under the canon of
- 4 noscitur a sociis, it is appropriate to construe the
- 5 term "process" in conjunction with the other terms.
- 6 Those other terms are broad, but they all refer to
- 7 physical objects that don't exist in nature and are
- 8 created by man. And a huge array of very productive,
- 9 innovative activity doesn't culminate in the creation of
- 10 any new physical substance, and the word "process"
- 11 surely was intended to add something, but it would be
- 12 quite strange to construe the word "process" to
- 13 encompass the whole range of human endeavor when the
- 14 other words are limited to the creation of new things in
- 15 the physical.
- 16 The second thing is that when this Court in
- 17 the past has explained the term "process," it's always
- 18 linked it to the operation of machines, as in the
- 19 telephone cases in Morse, or to the transformation of
- 20 matter in ways that may not be dependent on a particular
- 21 machine.
- 22 And the third thing I would say is that in a
- 23 sense, there is a strong dog that didn't bark in the
- 24 night quality to our argument. That is, even though the
- 25 Court has never said in so many words that a method of

| 1 | allocating risk by contract is a patent-eligible |
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| 2 | process, the economic history of this country really |
| 3 | would have been fundamentally different if it had been |
| 4 | believed from the outset that innovations of this |
| 5 | character could be patented and potential competitors |
| 6 | could be foreclosed from engaging in the same method. |
| 7 | If the Court has nothing further? |
| 8 | CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Thank you, Counsel. |
| 9 | Mr. Jakes, you have four minutes remaining. |
| 10 | REBUTTAL ARGUMENT OF J. MICHAEL JAKES |
| 11 | ON BEHALF OF THE PETITIONER |
| 12 | MR. JAKES: Thank you, Mr. Chief Justice. |
| 13 | The Federal Circuit did announce this test |
| 14 | as the sole test for all processes. It said it applied |
| 15 | no matter what the process was, so we do have to face |
| 16 | these difficult questions. |
| 17 | I think the question can be avoided, because |
| 18 | we don't need a rigid test of this type based on |
| 19 | machine-or-transformation. The question we are looking |
| 20 | at and should be looking at is: Are we trying to patent |
| 21 | an abstract idea? |
| 22 | Now, the government has gone farther than |
| 23 | that and really wants to exclude methods of organizing |
| 24 | human behavior. I think that's the way they describe |
| 25 | it. That's really the business method rejection in |

- 1 other words. And I think that runs contrary to section
- 2 273 of the statute, which recognized that there were
- 3 business methods that could fall within the patent
- 4 statute, and as a result prior user rights should be
- 5 granted.
- To speak briefly about the State Street Bank
- 7 case that was a type of business method that was
- 8 implemented on a machine. The Federal Circuit said it
- 9 didn't matter. They weren't looking at whether it was
- 10 in machine form or method form. Their reasoning would
- 11 have applied the same either way, and to do otherwise
- 12 would be to place form over substance. And in a sense,
- 13 that's what some of the transformation debate is about.
- 14 It's form over substance. Why should transformation be
- 15 the key? The key should be: Is it a practical
- 16 application of a useful result?
- Our method, we believe, is a practical
- 18 application. As the patent office has said, it does
- 19 involve physical steps. I think that was one of the
- 20 clues that the patent office has relied on in saying
- 21 whether or not something is abstract. Since it is not
- 22 an abstract method, it's rooted in the real world, we
- 23 think it should be eligible to have its examination at
- 24 the patent office and it shouldn't be thrown out on an
- 25 arbitrary test.

| Т | CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: THE THE PHYSICAL |
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| 2 | step that your process involves is picking picking up |
| 3 | the phone and calling people on both sides of the |
| 4 | transaction. |
| 5 | MR. JAKES: It could be. It also requires |
| 6 | the sale of a commodity on a fixed price. That is |
| 7 | something that takes place in the real world as opposed |
| 8 | to a mental process within somebody's head. Purely |
| 9 | mental processes that are done just solely in someone's |
| -0 | mind, I think we all agree, those are not |
| .1 | patent-eligible. That's not our method. |
| _2 | CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Thank you, Counsel. |
| L3 | The case is submitted. |
| 4 | (Whereupon, at 1:55 p.m., the case in the |
| _5 | above-entitled matter was submitted.) |
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