

Syllabus

NOTE: Where it is feasible, a syllabus (headnote) will be released, as is being done in connection with this case, at the time the opinion is issued. The syllabus constitutes no part of the opinion of the Court but has been prepared by the Reporter of Decisions for the convenience of the reader. See *United States v. Detroit Timber & Lumber Co.*, 200 U. S. 321, 337.

SUPREME COURT OF THE UNITED STATES

Syllabus

GARCETTI ET AL. v. CEBALLOS**CERTIORARI TO THE UNITED STATES COURT OF APPEALS FOR
THE NINTH CIRCUIT**

No. 04–473. Argued October 12, 2005—Reargued March 21, 2006—
Decided May 30, 2006

Respondent Ceballos, a supervising deputy district attorney, was asked by defense counsel to review a case in which, counsel claimed, the affidavit police used to obtain a critical search warrant was inaccurate. Concluding after the review that the affidavit made serious misrepresentations, Ceballos relayed his findings to his supervisors, petitioners here, and followed up with a disposition memorandum recommending dismissal. Petitioners nevertheless proceeded with the prosecution. At a hearing on a defense motion to challenge the warrant, Ceballos recounted his observations about the affidavit, but the trial court rejected the challenge. Claiming that petitioners then retaliated against him for his memo in violation of the First and Fourteenth Amendments, Ceballos filed a 42 U. S. C. §1983 suit. The District Court granted petitioners summary judgment, ruling, *inter alia*, that the memo was not protected speech because Ceballos wrote it pursuant to his employment duties. Reversing, the Ninth Circuit held that the memo’s allegations were protected under the First Amendment analysis in *Pickering v. Board of Ed. of Township High School Dist. 205, Will Cty.*, 391 U. S. 563, and *Connick v. Myers*, 461 U. S. 138.

Held: When public employees make statements pursuant to their official duties, they are not speaking as citizens for First Amendment purposes, and the Constitution does not insulate their communications from employer discipline. Pp. 5–14.

(a) Two inquiries guide interpretation of the constitutional protections accorded public employee speech. The first requires determining whether the employee spoke as a citizen on a matter of public concern. See *Pickering, supra*, at 568. If the answer is no, the em-

Syllabus

ployee has no First Amendment cause of action based on the employer's reaction to the speech. See *Connick, supra*, at 147. If the answer is yes, the possibility of a First Amendment claim arises. The question becomes whether the government employer had an adequate justification for treating the employee differently from any other member of the general public. See *Pickering, supra*, at 568. This consideration reflects the importance of the relationship between the speaker's expressions and employment. Without a significant degree of control over its employees' words and actions, a government employer would have little chance to provide public services efficiently. Cf. *Connick, supra*, at 143. Thus, a government entity has broader discretion to restrict speech when it acts in its employer role, but the restrictions it imposes must be directed at speech that has some potential to affect its operations. On the other hand, a citizen who works for the government is nonetheless still a citizen. The First Amendment limits a public employer's ability to leverage the employment relationship to restrict, incidentally or intentionally, the liberties employees enjoy in their capacities as private citizens. See *Perry v. Sindermann*, 408 U. S. 593, 597. So long as employees are speaking as citizens about matters of public concern, they must face only those speech restrictions that are necessary for their employers to operate efficiently and effectively. See, e.g., *Connick, supra*, at 147. Pp. 5–8.

(b) Proper application of the Court's precedents leads to the conclusion that the First Amendment does not prohibit managerial discipline based on an employee's expressions made pursuant to official responsibilities. Because Ceballos' memo falls into this category, his allegation of unconstitutional retaliation must fail. The dispositive factor here is not that Ceballos expressed his views inside his office, rather than publicly, see, e.g., *Givhan v. Western Line Consol. School Dist.*, 439 U. S. 410, 414, nor that the memo concerned the subject matter of his employment, see, e.g., *Pickering*, 391 U. S. at 573. Rather, the controlling factor is that Ceballos' expressions were made pursuant to his official duties. That consideration distinguishes this case from those in which the First Amendment provides protection against discipline. Ceballos wrote his disposition memo because that is part of what he was employed to do. He did not act as a citizen by writing it. The fact that his duties sometimes required him to speak or write does not mean his supervisors were prohibited from evaluating his performance. Restricting speech that owes its existence to a public employee's professional responsibilities does not infringe any liberties the employee might have enjoyed as a private citizen. It simply reflects the exercise of employer control over what the employer itself has commissioned or created. Cf. *Rosenberger v. Rector and Visitors*

Syllabus

of Univ. of Va., 515 U. S. 819, 833. This result is consistent with the Court's prior emphasis on the potential societal value of employee speech and on affording government employers sufficient discretion to manage their operations. Ceballos' proposed contrary rule, adopted by the Ninth Circuit, would commit state and federal courts to a new, permanent, and intrusive role, mandating judicial oversight of communications between and among government employees and their superiors in the course of official business. This displacement of managerial discretion by judicial supervision finds no support in the Court's precedents. The doctrinal anomaly the Court of Appeals perceived in compelling public employers to tolerate certain employee speech made publicly but not speech made pursuant to an employee's assigned duties misconceives the theoretical underpinnings of this Court's decisions and is unfounded as a practical matter. Pp. 8–13.

(c) Exposing governmental inefficiency and misconduct is a matter of considerable significance, and various measures have been adopted to protect employees and provide checks on supervisors who would order unlawful or otherwise inappropriate actions. These include federal and state whistle-blower protection laws and labor codes and, for government attorneys, rules of conduct and constitutional obligations apart from the First Amendment. However, the Court's precedents do not support the existence of a constitutional cause of action behind every statement a public employee makes in the course of doing his or her job. Pp. 13–14.

361 F. 3d 1168, reversed and remanded.

KENNEDY, J., delivered the opinion of the Court, in which ROBERTS, C. J., and SCALIA, THOMAS, and ALITO, JJ., joined. STEVENS, J., filed a dissenting opinion. SOUTER, J., filed a dissenting opinion, in which STEVENS and GINSBURG, JJ., joined. BREYER, J., filed a dissenting opinion.