
Christina Rossetti

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MERRIAM-WEBSTER’S UNEXPECTED IMPACT ON THE ENVIRONMENT: AN ANALYSIS OF JUSTICE KAVANAUGH’S MEXICHEM FLUOR, INC. V. EPA

I. JUSTICE KAVANAUGH, WEBSTER, AND THE ENVIRONMENT

Merriam-Webster: a name synonymous with the word “dictionary.” While individuals primarily use dictionaries in everyday life, courts sometimes employ them to resolve statutory disputes. Dictionaries can help elucidate the meaning of statutory language when congressional intent is unclear. In the environmental context, the United States Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit heavily relied on Merriam-Webster in Mexichem Fluor, Inc. v. EPA, and this reliance led the court to conclude the EPA did not have the authority to ban hydrofluorocarbon (HFC) use in certain circumstances under Section 612 of the Clean Air Act (CAA).

For most of the twentieth century, the world focused on the dangers of ozone-depleting substances. Unfortunately, this focus may have prevented a deeper look into other dangerous substances lurking in the air, like greenhouse gases. HFCs are potent greenhouse gases that remain in the atmosphere for a long time, which partly allows them to “trap thousands of times more heat in our...”

3. See Liptak, supra note 2 (revealing courts from 2000 to 2010 employed dictionaries in 225 opinions).
5. See id. at 458-59 (emphasizing EPA did not properly interpret “replace” which rendered their interpretation of Section 612 implausible).
7. See 42 U.S.C. § 7671k (focusing on eradicating ozone-depleting substances usage and listing greenhouse gases as safe substitutes to ozone-depleting substances); see also Fisher & Wilson, supra note 6 (contrasting improvement in decreasing ozone-depleting substances with HFC’s detrimental effect).
They also contribute to heat waves, severe natural disasters, poor air quality, and an increase of waterborne or foodborne pathogens, all of which detrimentally impact the environment and human health. While the ozone layer is on the path to reparation, a variety of products, including aerosols, air conditioners, and refrigerators, rely heavily on HFCs. Prohibiting HFC use would reduce these risks and provide manufacturers with the opportunity to employ more efficient alternatives.

In 2009, recognizing the serious danger posed by HFCs, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) adopted a new regulation which concluded greenhouse gases, including HFCs, “endanger both the public health and the public welfare of current and future generations.” Former President Barack H. Obama typically supported the EPA’s actions against climate change. In 2013, President Obama formulated a Climate Change Action Plan, encouraging a reduction of HFC use and giving the EPA authority to act accordingly.
Unlike former President Obama, President Donald J. Trump generally has not supported environmental regulation. In the CAA context, President Trump has taken steps to decrease air pollution restraints in order to increase manufacturing. Against this backdrop, President Trump recently nominated a judge to take the place of retiring Supreme Court Justice, Anthony Kennedy. He chose D.C. Circuit Judge Brett M. Kavanaugh, who appears to be a more conservative judge than Justice Kennedy. The Senate narrowly appointed Justice Kavanaugh to the Supreme Court on October 6, 2018.

This Note examines Justice Kavanaugh’s decision in Mexichem Fluor, its impact on the environment and the law, and its implications for the future makeup of the Supreme Court. Section II describes the facts giving rise to Mexichem Fluor. Section III proposes to find alternatives to greenhouse gases through Significant New Alternatives Policy Program.

15. See Michael Greshko et al., A Running List of How President Trump is Changing Environmental Policy, NAT’L GEOGRAPHIC (Mar. 12, 2019), https://news.nationalgeographic.com/2017/03/how-trump-is-changing-science-environment/ (listing Trump’s changes that are affecting environment). The environmental changes include dismantling Obama’s plans to preserve the environment and other regulations restricting air pollution. Id. (describing Trump’s undermining of Obama’s fuel economy goals specifically).


18. See id. (comparing Kavanaugh’s conservative tendencies with his speech indicating willingness to be bipartisan).


20. For further discussion of the court’s holding, see infra notes 105-42 and accompanying text. For further discussion of the holding’s impact, see infra notes 195-243 and accompanying text. For clarity, Justice Kavanaugh was a D.C. Circuit judge at the time of the Mexichem Fluor opinion, but he will be referred to as Justice throughout this Note to reflect his Supreme Court appointment.

21. For further discussion on the facts of Mexichem Fluor, see infra notes 26-38 and accompanying text.
vides a legal framework and background of the issues in this case.\textsuperscript{22} Section IV provides a legal analysis of the D.C. Circuit’s majority and dissenting opinions.\textsuperscript{23} Section V provides a critique of the court’s analysis and reasoning.\textsuperscript{24} Finally, Section VI concludes with a discussion of the decision’s impact in multiple contexts.\textsuperscript{25}

II. The Situation Where Webster Came to the Rescue

Mexichem Fluor and Arkema are two manufacturers that used HFCs in a variety of products because they relied on HFCs’ classification as a safe alternative to ozone-depleting substances under Section 612 of the CAA.\textsuperscript{26} In 2015, the EPA announced a new rule removing HFCs’ title as a safe substitute, meaning companies needed to find other EPA-approved substances in manufacturing their products.\textsuperscript{27} Mexichem Fluor brought suit challenging this removal on two grounds.\textsuperscript{28} First, Mexichem Fluor argued the EPA lacked statutory authority to make this change, as the EPA did not have CAA authorization to regulate safe substitutes like HFCs once manufacturers ceased use of ozone-depleting substances.\textsuperscript{29} Second, Mexichem Fluor asserted the EPA’s decision to remove HFCs from the safe substitute list was arbitrary and capricious because the EPA cited no explanation for the change.\textsuperscript{30} Based on new information, the EPA argued it had the authority under Section 612 of the CAA to change HFCs’ characterization as a safe substitute.\textsuperscript{31}

Both parties agreed the EPA had the authority to remove HFCs from the safe substitute list under the CAA, and the EPA could pre-

\textsuperscript{22} For further discussion of the legal background of the case, see infra notes 39-104 and accompanying text.
\textsuperscript{23} For further discussion of the court’s legal analysis of the issues presented in Mexichem Fluor, see infra notes 105-142 and accompanying text.
\textsuperscript{24} For a critique of the court’s legal analysis and reasoning, see infra notes 143-194 and accompanying text.
\textsuperscript{25} For further discussion of the potential impact from Mexichem Fluor, see infra notes 195-243 and accompanying text.
\textsuperscript{26} See Mexichem Fluor, Inc. v. EPA, 866 F.3d 451, 453, 456 (D.C. Cir. 2017) (noting parties’ admission that HFCs are non-ozone-depleting substances and were previously safe substitutes).
\textsuperscript{27} See id. at 453, 456 (explaining 2013 Presidential Order’s influence on 2015 rule and impact on companies).
\textsuperscript{28} See id. (stating Mexichem Fluor’s two arguments).
\textsuperscript{29} See id. at 456 (emphasizing HFCs’ status as non-ozone-depleting substance). Procedurally, two cases with the same arguments were consolidated to form Mexichem Fluor. See id. (noting procedural history).
\textsuperscript{30} See id. (explaining Mexichem Fluor argued EPA failed to address all parts of issue).
\textsuperscript{31} See Mexichem Fluor, 866 F.3d at 453 (discussing EPA’s argument based on Section 612 of CAA).
vent companies that are still relying on ozone-depleting substances from replacing these substances with HFCs.\textsuperscript{32} The issue was ultimately narrow, asking only whether the EPA could mandate manufacturers who relied on HFCs’ safe alternative classification to stop using HFCs as replacements for ozone-depleting substances.\textsuperscript{33}

The D.C. Circuit, which has exclusive jurisdiction over this issue, analyzed whether the EPA had statutory authority under Section 612 of the CAA to prohibit HFCs’ use despite their previous designation as safe alternatives to ozone-depleting substances.\textsuperscript{34} The Court additionally discussed whether EPA’s general removal of HFCs from the safe substitute list was arbitrary and capricious.\textsuperscript{35} In a split decision, Justice Kavanaugh wrote for the majority and held the EPA lacked statutory authority to require manufacturers to replace HFCs with safer substances, even though the EPA’s reasoning for the initial removal of HFCs from the safe substitute list was not arbitrary and capricious.\textsuperscript{36} Although he vacated any portions of the 2015 rule requiring the replacement of HFCs, Justice Kavanaugh remanded the case so the EPA could pursue this action on retroactive disapproval grounds.\textsuperscript{37} Judge Wilkins dissented, arguing the congressional intent of Section 612 was unclear, which indicated deference should have been given to the EPA’s interpretation.\textsuperscript{38}

III. THE ORIGINS OF WEBSTER’S ROLE

The CAA, worldwide agreements, and separation of powers principles created the perfect storm that gave rise to Mexichem Fluor’s facts.\textsuperscript{39} This section first examines the statute at issue, Section 612 of the CAA, and its context on both a national and global

\textsuperscript{32} See id. at 457-58 (stating undisputed facts to help frame issue).
\textsuperscript{33} See id. at 458 (emphasizing issue is solely in regard to manufacturers that already replaced all ozone-depleting substances).
\textsuperscript{34} See 42 U.S.C. § 7607(b) (2012) (providing D.C. Circuit with special jurisdiction over specific air issues); see also Mexichem Fluor, 866 F.3d at 458 (explaining issues relating to separation of powers).
\textsuperscript{35} See Mexichem Fluor, 866 F.3d at 462 (holding EPA’s actions neither arbitrary nor capricious and vacating for lack of statutory authority).
\textsuperscript{36} Id. at 454, 464 (describing Justice Kavanaugh’s holding).
\textsuperscript{37} See id. at 462 (stating reasons for remand and necessary components to succeeding under retroactive disapproval theory).
\textsuperscript{38} See id. at 464-65 (summarizing Judge Wilkins’ reason for dissenting).
\textsuperscript{39} For further discussion of the CAA, see infra notes 42-61 and accompanying text. For further discussion of worldwide agreements, see infra notes 62-68 and accompanying text. For further discussion of separation of powers, see infra notes 69-92 and accompanying text.
level. Next, this section will examine more specifically key statutory interpretation and deference principles.

A. Air (n.): “the mixture of invisible odorless tasteless gases . . . that surrounds the earth.”

The CAA addresses increasing amounts of air pollution due to the expansion of United States’ populations in cities. Section 612, at issue in Mexichem Fluor and referred to as the Significant New Alternatives Policy (SNAP), specifically alleviates the impact of dangerous substances on the air by prohibiting the use of those substances. Although the word “ozone” does not appear in this section of the CAA, Section 612 falls under a subchapter dedicated to ozone protection and focuses on ozone-depleting substances. Section 612 sought to “replace” ozone-depleting substances with safer alternatives for the environment.

To achieve this goal, Section 612 calls for the use of federal resources to research safe alternatives to ozone-depleting substances. All alternative substances must “reduce the overall risk to human health and the environment; and [be] currently or potentially available.” Finally, Section 612 allows for a right to add or remove a substance from the safe substitute list, provided that the petitioner demonstrates adequate reasons and support for this action.

The CAA’s legislative history reveals the senate bill encouraged the substitution of a variety of substances that affect climate change,

40. For further discussion of the CAA and its context, see infra notes 42-61 and accompanying text.
41. For further discussion of statutory interpretation principles, see infra notes 69-92 and accompanying text.
42. Air, WEBSTER’S NEW INTERNATIONAL DICTIONARY (3d. ed. 1993) (providing definition of “air”).
44. See 42 U.S.C. § 7671k (2012) (outlining SNAP policy and procedure); see also id. § 7401 (conveying goal to enhance environmental protection).
45. See § 7671k (prohibiting class I and class II substances); see also 42 U.S.C. § 7671a (2012) (defining class I and class II substances as ozone-depleting substances).
46. See § 7671k (defining policy for removing class I and class II substances). This policy intended to remove ozone-depleting substances “to the maximum extent practicable.” Id. (stating policy’s goal).
47. See § 7671k(b)(1) (discussing federal research programs dedicated to finding safe alternatives).
48. § 7671k(c) (stating alternative substances’ requirements).
not just ozone-depleting substances. The conference committee chose to adopt the house bill instead, which focused only on substances that depleted the ozone layer. Neither the senate nor the house bill discussed the protocol for replacing a substitute that was previously deemed "safe."

In 1994, the EPA formulated a regulation to address Section 612's implementation. In discussing this regulation, the EPA stated this section "does not authorize EPA to review substitutes for substances that are not themselves' ozone-depleting substances." In contrast, the EPA stated "class I and class II substances are 'replaced' within the meaning of Section 612(c) each time a substitute is used, so that once EPA identifies an unacceptable substitute, any future use of such substitute is prohibited." In 2009, the EPA determined HFCs were dangerous greenhouse gases, even though they were listed as safe substitutes to ozone-depleting substances.

The EPA created a new rule in 2015 after determining greenhouse gases were not safe substitutes to ozone-depleting substances. In this rule, the EPA stated it would no longer permit HFCs as safe substitutes, and companies currently relying on HFCs needed to cease using them by certain dates, depending on the product and HFC type. The agency justified this new rule by find-
ing that HFCs damaged the environment and air more than easily available alternatives.59 The EPA acknowledged this rule affected a wide variety of industries.60 The agency also recognized the transition could be costly, but stated it could only consider substitute costs, not transition costs, in accordance with the CAA.61

B. Agreement (n.): “harmony of opinion, action, or character”62

The Montreal Protocol, an agreement among the United Nations to regulate ozone-depleting substances was influential in Section 612’s formulation.63 Under this arrangement, countries agreed to replace chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs) and other ozone-depleting substances with safer substitutes.64 As a result of this agreement, the amount of ozone-depleting substances has been reduced, and “the ozone layer is expected to be fully healed near the middle of the 21st century.”65

In 2016, countries’ delegates amended the Montreal Protocol to include the Kigali Amendment after research revealed HFCs’ detrimental effects.66 The Amendment not only included phasing out HFCs’ use, but also required wealthier countries to assist finan-

59. See id. at 42,871 (describing comparative approach and stating no safe alternative determination was intended to be static). “Most of the other alternatives that EPA identified as having lower risk than those for which we proposed to change the status have zero ODP or have negligible impact on stratospheric ozone.” Id. at 42,923 (stating alternatives are safer than HFCs).
60. See id. at 42,873 (noting new rule’s effect on industries from plumbing and air conditioning to motor vehicle manufacturing to food).
61. See id. at 42,897 (responding to comments concerning transition costs).
65. See id. (noting reduction requirements of ozone-depleting substances and their impact on the environment).
cially poorer nations in this transition and prohibited countries from trading HFCs to those that have not yet ratified the Amendment.\textsuperscript{67} Per this Amendment, the United States must halt HFCs’ use and replace HFCs with safer substitutes by 2019.\textsuperscript{68}

C. Separation (n.): “the act or process of separating”\textsuperscript{69}

As part of our constitutional system’s foundation, courts do not make the law, but instead, interpret it.\textsuperscript{70} Even if Congress, the lawmakers, ineffectively addresses a pressing issue, courts still do not have the authority to create the law.\textsuperscript{71} This principle extends to government agencies, as Congress cannot delegate lawmaking power to agencies without an intelligible principle.\textsuperscript{72} When Congress’ delegation and statutory intent is unambiguous, little interpretation is necessary.\textsuperscript{73} A problem arises when congressional authority is unclear.\textsuperscript{74}

To address this situation, \textit{Chevron, U.S.A., Inc. v. Natural Resources Defense Council, Inc.}\textsuperscript{75} provided a two-part framework for understanding the authority delegated by Congress.\textsuperscript{76} If congressional intent is unambiguous, then the agency must follow that intent, and the court has no further role.\textsuperscript{77} If congressional intent is ambiguous, the court cannot provide its own interpreta-

\textsuperscript{67.} See id. (discussing Kigali Amendment’s requirements). Even companies that create HFCs are part of this agreement, demonstrating their commitment to protecting Earth. Id. (indicating chemical industries’ dedication to Kigali Amendment).

\textsuperscript{68.} See id. (noting different phase out dates for each country). The United States’ phase out date is one of the earliest because the United States is one of richest countries. Id. (mandating most other countries to reduce by 2024).

\textsuperscript{69.} \textit{Separation}, \textsc{Webster’s New International Dictionary} (3d. ed. 1993) (providing definition of “separation”).

\textsuperscript{70.} See \textit{Marbury v. Madison}, 5 U.S. 137, 177 (1803) (outlining fundamental separation of powers principles). “It is emphatically the province and duty of the judicial department to say what the law is.” Id. (describing court’s role in relation to other branches of government).

\textsuperscript{71.} See \textit{e.g.}, \textit{Hamdan v. Rumsfeld}, 548 U.S. 557, 636 (2006) (Breyer, J., concurring) (noting need for congressional authorization to create military commissions);


\textsuperscript{74.} See id. (discussing how court must analyze issues further if congressional intent is not clear).


\textsuperscript{76.} See id. at 843 (outlining two steps).

\textsuperscript{77.} See id. (stating first step is always determining whether Congress specifically addressed issue).
tion, but instead must give deference to the agency’s interpretation so long as it is “based on a permissible construction of the statute.”78 Under this second part of the framework, an agency’s interpretation is not afforded deference only when it contradicts congressional intent.79 Legislative history helps to define an ambiguous statute when the history is clear, but if the history is conflicting, then it does little to resolve statutory ambiguities.80

In *Utility Air Regulatory Group v. EPA*81 and *Center for Biological Diversity v. EPA*,82 the courts applied *Chevron’s* framework in the environmental context.83 In *Utility Air Regulatory Group*, the Supreme Court determined the EPA did not have statutory authority to regulate greenhouse gases under part two of the *Chevron* framework and noted the importance of interpreting a statute within its entire framework.84 In *Center for Biological Diversity*, the D.C. Circuit found the EPA met *Chevron* part two because the EPA’s interpretation was reasonable, and it was not the court’s role to construct its own interpretation.85

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78. Id. at 843-44 (explaining courts should interpret congressional silence to mean Congress left issue up to agency’s authority); see also City of Arlington v. FGC, 569 U.S. 290, 296 (2013) (discussing deference under *Chevron*). Courts should remember that “[c]ongress knows to speak in plain terms when it wishes to circumscribe, and in capacious terms when it wishes to enlarge, agency discretion.” *City of Arlington*, 569 U.S. at 296 (emphasizing congressional silence’s significance). To determine whether an agency’s interpretation is “based on permissible construction of the statute,” the Court noted it should consider legislative and statutory history in addition to whether the accommodation was reasonable. *Chevron*, 466 U.S. at 843-45 (listing court’s considerations).


81. 573 U.S. 302 (2014) (analyzing case based on *Chevron*).

82. 749 F.3d 1079 (D.C. Cir. 2014) (discussing *Chevron* principles in environmental case).

83. See *Util. Air Regulatory Grp. v. EPA*, 573 U.S. at 324-25 (applying *Chevron* to greenhouse gas emission case); see also *Center for Biological Diversity v. EPA*, 749 F.3d at 1087 (determining EPA’s decision to wait for more research to promulgate joint air rule met *Chevron’s* second step).

84. See *Util. Air Regulatory Grp.*, 573 U.S. at 321 (explaining EPA’s interpretation failed *Chevron* step two due to its inconsistency with statute’s context). In this case, the EPA used their authority under the CAA “to regulate greenhouse gas emissions from new motor vehicles.” Id. at 2436 (stating facts of case at issue). The Court held this action was not within the statutory authority of the EPA because it increased “EPA’s regulatory authority without clear congressional authorization” and overused government resources. *Id.* at 2444 (explaining reasoning for holding based on *Chevron*).

85. See *Center for Biological Diversity*, 749 F.3d at 1089 (discussing CAA gave EPA authority to reject promulgation based on uncertain research).
Cases have recently questioned statutory interpretation principles and *Chevron*’s framework. In *Michigan v. EPA*, writing for the majority, Justice Scalia favored a strict interpretation of statutes under *Chevron*. Justice Thomas sought to completely abandon deference to agencies, because he believed it deprived judges of their decision making role and allowed agencies to overstep Congress. On the opposite side, Justice Kagan proposed a more liberal construction of *Chevron*, advocating for more deference and policymaking authority to agencies. This view is supported by the environment’s rapidly detrimental changes, which the Constitution’s framers likely did not anticipate. While a strict interpretation was the majority’s view, courts are reaching different


88. See id. at 2708 (cautioning against providing too much deference to EPA). Justice Scalia stated *Chevron* “does not license interpretive gerrymanders under which an agency keeps parts of statutory context it likes while throwing away parts it does not.” Id. (highlighting limits to agency’s powers).

89. See id. at 2712-13 (favoring stricter interpretation of intent). Justice Thomas wrote, “Statutory ambiguity thus becomes an implicit delegation of rule-making authority, and that authority is used not to find the best meaning of the text, but to formulate legally binding rules to fill in gaps based on policy judgments made by the agency rather than Congress.” Id. at 2713 (discussing dangers of providing agencies with too much authority).

90. See id. at 2718 (Kagan, J., dissenting) (advocating for more deference to agencies); see also Philip A. Wallach, Michigan v. EPA: Competing Conceptions of Deference Due to Administrative Agencies, BROOKINGS (June 29, 2015), https://www.brookings.edu/blog/planetpolicy/2015/06/29/michigan-v-epa-competing-conceptions-of-deference-due-to-administrative-agencies-2/ (summarizing justices’ viewpoints in *Michigan v. EPA*). Justice Kagan believed deference is given because of the “technical and complex arena” agencies navigate to create rules. See Michigan, 135 S. Ct. at 2718 (describing agency’s better understanding of issues it is tasked to resolve). Considering these complexities, Justice Kagan argued courts lack the ability to properly interpret the EPA’s role. See id. (illustrating court’s lack of insight compared to that of agencies).

conclusions based on the same statutes due to *Chevron*’s unclear application.92

D. Retroactive (adj.): “extending in scope or effect to a prior time . . .”93

Under retroactive disapproval theory, a federal agency can modify its own rule after consulting new information.94 There is a presumption against this theory, unless one of two options are present: an agency must either inherently possess authority to revise prior determinations and do so in a timely manner, or it must possess statutory authority for this action.95 If Congress expressly provides a way to revise an error, then inherent authority does not apply.96 The agency must also provide a reasonable and compelling explanation for the need to revise.97 It does not have to demonstrate that the change is better than the previous determination, but the agency still must show sufficient reasons for rectification.98 Additionally, an agency cannot punish anyone who relied on the prior determination and must give fair notice of the change to these people or entities.99

92. *See* Slattery, supra note 86 (stating courts interpret same words differently and reach different results under *Chevron*).


95. *See* Ivy Sports Medicine, 767 F.3d at 86 (discussing agency’s inherent authority). This court stated the “‘power to reconsider is inherent in the power to decide.’” *Id.* (stating agency’s reconsideration power).

96. *See id.* (explaining Congress’ express ability to rectify supersedes any inherent authority).


98. *See id.* (stating agency must “believe” new version is better than prior determination).

E. Arbitrary (adj.): “existing or coming about seemingly at random or by chance or as a capricious and unreasonable act of will”

The arbitrary and capricious standard is deferential to government agencies and only requires a reasonable rule. The United States Supreme Court recognized that “an agency must be given ample latitude to ‘adapt their rules and policies to the demands of changing circumstances.’” Courts should consider whether the agency contemplated factors reflecting Congress’ intent and whether it addressed all aspects of the issue. Additionally, courts should determine if the agency provided evidence of a plausible reason for its view.

IV. PUTTING WEBSTER TO THE TEST: APPLYING WEBSTER’S DEFINITION OF “REPLACE” TO EPA’S 2015 RULE

While Justice Kavanaugh and Judge Wilkins agreed that the EPA’s decision to remove HFCs was not arbitrary and capricious, they reached different conclusions based on their interpretation of “replace.” Justice Kavanaugh took a strict approach to interpreting Section 612, basing his conclusion largely on the framework of the CAA. Judge Wilkins took a more liberal approach, finding the definition of “replace” to be at least ambiguous, which warranted agency deference.

102. State Farm, 463 U.S. at 42 (noting agency’s ability to change rules with good reason).
103. See id. at 43 (listing factors courts should consider when evaluating arbitrary and capricious standard).
104. See id. (stating plausible reasoning is arbitrary and capricious factor).
106. See id. at 459 (discussing statutory framework).
107. See id. at 465-74 (explaining Judge Wilkins’ reasoning).
A. Majority (n.): “the quality or state of being greater”  

Justice Kavanaugh, writing on behalf of the majority, began this opinion by examining whether the EPA had statutory authority to create their 2015 rule under the CAA. After broadly recounting the history of the CAA, Justice Kavanaugh narrowed the analysis to Section 612 specifically. Justice Kavanaugh emphasized the narrow nature of this issue and that the EPA previously indicated in both 1994 and 1996 that it lacked the authority to require replacement of non-ozone-depleting substances.

1. Interpretation of The Clean Air Act

After emphasizing these points, Justice Kavanaugh analyzed the CAA’s language, which boiled down to the definition of the word “replace.” Section 612 prohibited replacement of ozone-depleting substances with substances on the prohibited list. The court faced two possible interpretations of “replace”: it could either be an ongoing process where a manufacturer continued to replace ozone-depleting substances every time it used a substitute, or replacement could be a one-time occurrence, completed once a manufacturer initially employed a substitute. Through an analysis largely based on dictionaries’ definitions of “replace,” Justice Kavanaugh supported the latter interpretation.

Citing various dictionaries, including Webster’s Dictionary, American Heritage, and Oxford, Justice Kavanaugh determined “replace” meant to “take the place of” and was a one-time occurrence. Appealing to every-day word usage, Justice Kavanaugh...
analogized replacement of ozone-depleting substances to replacement of a president, explaining a new president only replaced the former president once, not continually each day. Policy considerations further supported this argument, because interpreting “replace” as continuous would implausibly give the EPA unlimited authority to prohibit substances.

Based on these findings, Justice Kavanaugh determined Section 612’s language unambiguously demonstrated the EPA’s lack of authority to continually regulate substances, which meant the EPA’s challenge failed the first part of *Chevron*’s analysis. Legislative history also supported this determination, because Congress adopted the House’s narrower interpretation, which applied the statute only to ozone-depleting substances. Justice Kavanaugh briefly explained even if the statute did not fail under this part of *Chevron*, it would inevitably fail under the second part as unreasonable. Justice Kavanaugh conceded “[a]lthough we understand and respect EPA’s overarching effort to fill that legislative void and regulate HFCs, EPA may act only as authorized by Congress.” He reasoned, based on precedent, that good intent did not overcome an agency’s inability to make law.

2. Alternatives

After demonstrating the EPA lacked statutory authority to create the 2015 rule, Justice Kavanaugh noted other ways in which the EPA could regulate HFCs. Justice Kavanaugh provided these options because “Congress has not yet enacted general climate change legislation.” The EPA could still prevent manufacturers relying on ozone-depleting substances from using HFCs as substitutes, reg-
ulate HFCs through the Toxic Substances Control Act, and require any company currently relying on ozone-depleting substances to replace those substances. Additionally, Justice Kavanaugh stressed the opportunity to pursue this case on remand under the retroactive disapproval theory. He explained the EPA could succeed if it demonstrated its authority to retroactively disapprove the basis for the change, and its compliance with due process.

3. Arbitrary and Capricious

Despite Mexichem Fluor’s vehement objections, the D.C. Circuit held the EPA’s reasoning for removing HFCs from the safe substitute list was not arbitrary and capricious. According to Justice Kavanaugh, the EPA provided ample evidence that HFCs detrimentally affected the environment, were less safe than alternatives, and had a detrimental “collective global impact.” In relation to the costliness of replacing HFCs, Justice Kavanaugh stated it was reasonable for the EPA not to pay transition costs, because the agency provided additional time to comply with the new rule. Justice Kavanaugh concluded that even though the EPA’s actions were not arbitrary and capricious, they still were not justified given the lack of statutory authority.

B. Dissent (n.): “to withhold assent or approval”

Judge Wilkins dissented primarily due to his disagreement about the statute’s ambiguity. He adopted the EPA’s continuous

126. See Mexichem Fluor, 866 F.3d at 460 (addressing Section 612 is not only way for EPA to regulate HFCs).
127. See id. (describing retroactive disapproval theory).
128. See id. at 461-62 (outlining steps EPA would need to meet to demonstrate retroactive disapproval ability). Justice Kavanaugh stated that meeting these steps would not automatically guarantee success. See id. (stating only possibility of success).
129. See id. 462-64 (refuting each argument Mexichem Fluor raised in relation to arbitrary and capricious standard).
130. See id. (discussing dangers of HFCs and why their prohibition was reasonable goal).
131. See Mexichem Fluor, 866 F.3d at 464 (rejecting Mexichem Fluor’s argument regarding transition costs because of “extra time to comply”).
132. See id. (summarizing holding).
133. Dissent, WEBSTER’S NEW INTERNATIONAL DICTIONARY (3d. ed. 1993) (providing definition of “dissent”).
134. See Mexichem Fluor, 866 F.3d at 464-65 (stating “replace” is open to many different meanings which makes statute unclear). Judge Wilkins emphasized “[t]he bar for deciding a case at Chevron step one is high, requiring clear and unambiguous congressional intent.” Id. at 464 (stating Chevron’s high bar under part one to demonstrate that high bar was not met in Mexichem Fluor).
replacement argument after examining the statutory scheme. Judge Wilkins determined “replace” meant to provide a “substitute for,” which was more consistent with Section 612’s purpose and was an alternative definition in the dictionaries the majority cited. Section 612 called for replacement of ozone-depleting substances with “alternative manufacturing processes that reduce overall risks to human health and the environment,” but the majority limited EPA’s ability to do this by preventing EPA from forbidding HFCs. Judge Wilkins stated, “Congress undoubtedly knew how to instruct EPA to develop a list of acceptable and unacceptable substitutes by a certain date and then stop there,” and because Congress instead was ambiguous, it implied that agencies were given discretion. Additionally, legislative history never addressed this precise issue.

After finding *Chevron* part one was met, Judge Wilkins deferentially analyzed the reasonableness of the EPA’s interpretation. Judge Wilkins concluded the EPA’s construction was reasonable for the same reasons he believed the EPA’s interpretation passed *Chevron*.

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135. See id. at 465-66 (noting “replace” is not defined anywhere in statute). Judge Wilkins also noted the majority opinion does not address retailers and Section 612 is “written in the passive voice and without identifying a particular target of the regulation . . . .” *Id.* at 466 (distinguishing retailers’ replacement from manufacturers’ replacement). Countering Justice Kavanaugh’s president analogy, Judge Wilkins provided the analogy of replacing older medicines or other classes of substances. *See id.* at 466 (providing examples of substances Section 612 applies to that are not replaced just once). In Judge Wilkins’ view, when new, more advanced classes of substances arrive, these substances continually replace each other. *See id.* (explaining reasoning for continual replacement theory).

136. *Id.* at 467 (noting Section 612 uses “substitute” and “alternative” in its text and title).

137. *Id.* at 467-68 (explaining majority’s ruling did not allow EPA to reduce danger to humans and environment to “maximum extent practicable”).

138. *Id.* at 469 (citing *City of Arlington*, 569 U.S. 290 (2013)) (emphasizing principle that congressional silence is intentional and meant to convey discretion to agency).

139. See *Mexichem Fluor*, 866 F.3d at 469 (explaining legislative history did not provide “sufficient clarity” that EPA’s interpretation was against Congress’ goals). Judge Wilkins stated even though the EPA released an earlier statement indicating they did not have the authority to create the 2015 rule, the EPA’s interpretation of a statute is not necessarily the same as Congress’ interpretation. *See id.* at 469 (demonstrating EPA’s prior statements’ little importance in Section 612’s interpretation).

140. See *id.* at 470 (noting “considerable weight” should be given to EPA’s interpretation).
ron part one. On this basis, Judge Wilkins opined that the 2015 rule should have been upheld.

V. SHOULD WEBSTER HAVE BEEN INVOLVED?

Both Justice Kavanaugh and Judge Wilkins agreed the EPA’s removal of HFCs from the safe substitute list was not arbitrary and capricious, and prior case law supports their conclusion. Additionally, while Judge Wilkins did not address the retroactive disapproval theory, Justice Kavanaugh relied on precedent in recommending this theory to the EPA. While the majority’s decision might hurt the environment, Justice Kavanaugh’s opinion upheld fundamental constitutional principles and adhered to precedent. Judge Wilkins’ dissenting opinion, though well-intentioned, slightly overstepped the bounds of statutory interpretation. Due to a slow-moving Congress, this brings judges and Americans to an unfortunate choice: tradition or environmental protection.

141. See id. at 471 (stating EPA’s definition of “replace” was reasonable). Judge Wilkins noted the EPA’s authority to regulate is not indefinite, because once ozone-depleting substances are no longer in use, the EPA’s authority is void. See id. at 472 (noting entities were still using ozone-depleting substances).
142. See id. at 473 (summarizing dissenting opinion).
143. See State Farm, 463 U.S. 29, 43 (1983) (supporting Judge Wilkins and Justice Kavanaugh’s decision because they considered relevant factors). The EPA considered all parts of the issue and relevant factors, offered a valid explanation for the rule, and came to a plausible conclusion. See Mexichem Fluor, 866 F.3d at 462-64 (describing why removing HFCs from safe substitute list was not arbitrary and capricious).
144. For further discussion of the retroactive disapproval theory, see supra notes 94-99 and accompanying text.
145. For further discussion of fundamental constitutional principles, namely separation of powers, see supra notes 69-92 and accompanying text.
146. For further discussion of why Justice Kavanaugh believed Judge Wilkins’ interpretation seemed to stretch the statute, see supra notes 112-118 and accompanying text.
A. Framework (n.): “a basic conceptional structure (as of ideas)” \(^{148}\)

Both Justice Kavanaugh and Judge Wilkins provided valid interpretations of the word “replace,” as supported by esteemed dictionaries and common experience. \(^{149}\) “Replace” seems ambiguous given its two acceptable meanings, but Justice Kavanaugh’s argument that the statute was proposed to regulate ozone-depleting substances is compelling. \(^{150}\) *Utility Air Regulatory Group* emphasized the importance of interpreting statutory intent by looking at the entire statutory framework. \(^{151}\) Justice Kavanaugh not only adhered to statutory interpretation principles, but also to Supreme Court precedent by emphasizing the purpose of the statute as a whole was to replace ozone-depleting substances. \(^{152}\)

Additionally, while Judge Wilkins’ argument that HFCs do not “reduce[ ] the overall risk to human health and the environment” is persuasive, nothing in the statute specifically suggests the EPA holds authority to regulate safe substitutes once manufacturers have ceased reliance on ozone-depleting substances. \(^{153}\) The process of removing substances from the safe substitute list discussed in the statute makes no mention of this authority. \(^{154}\) While congressional silence can be interpreted to leave discretion to an agency, clear legislative history and the context of this statute justifies Justice Kavanaugh’s interpretation. \(^{155}\)

Despite ultimately reaching the accurate interpretation of clear statutory intent, Justice Kavanaugh’s brief statement that the EPA’s interpretation would still be unreasonable under *Chevron* part two
appears to contradict key *Chevron* principles. Because intent was clear, reasonableness was not at issue in this case. There was ultimately no need to interpret part two of *Chevron*’s framework, which means Justice Kavanaugh’s interpretation of reasonableness does not change his valid conclusion.

**B. History (n.): “a chronological record of significant events... often including an explanation of their causes”**

Although intent is clear from the statutory framework, the CAA’s legislative history further supports Justice Kavanaugh’s argument. Judge Wilkins is correct that the legislative history does not speak to the precise question at issue in *Mexichem Fluor*, but Judge Wilkins under-emphasized the legislature’s focus on regulating only ozone-depleting substances. Narrowly focusing on Section 612’s legislative history is favorable to Judge Wilkins because the EPA’s statements cited by Justice Kavanaugh only slightly supports his view. While the EPA stated that it did have the authority to regulate non-ozone-depleting substances, it also stated “replace” was a continual process. Regardless of these conflicting viewpoints, Judge Wilkins weakened this evidence by correctly

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156. See *Chevron, U.S.A., Inc*. v. Nat. Res. Def. Council, 467 U.S. 837, 843 (1984) (explaining reasonableness prong); see also *Japan Whaling Ass’n* v. Am. Cetacean Soc., 478 U.S. 221, 223 (1986) (discussing general rule of deference). Courts give deference to an agency’s interpretation so long as the interpretation is “permissible,” which is a low standard. See *Chevron*, 467 U.S. at 843 (demonstrating low bar for second *Chevron* prong). If intent was unclear here, then the EPA’s interpretation was reasonable because HFCs’ regulation achieves the Act’s overall goal of reducing dangerous substances in the environment, and the EPA is in a better position than the court to determine reasonable steps to achieve this goal. See 42 U.S.C. § 7401 (2012) (noting statute’s purpose); see also Michigan v. EPA, 135 S. Ct. 2699, 2718 (2015) (Kagan, J., dissenting) (emphasizing agency is in better position to interpret its role when intent is ambiguous).

157. See *Chevron*, 467 U.S. at 843 (indicating no need to interpret reasonableness if *Chevron* part one is met).

158. For further discussion of the clear statutory intent in *Mexichem Fluor*, see supra notes 112-123 and accompanying text.


160. For further discussion of the CAA’s legislative history, see supra notes 50-52 and accompanying text.


162. For further discussion of EPA’s comments regarding Section 612, see supra notes 53-55 and accompanying text.

163. For further discussion of the EPA’s statements, see supra notes 53-55 and accompanying text.
pointing out that the EPA’s interpretation is not necessarily correlated with Congress’ view.\textsuperscript{164} What matters is congressional intent, which unambiguously granted the EPA the exclusive authority to regulate ozone-depleting substances based on the CAA’s legislative history.\textsuperscript{165}

In a global context, the Montreal Protocol was influential in Section 612’s creation.\textsuperscript{166} This Protocol only regulated ozone-depleting substances.\textsuperscript{167} The Kigali Amendment, which sought to regulate HFCs, was formed in 2016, years after Section 612’s adoption.\textsuperscript{168} This context further supports Justice Kavanaugh’s view because when Section 612 was formed, the focus was only on curtailing ozone-depleting substances’ use.\textsuperscript{169}

C. Power (n.): “ability to act or produce an effect”\textsuperscript{170}

Taking a textualist view, Justice Kavanaugh’s interpretation is “correct” based on the separation of powers.\textsuperscript{171} If agencies receive too much authority, they can essentially make laws without bicameralism and presentment, which violates fundamental parts of American democracy.\textsuperscript{172} “When agencies strive to find ambiguity in clarity, they bypass these [constitutional] safeguards and exceed the bounds of their authority.”\textsuperscript{173} Justice Kavanaugh prevented this by adhering to unambiguous congressional intent instead of stretching the statute’s reading to make it ambiguous.\textsuperscript{174} He also adhered

\textsuperscript{164} For further discussion of Judge Wilkins’ view of EPA’s comments, see supra note 139 and accompanying text.

\textsuperscript{165} For further discussion of EPA’s authority to regulate ozone-depleting substances, see supra notes 50-51 and accompanying text.

\textsuperscript{166} For further discussion of Montreal Protocol’s purpose, see supra notes 63-65 and accompanying text.

\textsuperscript{167} For further discussion of the Kigali Amendment, see supra notes 66-68 and accompanying text.

\textsuperscript{168} For further discussion of the Kigali Amendment’s context, see supra notes 66-68 and accompanying text.


\textsuperscript{170} Power, WEBSTER’S NEW INTERNATIONAL DICTIONARY (3d. ed. 1993) (providing definition of “power”).

\textsuperscript{171} For further discussion of separation of powers, see supra notes 69-74 and accompanying text.

\textsuperscript{172} See Susannah Landes Foster, When Clarity Means Ambiguity: An Examination of Statutory Interpretation at the Environmental Protection Agency, 96 GEO. L.J. 1347, 1360 (Apr. 2008) (discussing problem with agency overstepping authority).

\textsuperscript{173} Id. at 1360 (reviewing statutory interpretation under \textit{Chevron}).

\textsuperscript{174} See Mexichem Fluor, Inc. v. EPA, 866 F.3d 451, 460 (D.C. Cir. 2017) (implementing separation of powers principles).
to landmark separation of powers cases like *Marbury v. Madison*, *Youngstown Sheet & Tube Co. v. Sawyer*, and *Hamdan v. Rumsfeld*, which emphasize the Court’s lack of lawmaking power.

The Supreme Court case *Michigan v. EPA* presents strong arguments both for and against applying strict statutory interpretations to environmental agencies. Ultimately, the majority took a textualist view, which means Justice Kavanaugh’s interpretation is consistent with this Supreme Court precedent. Strict interpretation, while slowing progress in the environmental context, ensures all agencies do not abuse their power by taking on Congress’ role.

While it is correct that the environment is changing, Justice Kavanaugh indicated these changes reflect a need for a transformation in Congress, not in traditional constitutional principles. The current congressional makeup transformed the meaning of “partisan” to an “us vs. them” mentality. A more active Congress regularly updating environmental laws prevents the impossible choice between tradition and environmental protection. Courts

175. 5 U.S. 137 (1803) (applying separation of powers principles to determine court’s role).
176. 343 U.S. 579 (1952) (deciding executive’s power in war context).
179. For further discussion of the arguments for and against applying strict statutory interpretations to environmental agencies, see supra notes 87-92 and accompanying text.
181. See Foster, supra note 172 at 1367 (acknowledging benefits of stricter interpretation of agency’s role). “[A]gencies should face some constraint in their interpretation, short of judicial review, because agencies, like courts, are not as democratically accountable and are not constrained by the same constitutional safeguards when they make law as is Congress.” Id. (explaining lack of elections for agencies indicates they might not adequately represent population’s views).
182. See Plumer, supra note 91 (discussing congressional inaction in environmental context).
cannot rescue the environment without the help of these laws.\textsuperscript{185} Demonstrating sympathy, Justice Kavanaugh accurately pointed out ways in which the EPA could regulate HFCs and presented the EPA with the opportunities to win this case on remand.\textsuperscript{186}

D. Dictionary (n.): “A reference source in print or electronic form containing words”\textsuperscript{187}

Justice Kavanaugh’s dictionary use is supported by judicial opinions since the origin of the court system.\textsuperscript{188} The definition of the word “replace” used by the majority is “correct” based on Merriam-Webster, but regardless of the “correct” interpretation, boiling down a dangerous environmental hazard to one word in a statute does not seem like the best way to resolve environmental issues.\textsuperscript{189} Like the subheadings of this Note, words hold deeper meanings than their dictionary definitions, and resting major environmental decisions on interpreting a single word could delay important environmental initiatives.\textsuperscript{190}

Because Congress has not formulated environmental laws since the 1990’s, Justice Kavanaugh’s interpretation style cannot take the sole blame for this issue.\textsuperscript{191} “[B]ecause [Justice Kavanaugh] considers global warming to be charged with a ‘huge policy imperative,’ he [is] skeptical that the Environment Protection Agency (or the

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\textit{Global Warming, Quartz} (May 27, 2018), https://qz.com/1290377/what-it-will-take-to-get-republicans-are-democrats-to-agree-on-climate-change/ (depicting graphically earlier bipartisan notions to protect environment and Congress’ current partisan emphasis, which negatively impacts environment).
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\textsuperscript{185} For further discussion of separation of powers, see supra notes 69-92 and accompanying text.

\textsuperscript{186} See Mixichem Fluor, Inc. v. EPA, 866 F.3d. 451, 461 (D.C. Cir. 2017) (providing different congressionally approved methods to achieve similar results).

\textsuperscript{187} See Dictionary, WEBSTER’S NEW INTERNATIONAL DICTIONARY (3d. ed. 1993) (providing definition of “dictionary”).

\textsuperscript{188} See Liptak, supra note 2 (discussing dictionary use’s prevalence in court opinions).

\textsuperscript{189} See Nuccitelli, supra note 147 (describing strict statutory interpretation’s impact on environment because of congressional inaction).

\textsuperscript{190} See Liptak, supra note 2 (explaining dictionary definitions are not always consistent with congressional intent). “It [is] easy to stack the deck by finding a definition that does or does not highlight a nuance that you’re interested in.” Id. (indicating possibility of finding dictionary definition for any viewpoint).

\textsuperscript{191} See Plumer, supra note 91 (discussing lack of congressional environmental action since 1990s). Richard Lazarus, a Harvard Law School Professor, stated, “Congress stopped making clean air laws after 1990, so the E.P.A. has to work with increasingly tenuous statutory language.” Id. (illustrating need to stretch older laws to fit changing environmental circumstances).
executive branch) should be fighting it alone.” Justice Kavanaugh properly put Congress on notice to choose their words carefully when drafting statutes and to create laws in the environmental context. There would be no need to consult dictionaries and rest major decisions on these interpretations if Congress laid out new regulations addressing environmental problems that were not contemplated in the 1990’s.

VI. MERRIAM-WEBSTER’S FAR-REACHING IMPACT

One Merriam-Webster definition could impact the environment and the law. The way in which the definition was employed in Mexichem Fluor also helps to predict the future of the Supreme Court with Justice Kavanaugh on the bench and the fate of Chevron’s framework. Mexichem Fluor is more than one narrow decision, as it reflects a greater controversy over agency authority and the future of the environment.

A. Environment (n.): “the circumstances, objects, or conditions by which one is surrounded”

The D.C. Circuit’s holding could negatively impact the environment due to HFCs’ harm to human health, role in increasing


194. See Plumer, supra note 91 (emphasizing difficult task to apply older environmental laws to newly arising environmental issues); see also Congress and Climate Change, CTR. FOR CLIMATE AND ENERGY SOLUTIONS, https://www.c2es.org/content/congress-and-climate-change/ (last visited Dec. 14, 2018) (noting Congress’ reliance on 1970 CAA to address climate change even though this issue was likely not known to this Act’s framers).


196. For further discussion of Justice Kavanaugh’s impact on the Supreme Court, see infra notes 214-223. For further discussion of the controversy surrounding Chevron’s framework, see supra notes 86-92.

197. For further discussion of Mexichem Fluor’s impact on agency authority, see infra notes 232-243. For further discussion of this case’s impact on the environment, see infra notes 198-213.

198. See Environment, WEBSTER’S NEW INTERNATIONAL DICTIONARY (3d. ed. 1993) (providing definition of “environment”).
natural disasters, and contribution to global warming. The United States placed twenty-seventh overall in environmental protection and showed notable weakness in preventing greenhouse gas emissions. As one of the first countries required to phase out HFCs under the Kigali Amendment, the United States should be leading in environmental protection in this area. Mexichem Fluor's continued allowance of HFCs' use does not help to improve the United States' standing.

In addition to the United States relatively poor environmental progress, analysts predict a worldwide increase in HFC demand as poorer countries develop. This expected increase is likely due to a surge in demand for air conditioners and refrigerators in poorer countries. The United States should cut back on using HFCs, given this expected increase, but Mexichem Fluor thwarts this effort.

Some circumstances will ameliorate the potentially negative impacts of Mexichem Fluor. Most importantly, the Kigali Amendment specifically commits the United States to decreasing HFC use. Although President Trump has not supported many environmental efforts, the administration seems to support the Kigali Amendment. Big companies also implore President Trump to

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199. For further discussion of HFCs' harmful effects, see supra notes 8-9 and accompanying text.
201. See The Kigali Amendment to the Montreal Protocol: Another Global Commitment to Stop Climate Change, supra note 66 (stating Kigali Amendment requires HFCs be phased out by 2019).
204. See id. (discussing refrigeration's reliance on HFCs).
205. See Mexichem Fluor, 866 F.3d at 464 (allowing continued HFC use in certain circumstances).
206. See The Kigali Amendment to the Montreal Protocol: Another Global Commitment to Stop Climate Change, supra note 66 (discussing Kigali Amendment to reduce HFC use).
207. See id. (outlining Kigali Amendment's goals).
remain a part of the Kigali Amendment, as the Amendment will create thirty-three thousand job opportunities by 2027 if ratified.\(^{209}\)

Additionally, many companies shifted from HFC use before this ruling in anticipation of required HFC replacement.\(^{210}\) Further, California is still implementing portions of the SNAP policy into a new state program designed to combat HFCs, and one commentator predicted the other eleven states that supported the EPA’s rule will follow in California’s footsteps.\(^{211}\) Addressing \textit{Mexichem Fluor} and the importance of state environmental regulations, Senator Lara of California stated, “This federal court decision on super-polluting refrigerants is the latest sign that California cannot look to the federal government for help in reaching our clean air goals.”\(^{212}\) \textit{Mexichem Fluor} thus inspired state courts to take action in the environmental context.\(^{213}\)
B. Supreme Court (n.): “the highest judicial tribunal in a political unit”\(^{214}\)

Justice Kavanaugh’s opinion not only affects the environment, but also predicts the Supreme Court’s future.\(^{215}\) As demonstrated in *Mexichem Fluor*, Justice Kavanaugh strictly interprets the Constitution and will likely overrule environmental regulations due to a lack of explicit congressional authorization.\(^{216}\) Despite this viewpoint, Justice Kavanaugh expressed empathy with the EPA in *Mexichem Fluor*, and this empathy manifested itself in some of the Justice Kavanaugh’s prior decisions that favored the EPA.\(^{217}\) While some commentators expressed concern regarding Justice Kavanaugh’s strict interpretation, it does not seem that the he is “single-mindedly hostile toward environmental lawmaking.”\(^{218}\) In a confirmation hearing, Justice Kavanaugh stated, “I’m not a skeptic of regulation at all. I’m a skeptic of unauthorized regulation, illegal regulation that is outside the bounds of what the laws passed by the Congress have said.”\(^{219}\) While it is likely that Justice Kavanaugh is a strong conservative against a more liberal interpretation of environmental statutes, his approval does not paint an entirely grim picture of the environment because the record reveals occasional votes in favor of the EPA.\(^{220}\)

What is perhaps most important is that Justice Kavanaugh was nominated to replace Justice Kennedy, a notorious swing vote on the Supreme Court.\(^{221}\) The addition of Justice Kavanaugh’s mainly

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\(^{214}\) *Supreme Court, Merriam-Webster’s New International Dictionary* (3d. ed. 1993) (providing definition of “Supreme Court”).

\(^{215}\) See Conlon, *supra* note 19 (informing about Justice Kavanaugh’s confirmation to Supreme Court).

\(^{216}\) See Plumer, *supra* note 91 (discussing Justice Kavanaugh’s prior cases demonstrating strict statutory interpretation). In previous decisions, Justice Kavanaugh emphasized the importance of congressional authorizations in environmental cases. *See id.* (explaining Justice Kavanaugh’s decisions generally stress congressional action). In one instance, the Supreme Court overturned Justice Kavanaugh’s decision by a six to two vote where some conservative justices favored a liberal interpretation. *See id.* (recounting case that overturned Justice Kavanaugh’s decision).

\(^{217}\) *See id.* (detailing Justice Kavanaugh’s prior decisions in favor of EPA).

\(^{218}\) *Id.* (quoting Harvard Law Professor Richard J. Lazarus).


\(^{220}\) *See id.* (noting Justice Kavanaugh’s departure from Obama’s adoption of older environmental laws to address new environmental issues).

\(^{221}\) *See Meyer, supra* note 192 (emphasizing importance of Justice Kennedy’s swing vote). “Kennedy voted in the majority in every environmental case in front of the court except one . . . .” *Id.* (discussing Justice Kennedy’s rulings in environmental cases).
conservative views indicate Justice Kennedy’s role as swing vote will likely be left unfulfilled, resulting in a consistent conservative majority. Justice Kavanaugh’s potential impact on the Supreme Court in the environmental context comes down to Congress: if Congress enacts more environmental laws, Justice Kavanaugh will likely rule in favor of the EPA.

C. Future (adj.): “that is to be”

On January 26, 2018, the D.C. Circuit denied the EPA’s petition for rehearing, and Judge Wilkins again dissented. Three manufacturers who intervened to defend the 2015 rule in *Mexichem Fluor* then petitioned for certiorari to the Supreme Court. On October 9, 2018, the Supreme Court denied certiorari. Due to this denial and because the D.C. Circuit has exclusive jurisdiction over this issue, it “can never be litigated again in any court of appeals.”

In light of *Mexichem Fluor*’s permanent decision, the EPA rescinded its entire 2015 rule. The EPA indicated that it agreed with *Mexichem Fluor*’s holding and altered its policies to be more

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222. See id. (noting Chief Justice John Roberts will likely hold the swing vote instead of Justice Kavanaugh).

223. For further discussion of Justice Kavanaugh’s willingness to rule in favor of the EPA when congressional intent is clear, see supra note 176 and accompanying text.


225. See Mexichem Fluor, Inc. v. EPA, 866 F.3d 451, 464 (D.C. Cir. 2017) (rehearing en banc denied) (denying rehearing of *Mexichem Fluor*).

226. See generally Honeywell Int’l, Inc. v. Mexichem Fluor, 139 S.Ct. 322 (2018), petition for cert. filed, (No. 17-1703) (discussing reason for applying for certiorari). Honeywell International and Chemours, who wrote separately from the other petitioner, Natural Resources Defense Council, spent over one billion dollars investing in alternatives to HFCs. See id. at 4. (describing reasoning for petition). They claimed this investment was valueless because of *Mexichem Fluor*’s holding. See id. (claiming proper reliance on statutory interpretation principles in deciding to make this investment).


consistent with this holding. The EPA stated it would not apply HFCs to the 2015 Rule but would revisit this determination based on stakeholders’ responses.

Based on this complete revocation, eleven states are suing the EPA. The spearhead of this suit, New York Attorney General Barbara Underwood, “accused the EPA under President Donald Trump of trying ‘to gut critical climate protection rules through the backdoor’ by revoking the 2015 limits rather than going through a public review process.” These states assert the EPA should have provided public opportunity for comment before abandoning the entire rule, especially since Mexichem Fluor only vacated the rule in part. If these allegations are correct, it could undermine the United States’ achievement of the Kigali Amendment’s goals.

D. Law (n.): “a binding custom or practice of a community”

Mexichem Fluor signals to future cases in the D.C. Circuit that clear delegation of authority is necessary to survive a Chevron analysis, a high and difficult burden for the EPA to meet. It will likely be unacceptable to rely on older statutes to address new environmental problems. Other circuits may approach this differently and interpret older laws’ intent more liberally, but Mexichem Fluor generated pressure on Congress to expand environmental prote-

230. See id. at 84,443 (expressing agreement with court’s decision and altering rule to support Mexichem Fluor’s holding).
231. See id. at 18,443-44 (explaining and applying Mexichem Fluor’s ruling). The EPA admitted there was no language in the 1994 rule that specifically and narrowly permitted their 2015 rule, which is consistent with Mexichem Fluor. See id. (applying Mexichem Fluor to new rule).
233. See id. (explaining reasoning for states’ suits against EPA).
236. Law, WEBSTER’S NEW INTERNATIONAL DICTIONARY (3d. ed. 1993) (providing definition of “law”).
238. See Plumer, supra note 91 (stating no new environmental laws have been passed since 1990s).
tion laws. Additionally, this case demonstrates the impact of *Chevron*’s ambiguity, as judges define words and interpret deference differently. The Supreme Court needs to address *Chevron*’s application more clearly to promote uniformity in its application. Congress also needs to be clearer in its delegation to agencies. In sum, *Mexichem Fluor* not only impacts future cases and the environment, but also foreshadows an era of environmental conservatism, given the Supreme Court’s new makeup with Justice Kavanaugh on the bench.

*Christina Rossetti*

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239. See Slattery, *supra* note 86 (discussing different results based on liberal or strict interpretation style in *Massachusetts v. EPA*); see also *Mexichem Fluor*, 866 F.3d at 460 (emphasizing Congress’ lack of environmental laws addressing climate change).

240. See Slattery, *supra* note 86 (discussing several cases’ different results under same statute because of *Chevron* confusion). This problem extends beyond just environmental cases. See id. (recounting other cases that *Chevron*’s confusion impacted). Demonstrating this principle, Slattery provided the example that “two appellate courts disagreed about the definition of an ‘applicant’ under the Equal Credit Opportunity Act.” *Id.* (providing specific example of how one word can affect case holdings because of *Chevron*’s confusion).

241. See id. (emphasizing need for Supreme Court to address *Chevron* more clearly). In noting the importance of the court’s role in regulating agencies, Slattery posed the question, “If the courts will not, who will regulate the regulators?” *Id.* (noting Court’s role of keeping agencies’ power in check).


243. For further discussion of the impact in these areas, see *supra* notes 195-243 and accompanying text.

* J.D. Candidate, 2020, Villanova University Charles Widger School of Law; B.S., Psychology, minor in Spanish, 2017, St. Joseph’s University. I would like to thank my family for their constant love and support. I would also like to thank the members of the *Villanova Environmental Law Journal* for their guidance throughout the writing process.