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Does the Evolving Concept of Due Process in Obergefell Justify Judicial Regulation of Greenhouse Gases and Climate Change?: Juliana v. United States

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Does the Evolving Concept of Due Process in Obergefell Justify Judicial Regulation of Greenhouse Gases and Climate Change?: Juliana v. United States

Bradford C. Mank*

Justice Kennedy's Obergefell opinion, which held that same sex marriage is a fundamental right under the Constitution's due process clause, reasoned that the principles of substantive due process may evolve because of changing societal views of what constitutes "liberty" under the clause, and that judges may recognize new liberty rights in light of their "reasoned judgment." In Juliana v. United States, Judge Aiken used her "reasoned judgment" to conclude that evolving principles of substantive due process in the Obergefell decision allowed the court to find that the plaintiffs were entitled to a liberty right to a stable climate system capable of sustaining human life, and, furthermore, that these same evolving principles of substantive due process led the court to interpret the public trust doctrine to now include a similar right to a sustainable climate system. Relying on Chief Justice Roberts's dissenting opinion in Obergefell and a decision by Judge Sutton of the Sixth Circuit, one may criticize the Juliana decision for giving judges too much discretion to invent new due process rights and usurp the role of the legislature. More appropriately, Judge William Alsup of the U.S. District Court of the Northern District of

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California dismissed a public nuisance suit against major oil companies because Congress and the Executive Branch should decide climate change policy rather than federal courts. Professor Kenji Yoshino has argued that the Obergefell decision should be interpreted as "antisubordination liberty" that protects "historically subordinated groups." Following the "antisubordination liberty" principle, alleged victims of climate change are arguably not entitled to special protection from the judiciary because the impacts of such harms affect every person in the United States rather than singling out under-represented minority groups, even if certain "historically subordinated groups" are affected to a greater degree by climate change. Instead of judicial intervention against President Trump's climate policies, states and cities should exercise their right in our federalist system to adopt policies reducing the impacts of climate change. Furthermore, renewable energy appears to be on an unstoppable trajectory to replace fossil fuels, so there is no need for judges to usurp political policy decisions about future energy choices.

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INTRODUCTION

In Juliana v. United States, a group of young people filed suit arguing that the United States, then President Barack Obama, and various federal agencies failed to regulate carbon dioxide ("CO₂") produced by burning fossil fuels, and that the resulting increased levels of CO₂ disrupted the Earth's climate system in a manner threatening the plaintiffs with serious risks. The plaintiffs argued that the defendants' actions contributing to rising greenhouse gases ("GHGs") violated their substantive due process rights to life, liberty, and property. The plaintiffs also argued that the defendants had also violated the federal government's common law duty to hold certain resources in a "public trust" for present and future generations of Americans. In 2016, U.S. District Court Judge Ann Aiken of the U.S. District of Oregon denied defendants' motions to dismiss by concluding that the right to a stable climate system capable of supporting human life is a fundamental substantive due process right, and, additionally, is a right under the public trust doctrine.

In concluding that the plaintiffs had a substantive due process right to a stable climate system, Judge Aiken relied upon the Supreme Court's 2015 decision in Obergefell v. Hodges, which held that same sex marriage is a fundamental right under the Constitution's due process clause. Justice Anthony Kennedy's Obergefell opinion reasoned that the principles of substantive due process may evolve because of changing societal views of what constitutes "liberty" under the clause, and, therefore, that judges may recognize new liberty rights in light of their "reasoned judgment." In Juliana, Judge Aiken used her "reasoned judgment" to conclude that evolving principles of substantive due process in the Obergefell decision allowed the court to
find that the plaintiffs were entitled to a liberty right to a stable climate system capable of sustaining human life. Furthermore, these same evolving principles of substantive due process led the court to interpret the public trust doctrine to now include a similar right to a sustainable climate system.9

The Obergefell decision's concept of evolving due process rights raises a number of concerns and objections. In his dissenting opinion in Obergefell, Chief Justice John Roberts criticized Justice Kennedy's majority opinion for giving judges too much discretion in deciding which unenumerated due process rights are fundamental, thereby giving judges unprecedented authority to strike down legislation that they disfavor.10 To avoid judicial usurpation of legislative power, Chief Justice Roberts urged a return to an analysis of history and tradition in determining which due process rights are fundamental, as the Court had in Washington v. Glucksberg.11 Similarly, Judge Jeffrey Sutton of the Sixth Circuit reasoned in DeBoer v. Snyder that using a substantive due process analysis to strike down state laws prohibiting same sex marriage would have profoundly anti-democratic impacts because that type of reasoning could be used by judges to strike down other types of legislation.12 Relying on Chief Justice Robert's critique of substantive due process analysis in Obergefell and Judge Sutton's similar arguments, one may criticize the Juliana decision for inventing new due process rights and usurping the role of the legislature.13

In framing the fundamental right at issue as the right to a climate system capable of sustaining human life, I intend to strike a balance and to provide some protection against the constitutionalization of all environmental claims . . . . [A]cknowledgment of this fundamental right does not transform

10 See generally Obergefell, 135 S. Ct. at 2611-12, 2616-23 (Roberts, C.J., dissenting); see also Adam Lamparello, Justice Kennedy's Decision in Obergefell: A Sad Day for the Judiciary, 6 HOUS. L. REV. OFF REC. 45, 47-52 (2015) (criticizing Justice Kennedy's overly expansive due process analysis for usurping legislative authority and transferring it to judges).
11 See Obergefell, 135 S. Ct. at 2615-18 (discussing the identification of fundamental rights through history and tradition in Washington v. Glucksberg, 521 U.S. 702, 720 (1997) and similar cases).
13 See Howard Slugh, Obergefell's Toxic Judicial Legacy, NAT'L REV. (Apr. 10, 2017, 8:00 AM), (criticizing Juliana for using Obergefell's flawed evolving due process rationale to invent a new constitutional due process right to a stable climate). However, Judge Aiken tried to place some limitations on when pollution issues trigger due process rights. She stated:
Another argument is that the *Obergefell* Court could have followed lower federal court decisions using a narrower equal protection analysis to achieve the result of judicial recognition of same sex marriage without transforming the meaning of the Due Process Clause. For example, Judge Richard Posner, in his Seventh Circuit decision *Baskin v. Bogan*, struck down the prohibitions of two states against same sex marriage under the Equal Protection Clause without addressing the issue of whether such marriages are a fundamental right under the Due Process Clause, and his narrower equal protection approach to addressing the question of marital rights could serve as a model to addressing other fundamental rights issues, including climate change. Judge Posner's narrower approach to fundamental rights issues using a rational basis analysis under the Equal Protection Clause would have precluded Judge Aiken in *Juliana* from establishing a new constitutional right to a stable climate system because she acknowledged that current environmental and energy laws addressing climate change are rational and only fail if they are examined pursuant to strict scrutiny review under Justice Kennedy's evolving due process approach in *Obergefell*.

More appropriately, in 2018, in *City of Oakland vs. BP P.L.C.*, Judge William Alsup of the U.S. District Court of the Northern District of California, granted the defendants' motion to dismiss for failure to state a claim regarding a public nuisance suit by the City of Oakland against the largest oil companies with operations in the United States. He concluded that Congress and the Executive Branch should any minor or even moderate act that contributes to the warming of the planet into a constitutional violation.  

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*Juliana*, 217 F. Supp. 3d at 1250.

14 766 F.3d 648 (7th Cir. 2014).

15 See id. at 654-57, 671-72; Lamparello, supra note 10, at 59-60; see also *Obergefell*, 135 S. Ct. at 2623 (Roberts, C.J., dissenting) (arguing that Justice Kennedy's majority opinion failed to use the modern Equal Protection Clause's "means-end methodology" in favor of a vague argument that there is "synergy" between that Clause and the Due Process Clause).


decide climate change policy rather than federal courts even though he accepted the plaintiff's argument that the burning of fossil fuels has a major impact on the Earth's climate. Judge Alsup also emphasized that climate change affects other nations, and that policy decisions affecting foreign relations should be decided by the political branches rather than by the federal courts.

For those not convinced by arguments in favor of Glucksberg's more limited historical and tradition based conception of fundamental due process rights, Professor Kenji Yoshino has supported an evolving conception of due process, but also argued that the Obergefell decision should be interpreted as a vision of liberty that he calls "antisubordination liberty" that protects "historically subordinated groups." Pursuant to Professor Yoshino's "antisubordination liberty" principle, alleged victims of climate change are arguably not entitled to special protection from the judiciary because the impacts of such harms affect every person in the United States. It might be possible to try to argue that certain "historically subordinated groups" are affected to a greater degree by climate change, but that is primarily the result of poverty rather than a deliberate attempt by government officials to deny a stable climate system to certain groups. Because certain "historically subordinated groups" are affected to a greater degree by climate change than others because of their poverty rather than deliberate government action in most cases, these groups are not

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18 Order Granting Motion to Dismiss Amended Complaints, supra note 17, at 14.
19 See id. Judge Keenan raised similar foreign policy and separation of powers concerns in dismissing New York City's climate suit against the major oil companies because of their global operations and sales. See Opinion and Order Dismissing Amended Complaint, supra note 17, at 20-23.
21 See id.
23 See Suzanne Goldenberg, Climate Change: The Poor Will Suffer Most, Guardian (Mar. 30, 2014, 8:01 PM), https://www.theguardian.com/Environment/2014/mar/31/climate-change-poor-suffer-most-un-report (discussing a UN Report on Climate Change and reporting that poor people are most likely to suffer from effects of natural disasters exacerbated by climate change, although victims of discrimination are vulnerable as well).
entitled to protection under the Equal Protection Clause unlike, for example, LGBT individuals whose rights were violated by state governments that selectively enforced antisodomy laws against them.\(^{24}\)

Some readers may be sympathetic to Judge Aiken's *Juliana* opinion because of their fears about the impacts of climate change. Additionally, some readers may strongly disagree with President Trump's 2017 disavowal of the Paris Climate Accord and believe that judicial intervention is necessary to prevent an "imminent" climate catastrophe.\(^{25}\) But there is greater danger in allowing the judiciary to usurp the political and legislative process when one remembers that the Juliana suit was initially directed at President Obama, the President who advocated for the Paris Climate Accord.\(^{26}\) Instead, critics of President Trump's withdrawal from the Paris Climate Accord should

\(^{24}\) See *DeBoer v. Snyder*, 772 F.3d 388, 416 (6th Cir. 2014) (observing that gay individuals were subject to prejudice and unequal enforcement of antisodomy laws compared to straight sexual partners), *overruled on other grounds* by *Obergefell v. Hodges*, 135 S. Ct. 2584 (2015).

\(^{25}\) Imminent is a relative term. Some of the differences in how readers and judges respond to the issue of judicial intervention in climate change issues may depend upon their understanding of the word "imminent." For some scientists, human activities that may affect the global climate may appear imminent if they are likely to cause changes in the Earth's environment in twenty years. For the purposes of this article, however, the question of what is "imminent" is intertwined with whether judges must act now or may wait for the legislative and executive branches to take action. For the author, Bradford Mank, a human activity that may cause harm to the environment is not imminent for the purposes of judicial intervention if a current or future legislative or executive branch might take action to address climate change issues without the need for an immediate judicial decision.

\(^{26}\) See Glenn Kessler & Michelle Ye Hee Lee, *Fact-checking President Trump's Claims on the Paris Climate Change Deal*, WASH. POST (June 1, 2017), https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/fact-checker/wp/2017/06/01/fact-checking-president-trumps-claims-on-the-paris-climate-change-deal/ (criticizing President Trump's factual claims about Paris Climate Accord); see, e.g., Michael Biesecker & Paul Wiseman, *AP Fact Check: Trump's Shaky Claims on Climate Accord*, AP NEWS (June 1, 2017), https://apnews.com/d4836217fa7b4d3eadea333dd20ceff3c ("Announcing that the U.S. will withdraw from the Paris climate accord, President Donald Trump misplaced the blame for what ails the coal industry and laid a shaky factual foundation for his decision.").

exercise their voting rights in the 2018 congressional elections and 2020 presidential election.

A more immediate alternative is relying on states and cities to exercise their right in our federalist system to adopt policies reducing CO\textsubscript{2} and GHGs to reduce the impacts of climate change. A number of states, cities, and private companies have announced efforts for further climate change reduction actions in the wake of President Trump's Paris Climate Accord withdrawal.\textsuperscript{28} Furthermore, there is evidence that renewable energy and more efficient electricity technologies are on an unstoppable path of replacing carbon-intensive fossil fuels.\textsuperscript{29} For example, new U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (“EPA”) data shows that in 2017, the U.S. electricity sector emitted twenty-five percent less carbon dioxide than in 2005. This is three-fourths of the way towards meeting the thirty-two percent reduction by 2030 from the same baseline that the Obama Administration had sought through the Clean Power Plan rule that the Trump Administration rescinded.\textsuperscript{30} Meanwhile, Bloomberg New Energy Finance (“BNEF”) estimated an even larger twenty-eight percent reduction in power-sector carbon emissions from 2005 levels by 2017.\textsuperscript{31} Even if the United States does

\textsuperscript{28} Gerald B. Silverman, States Bet on Green Economy as Trump Dumps Climate Programs, BLOOMBERG NEWS (June 19, 2019), https://www.bna.com/states-bet-green-n73014453584 (“States and cities are doubling down on the green economy despite President Donald Trump’s dismissal of the Paris climate accord as a bad deal for the U.S.”); Abby Smith, Coalitions Redouble Paris Support but Face Challenge to Achieve GHG Pledge, INSIDEEPACOM (June 6, 2017), https://insideepa.com/daily-news/coalitions-redouble-paris-support-face-challenge-achieve-ghg-pledge (reporting twelve states led by the Governors of California, New York, and Washington State have formed U.S. Climate Alliance to support the Paris Climate Accord to reduce GHGs); WE ARE STILL IN, http://wearestillin.com/signatories (last visited Nov. 3, 2018) (listing ten states including California, New York, North Carolina, Virginia, and Washington State as supporting the Paris Accord).


\textsuperscript{31} According to Bloomberg New Energy Finance (“BNEF”), “[p]ower-sector emissions now sit 28% below their 2005 peak, which puts the U.S. only 4 percentage points away from achieving its former Clean Power Plan target of 32% below 2005 levels by 2030. The rapid emissions reduction in the power sector has also helped to
not support climate change mitigation efforts, current legal efforts in other nations to decrease carbon emissions could lead to significant decreases in future demand for fossil fuels by 2035 that could result in losses of between $1 trillion and $4 trillion in asset values for fossil fuel companies even if there are no additional new climate policies taxing or regulating carbon dioxide. If renewable energy and more efficient electricity technologies are on a clear trajectory to replace carbon-intensive fossil fuels, there is no good reason to give federal judges the power under the Due Process Clause to usurp the authority to make energy policies from the political branches.

I. JULIANA

A. Introduction to the Juliana Decision

In Juliana, the plaintiffs included a group of young persons between the ages of eight and nineteen that the District Court referred to as the “youth plaintiffs”; Earth Guardians, an association of young environmental activists; and Dr. James Hansen, who claimed to act as a guardian for future generations. The age demographics of the plaintiffs were significant because the court observed that “the majority of youth plaintiffs are minors who cannot vote and must bring the U.S. halfway to its abandoned Paris Agreement target of slashing economy-wide emissions to 26% below 2005 levels by 2025.” BLOOMBERG NEW ENERGY FIN., SUSTAINABLE ENERGY IN AMERICA: 2018 FACTBOOK EXECUTIVE SUMMARY 4 (2018), http://www.bcse.org/wp-content/uploads/2018-Sustainable-Energy-in-America-Factbook_Executive-Summary.pdf.


See infra Part III and Conclusion.

34 Juliana v. United States, 217 F. Supp. 3d 1224, 1233 (D. Or. 2016). Judge Aiken did not address the standing of future generations to sue because she found at least one plaintiff had standing to sue, and therefore did not have to determine whether other plaintiffs had standing. Id. at 1248 n.5, 1260 n.13. Additionally, she did not “address whether youth or future generations are suspect classifications for equal protection purposes.” Id. at 1249 n.7. However, the Juliana decision was “mindful of the intergenerational dimensions of the public trust doctrine in issuing this opinion.” Id. at 1260 n.13.
depend on others to protect their political interests." The plaintiffs sued the United States, then President Obama, and several federal executive agencies on the grounds that the federal government had known for more than fifty years that burning fossil fuels produces significant amounts of CO$_2$ that destabilize the Earth's climate system, and, thereby, endangered the plaintiffs. The plaintiffs argued that defendants had encouraged the use of fossil fuels despite their knowledge that the resulting high levels of CO$_2$ caused climate change and other harmful impacts.

The plaintiffs contended that the defendants' actions regarding fossil fuel burning violated the plaintiffs' substantive due process rights to life, liberty, and property. Furthermore, the plaintiffs asserted that the defendants' action violated the federal government's duty to hold certain natural resources in the public trust for the American public and future generations of Americans; Part I.E will explore the definition of and precedent related to the "public trust" doctrine. Finally, the plaintiffs assert that in order to avert an impending environmental catastrophe, they should be entitled to declaratory relief of their due process and public trust rights, and injunctive relief ordering the defendants to develop a plan to reduce CO$_2$ emissions.

The defendants and certain intervenors moved to dismiss the action for lack of subject matter jurisdiction and failure to state a claim. U.S. District Court Magistrate Judge Thomas Coffin issued Findings and Recommendation ("F & R") regarding the plaintiffs' claims and recommended that the district court deny the defendants' motions to dismiss. Judge Aiken adopted Judge Coffin's F & R, and also denied the defendants' motions to dismiss.

Judge Aiken acknowledged the ramifications of the plaintiffs' theories by observing that "[t]his is no ordinary lawsuit." Furthermore, she stated:

35 Id. at 1241.
36 Id. at 1233.
37 Id.
38 Id.
39 Id.; see infra Part I.E.
40 Juliana, 217 F. Supp. 3d at 1233.
41 Intervenors the National Association of Manufacturers, the American Fuel & Petrochemical Manufacturers, and the American Petroleum Institute moved to dismiss on the same grounds as the defendants. Id.
42 Id.
43 Id.
44 Id. at 1234.
45 Id.
This lawsuit challenges decisions defendants have made across a vast set of topics — decisions like whether and to what extent to regulate CO₂ emissions from power plants and vehicles, whether to permit fossil fuel extraction and development to take place on federal lands, how much to charge for use of those lands, whether to give tax breaks to the fossil fuel industry, whether to subsidize or directly fund that industry, whether to fund the construction of fossil fuel infrastructure such as natural gas pipelines at home and abroad, whether to permit the export and import of fossil fuels from and to the United States, and whether to authorize new marine coal terminal projects. Plaintiffs assert defendants' decisions on these topics have substantially caused the planet to warm and the oceans to rise. They draw a direct causal line between defendants' policy choices and floods, food shortages, destruction of property, species extinction, and a host of other harms.46

Judge Aiken explained that the federal government defendants did not dispute that climate change was a serious threat to the planet Earth caused by human beings.47 Then President Obama in his 2015 State of the Union address declared that “[n]o challenge ... poses a greater threat to future generations than climate change.”48 The private industry intervenors “declined to take a clear position” on whether human-caused climate change posed a serious threat to the Earth.49 Judge Aiken explained that her decision would focus on the following questions: “[W]hether defendants are responsible for some of the harm caused by climate change, whether plaintiffs may challenge defendants' climate change policy in court, and whether this Court can direct defendants to change their policy without running afoul of the separation of powers doctrine.”50

Magistrate Judge Coffin recommended denying the defendants' and intervenors' motions to dismiss because he concluded that the plaintiffs' public trust and due process claims were viable.51 The defendants and intervenors objected to his recommendations because they argued that the plaintiffs' claims must be dismissed for lack of

46 Id.
47 Id. at 1234 n.3.
48 Id.
49 Id.
50 Id. at 1234.
51 Id. at 1235.
jurisdiction because the case presented non-justiciable political questions, the plaintiffs lacked standing to sue, and federal public trust claims could not be asserted against the federal government. They additionally claimed that the plaintiffs had failed to state a claim on which relief can be granted.

B. Political Question Doctrine

The federal government defendants and the private industry intervenors argued that the district court lacked jurisdiction because the case presented non-justiciable political questions. The Supreme Court first recognized in Chief Justice Marshall's landmark Marbury v. Madison decision that some questions are better resolved by the political branches, the Executive Branch and Congress, than by the federal courts. In Baker v. Carr, the Supreme Court observed that the political question doctrine is based on the separation of powers doctrine, which gives the branches of government largely separate functions with some overlap. The Baker decision established six criteria, each of which by itself might be sufficient to raise a political question barrier to judicial resolution of a case. The three most important criteria are as follows: first, a textually demonstrable constitutional commitment of the issue to a coordinate political department; second, a lack of judicially discoverable and manageable standards for resolving it; and, third, the impossibility of deciding

52 Id.
53 Id.
54 Id.
55 Id. (discussing Marbury v. Madison, 5 U.S. (1 Cranch) 137, 170 (1803)).
57 The Baker Court applied the political question doctrine using the following six factors:

(1) textually demonstrable constitutional commitment of the issue to a coordinate political department; (2) a lack of judicially discoverable and manageable standards for resolving it; (3) the impossibility of deciding without an initial policy determination of a kind clearly for nonjudicial discretion; (4) the impossibility of a court's undertaking independent resolution without expressing lack of the respect due coordinate branches of government; (5) an unusual need for unquestioning adherence to a political decision already made; or (6) the potentiality of embarrassment from multifarious pronouncements by various departments on one question.

Id. at 217; Juliana, 217 F. Supp. 3d at 1236 (quoting the six-part Baker test).
without an initial policy determination of a kind clearly for nonjudicial discretion.⁵⁸

Judge Aiken noted the importance of the political question doctrine in preserving the crucial separation of powers in our constitutional system.⁵⁹ However, she argued that the doctrine was inappropriate in this case's circumstances because "a court cannot simply err on the side of declining to exercise jurisdiction when it fears a political question may exist; it must instead diligently map the precise limits of jurisdiction."⁶⁰ She observed that climate change, energy policy and environmental regulatory issues had been the subject of political debate, but concluded that courts could address politically charged issues as long as an issue was not "inextricable" with a Baker criterion.⁶¹

Judge Aiken found that the first Baker factor did not apply because climate change was "not inherently, or even primarily, a foreign policy decision."⁶² Additionally, she determined that the second and third Baker criteria did not apply because the plaintiffs' substantive due process and the government's public trust obligations were in the scope of the court's competence.⁶³ The court rejected the defendants' and intervenors' arguments that the court would improperly inject itself into the political process by setting a permissible emissions level, choosing which agencies or industrial sectors would have to reduce emissions, or which agencies would have to enforce specific regulations.⁶⁴ Judge Aiken reasoned that the "Court could issue the requested declaration without directing any individual agency to take any particular action."⁶⁵ In the event that the plaintiffs won on the merits, she acknowledged that the court "would no doubt be

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⁵⁹ See Juliana, 217 F. Supp. 3d at 1235-36.
⁶₀ Id.
⁶¹ Id. (quoting Baker v. Carr, 369 U.S. 186, 217 (1962)).
⁶² Id. at 1238; Blumm & Wood, supra note 58, at 32.
⁶³ Juliana, 217 F. Supp. 3d at 1238-40; Blumm & Wood, supra note 58, at 32-33.
⁶⁵ Id. at 1239; Blumm & Wood, supra note 58, at 33. But see Kanuk ex rel. Kanuk v. State, Dep't of Nat. Res., 335 P.3d 1088, 1097-1103 (Alaska 2014) (finding prudential grounds barred relief because a declaration that the atmosphere is subject to the public trust doctrine would not resolve which specific steps Alaska should take to reduce GHG emissions).
compelled to exercise great care to avoid separation-of-powers problems in crafting a remedy. The separation of powers might, for example, permit the Court to direct defendants to ameliorate plaintiffs' injuries but limit its ability to specify precisely how to do so."\footnote{Juliana, 217 F. Supp. 3d at 1241; Blumm & Wood, supra note 58, at 33.}

Accordingly, Judge Aiken concluded that the court could decide the plaintiffs' suit without violating any of the Baker criteria or "to step outside the core role of the judiciary to decide this case."\footnote{Juliana, 217 F. Supp. 3d at 1241.}

A better approach to the question of applying the Baker criteria to climate change issues than the Juliana case is found in a decision by the Supreme Court of Alaska. In Kanuk ex rel. Kanuk v. State, Dept. of Natural Resources, the Supreme Court of Alaska took a different approach to the political question doctrine and the appropriateness of judicial remedies by concluding that the executive and legislative branches are better suited to making climate policy than the courts.\footnote{Kanuk, 335 P.3d at 1097-1103.}

The plaintiffs' claims in Kanuk were similar to the public trust portion of the complaint in Juliana. In Kanuk, the plaintiffs were six children who sued the State of Alaska, claiming that the State violated its duties under the Alaskan Constitution and the public trust doctrine by failing to take actions to protect the atmosphere.\footnote{Id. at 1091.} They sought declaratory judgment on the nature of the State's duty to protect the atmosphere and specific reductions in carbon dioxide emissions in the state.\footnote{Id. at 1097-1103.} An Alaskan superior court judge dismissed the complaint, finding that the claims were not justiciable.\footnote{Id.} The plaintiffs appealed to the Alaskan Supreme Court.\footnote{Id.}

Applying Baker's six factor political question test, the Alaska Supreme Court in Kanuk concluded that the plaintiffs' requests for a declaratory judgment that the State was obliged to reduce CO\textsubscript{2} emissions by at least six percent per year from 2013 through 2050 violated Baker's third factor that the legislature or the executive branch should make public policy decisions rather than the judiciary.\footnote{Id. at 1097-98.} It observed that the U.S. Supreme Court in American Electric Power v. Connecticut ("AEP") had dismissed federal common law nuisance claims filed against major electric utilities emitting large quantities of CO\textsubscript{2} because the EPA was better equipped to regulate...
major emitters of GHGs under environmental statutes such as the Clean Air Act rather than judges.\textsuperscript{74} In addition, the \textit{Kanuk} Court determined that the plaintiffs' request for declaratory relief under the public trust doctrine of the Alaskan state constitution did not violate the political question doctrine.\textsuperscript{75} The Court, however, on prudential grounds barred relief because a declaration that the atmosphere is subject to the public trust doctrine would not resolve which specific steps Alaska should take to reduce GHG emissions.\textsuperscript{76}

While state court decisions are not binding upon federal courts, the Ninth Circuit or the Supreme Court should learn from the reasoning of the \textit{Kanuk} decision, and bar suits like \textit{Juliana} either under factor three of the \textit{Baker} decision or more general prudential grounds. Courts should reject climate change suits seeking redress because such suits would require courts to either issue detailed directives that interfere with the legislative or executive branches, or, in the alternative, to issue vague declarations that climate change is "bad" that cannot meaningfully guide the actions of the government. Additionally, while not formally invoking the political question doctrine, Judge Alsup dismissed a public nuisance suit against major oil companies because he determined that Congress and the Executive Branch should decide climate change policy rather than federal courts, especially because such policy decisions affect international relations issues that should be decided by the political branches.\textsuperscript{77} Contrary to Judge Aiken's approach to the political question doctrine, the better approach is to let the legislative and executive branches decide climate policy as suggested by \textit{Kanuk ex rel. Kanuk} and Judge Alsup.

Justice Sotomayor in a concurring opinion has suggested that it is inappropriate for judges to wade into controversial policy decisions, which arguably include how to address climate change. In \textit{Zivotofsky ex rel. Zivotofsky v. Clinton},\textsuperscript{78} Justice Sotomayor in an opinion concurring in part and concurring in the judgment, which was joined by Justice Breyer, observed that the traditional role of English and American courts:

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{74} \textit{Id.} at 1098-99 (citing Am. Elec. Power Co. v. Connecticut, 564 U.S. 410, 415-29 (2011)).
\item \textsuperscript{75} \textit{Id.} at 1099-1103.
\item \textsuperscript{76} \textit{Id.}
\item \textsuperscript{77} \textit{See Order Granting Motion to Dismiss Amended Complaints at 14, City of Oakland vs. BP P.L.C., No. C17-06011 WHA, 2018 WL 3609055, (N.D. Cal. July 27, 2018).}
\item \textsuperscript{78} 566 U.S. 189 (2012).
\end{itemize}
involves the application of some manageable and cognizable standard within the competence of the Judiciary to ascertain and employ to the facts of a concrete case. When a court is given no standard by which to adjudicate a dispute, or cannot resolve a dispute in the absence of a yet-unmade policy determination charged to a political branch, resolution of the suit is beyond the judicial role envisioned by Article III.79

Justice Sotomayor's opinion further explained,

This is not to say, of course, that courts are incapable of interpreting or applying somewhat ambiguous standards using familiar tools of statutory or constitutional interpretation. But where an issue leaves courts truly rudderless, there can be “no doubt of [the] validity” of a court's decision to abstain from judgment.80

The difficult policy choices involving climate change and energy policy are such an issue where there is no “manageable and cognizable standard within the competence of the Judiciary.”81 Therefore, in light of the analysis in Kanuk, Judge Alsup's opinion and Justice Sotomayor's concurring opinion, federal courts should invoke either the political question doctrine, prudential reasons, or, jurisdictional reasons such as standing to avoid cases seeking a fundamental political decision about how to achieve a stable climate system.

C. Standing to Sue

Pursuant to Article III's “Case” and “Controversies” language in the U.S. Constitution defining the jurisdiction of federal courts,82 at least

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79 Id. at 203-04 (Sotomayor, J., concurring in part and concurring in the judgment) (citations omitted).
80 Id. at 204.
81 Id. at 203-04.
82 The constitutional standing requirements are derived from Article III, Section 2, which provides:

The judicial Power shall extend to all Cases, in Law and Equity, arising under this Constitution, the Laws of the United States, and Treaties made, or which shall be made, under their Authority; — to all Cases affecting Ambassadors, other public Ministers and Consuls; — to all Cases of admiralty and maritime Jurisdiction; — to Controversies to which the United States shall be a Party; — to Controversies between two or more States; — between a State and Citizens of another State; between Citizens of different States; — between Citizens of the same State claiming Lands under
one plaintiff in every federal court suit must have “standing” to sue to demonstrate that the plaintiff is pursuing an actual case or controversy and is not simply seeking an advisory opinion about a hypothetical case. To demonstrate Article III standing, a plaintiff must show that (1) she has suffered an injury in fact that is concrete, particularized, and actual or imminent; (2) the injury is fairly traceable to the defendant’s challenged conduct; and (3) the injury is likely to be redressed by a favorable court decision. A plaintiff has the burden of demonstrating each element of the standing test at each stage of the litigation. The Juliana court observed that because the defendants had filed a motion to dismiss, the plaintiffs were simply required to make general allegations sufficient to prove standing. At the motion to dismiss stage of litigation, a plaintiff’s conclusory allegations are presumed to be true because the plaintiffs have not yet had the chance to present evidence.

The government argued that the plaintiffs’ alleged injuries from climate change were nonjusticiable generalized grievances because climate change affects every person on the planet Earth. The Juliana court, however, concluded that widely shared injuries can be sufficient injuries as long as a plaintiff suffers a concrete injury as opposed to an abstract injury. The court concluded that at least some of the individual plaintiffs had proven an injury from flooding and high temperatures that appeared to be related to climate change.

Grants of different States, and between a State, or the Citizens thereof, and foreign States, Citizens or Subjects.

U.S. CONST. art. III, § 2; see also DaimlerChrysler Corp. v. Cuno, 547 U.S. 332, 340-42 (2006) (explaining why Supreme Court infers that Article III’s case and controversy requirement necessitates standing limitations).


Spokeo, 136 S. Ct. at 1547; Lujan, 504 U.S. at 561; Juliana, 217 F. Supp. 3d at 1242; Mank, supra note 83, at 1534.

Id., Lujan, 504 U.S. at 561.

Juliana, 217 F. Supp. 3d at 1243.

Id. at 1243-44.

See id. at 1242-44.
Yet the Juliana decision failed to address whether non-state plaintiffs are entitled to sue the federal government. The leading case involving climate change is Massachusetts v. E.P.A., which only recognized that the state government of Massachusetts had Article III standing to sue the federal government for its failure to regulate climate change because states were "entitled to special solicitude in our standing analysis." Massachusetts did not directly address whether private parties have similar standing rights to bring climate change suits against the federal government. However, the Court implied that private parties might have lesser standing rights when it declared that "[i]t is of considerable relevance that the party seeking review here is a sovereign State and not, as it was in Lujan, a private individual." It is not clear whether the Supreme Court would be as willing to recognize private party standing against the federal government in climate suits as in the Massachusetts decision, and, accordingly, the Juliana decision should have at least flagged the distinction between state standing and private standing as a potential issue in its standing analysis. Applying a rule that only states have standing to challenge the federal government's alleged failure to address climate change would have required a court to dismiss a case like Juliana. However, California and other states have strongly supported the Paris Climate Accord despite President's Trump's announcement indicating his desire to withdraw from the Accord. Accordingly, a precedent limiting climate suits against the federal government to state plaintiffs would not prevent state challenges to his Administration's climate policies.

Addressing the second prong of the standing test, causation, the Juliana decision concluded that the plaintiffs had established that their injuries were fairly traceable to the government's actions. The

92 Massachusetts, 549 U.S. at 518-20; Mank, supra note 83, at 1528, 1536-38.
93 See Massachusetts, 549 U.S. at 518-20; Mank, supra note 83, at 1528.
94 Massachusetts, 549 U.S. at 518-20; Mank, supra note 83, at 1528. In Lujan v. Defenders of Wildlife, several environmental groups brought an action against the Secretary of Interior challenging the agency's interpretation of a regulation. See Lujan v. Defenders of Wildlife, 504 U.S. 555, 557-59 (1992).
95 See Mank, supra note 83, at 1556-57, 1584-85.
government defendants had argued that the plaintiffs had failed to prove causation in light of the Ninth Circuit’s decision in Washington Environmental Council v. Bellon,98 which dismissed a climate change suit both because it determined that the five Washington State oil refineries at issue had only a small impact on worldwide GHG emissions and because it was too difficult to measure the impact of those refineries on the local climate in one state.99 The Juliana decision, however, distinguished the standing causation facts and outcome in its case from Bellon in “two important respects.”100 First, Judge Aiken observed that the procedural posture was different because the appeal in Bellon was from a grant of summary judgment relying on expert declarations, but the Juliana decision involved a motion to dismiss before the plaintiff had a chance to present evidence.101 She observed that “climate science is constantly evolving,” therefore, she could not “interpret Bellon — which relied on a summary judgment record developed more than five years ago — to forever close the courthouse doors to climate change claims.”102 In a 2014 article, this author, Bradford Mank, predicted that future lower courts could disregard the Ninth Circuit’s analysis in Bellon that science is not capable of measuring local climate change impacts based upon the argument that new scientific methods enabled scientists to make a causal link between local GHG sources and local climate change impacts that was not possible at the time of Bellon’s decision in 2014.103 Second, the Juliana decision determined that causation in its case was different from the Bellon decision. Juliana involved the impact of all U.S. emissions affected by the federal government’s actions, a significant portion of both national and worldwide GHG emissions, whereas only five refineries were at issue in Bellon, a tiny portion of global CO2 emissions.104 Accordingly, Judge Aiken in the Juliana decision found that the plaintiffs had established standing causation.105

98 732 F.3d 1131 (9th Cir. 2013).
99 Id. at 1143-44, 1146; Juliana, 217 F. Supp. 3d at 1244-45 (discussing the Ninth Circuit’s standing analysis in Bellon); see Mank, supra note 83, at 1569-72.
100 Juliana, 217 F. Supp. 3d at 1245.
101 Id.
102 Id. (citing Kirsten Engel & Jonathan Overpeck, Adaptation and the Courtroom: Judging Climate Science, 3 Mich. J. Env’l & Admin. L. 1, 25 (2013)).
103 Mank, supra note 83, at 1570-71 & n.295.
104 Juliana, 217 F. Supp. 3d at 1245.
105 Id. at 1246.
Finally, the Juliana decision concluded that the plaintiffs had proven standing redressability. Judge Aiken rejected the government's argument that a favorable judgment by her court could not guarantee an overall reduction in GHG emissions because "redressability does not require certainty, it requires only a substantial likelihood that the Court could provide meaningful relief." She observed that the U.S. Supreme Court's Massachusetts decision had only required plaintiffs to demonstrate that a "requested remedy would 'slow or reduce' the harm." Furthermore, the Juliana decision distinguished the redressability analysis in its case from Bellon because the five refineries in that case had far smaller impacts on global climate change. Therefore, both the causation and redressability analysis in the Bellon Ninth Circuit case was inapplicable to the Juliana case. Additionally, the Juliana decision reasoned that "the possibility that some other individual or entity might later cause the same injury does not defeat standing — the question is whether the injury caused by the defendant can be redressed." While acknowledging that the redressability issue raised many scientific questions, Judge Aiken determined that the plaintiffs did not have to answer those questions at the motion to dismiss stage of the proceedings. She concluded, "Construing the complaint in plaintiffs' favor, they allege that this relief would at least partially redress their asserted injuries. Youth plaintiffs have adequately alleged they have standing to sue."

D. Due Process Claims

The Due Process Clause of the Fifth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution prohibits the federal government from depriving a person of "life, liberty, or property" without "due process of law." The plaintiffs in the Juliana case alleged that the federal government defendants had violated their due process rights by approving and promoting fossil fuel development. For example, they argued that

106 Id. at 1247-48.
107 Id. at 1247.
108 Id. (quoting Massachusetts v. EPA, 549 U.S. 497, 525 (2007)).
109 Id.
110 Id. at 1245-47.
111 Id. at 1247.
112 See id.
113 Id. at 1248.
114 U.S. CONST. amend. V.
115 Juliana, 217 F. Supp. 3d at 1248.
the government's extraction and burning of such fuels resulted in rising atmospheric CO\textsubscript{2} levels "that dangerously interfere with a stable climate system" required for the health and safety of the plaintiffs and the entire U.S. population.\textsuperscript{116} The federal government defendants and private party intervenors objected to the plaintiffs' due process claims on two grounds.\textsuperscript{117} First, they contended that the plaintiffs' challenge to the defendants' affirmative actions in leasing land or issuing permits was inappropriate because the plaintiffs had failed to assert an infringement of a fundamental due process right or improper discrimination against a suspect class of persons.\textsuperscript{118} Second, they argued that the plaintiffs could not challenge the defendants' alleged inaction to prevent private third parties from emitting CO\textsubscript{2} at dangerous levels because the defendants did not have an affirmative duty to protect the plaintiffs from the impacts of climate change.\textsuperscript{119}

The \textit{Juliana} decision initially examined the plaintiffs' claim that the government had violated their rights through affirmative acts in permitting fossil fuel development.\textsuperscript{120} The court observed that the default level of judicial scrutiny is whether there is a rational basis for the government's actions.\textsuperscript{121} However, a court applies a much more demanding strict scrutiny review if the government violates a "fundamental right" of the plaintiff.\textsuperscript{122} Judge Aiken acknowledged that it was clear and undisputed that the government's actions approving various types of fossil fuel extraction and burning would pass rational basis review.\textsuperscript{123} So the crucial issue in resolving the motion to dismiss was whether the plaintiffs had asserted the violation of a fundamental right.\textsuperscript{124}

The \textit{Juliana} decision explained that fundamental due process liberty rights include both rights enumerated elsewhere in the U.S. Constitution and rights and liberties which are either (1) "deeply rooted in this Nation's history and tradition" or (2) "fundamental to our scheme of ordered liberty."\textsuperscript{125} In \textit{Washington v. Glucksberg}, the

\textsuperscript{116} Id.
\textsuperscript{117} Id.
\textsuperscript{118} Id.
\textsuperscript{119} Id.
\textsuperscript{120} See id.
\textsuperscript{121} Id.
\textsuperscript{122} See id.
\textsuperscript{123} Id. at 1249.
\textsuperscript{124} Id.
Supreme Court warned that federal courts must "exercise the utmost care whenever . . . asked to break new ground in this field, lest the liberty protected by the Due Process Clause be subtly transformed into [judicial] policy preferences."126 However, Judge Aiken observed that the cautious approach to creating new due process rights in Glucksberg was significantly changed in Justice Kennedy's Obergefell decision, which recognized a new fundamental due process right to same sex marriage.127 The Obergefell decision gave federal judges more discretion to establish new fundamental due process rights than Glucksberg's history and tradition test.128 Justice Kennedy stated that courts must:

"[E]xercise reasoned judgment in identifying interests of the person so fundamental that the State must accord them its respect . . . . History and tradition guide and discipline the inquiry but do not set its outer boundaries . . . . When new insight reveals discord between the Constitution's central protections and a received legal stricture, a claim to liberty must be addressed.129

In his dissenting opinion in Obergefell, Chief Justice Roberts attacked Justice Kennedy's majority opinion for "break[ing] sharply with decades of precedent" in effectively overruling "the importance of history and tradition" in how the Court had defined fundamental rights inquiry in Glucksberg.130 He noted that "many other cases both before and after have adopted the same approach."131 Chief Justice Roberts reasoned that Obergefell's "aggressive application of substantive due process" would provide judges too much discretion in deciding issues which properly belong to legislative decisions.132 As the next few paragraphs will demonstrate, Judge Aiken could have only found a substantive due process right under Obergefell's broad

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126 Id. (quoting Glucksberg, 521 U.S. at 720) (internal quotations omitted)).
127 Id. (discussing Obergefell v. Hodges, 135 S. Ct. 2584, 2598 (2015)).
129 Id.
130 See id. at 2618-19 (Roberts, C.J., dissenting).
131 Id. at 2618.
132 See also Lamparello, supra note 10, at 47-52 (criticizing Justice Kennedy's expansive due process analysis for usurping traditional legislative authority and transferring it to judges); infra Part II. See generally Obergefell, 135 S. Ct. at 2611-12, 2616-23 (Roberts, C.J., dissenting).
and evolving approach to due process and not under Glucksberg's narrower history and tradition approach.\textsuperscript{133}

Relying on the "reasoned judgment" standard for fundamental due process rights in Obergefell, Judge Aiken concluded that "I have no doubt that the right to a climate system capable of sustaining human life is fundamental to a free and ordered society."\textsuperscript{134} Analogizing to Obergefell's view that "marriage is the 'foundation of the family,'" she reasoned that "a stable climate system [was] quite literally the foundation of society, without which there would be neither civilization nor progress."\textsuperscript{135} She cautioned that the due process right to a stable climate system did not mean that plaintiffs could sue regarding "the government's role in producing any pollution or in causing any climate change."\textsuperscript{136} Judge Aiken explained, "In framing the fundamental right at issue as the right to a climate system capable of sustaining human life, I intend to strike a balance and to provide some protection against the constitutionalization of all environmental claims."\textsuperscript{137} She held that a valid due process claim regarding climate change required a plaintiff to assert that the "governmental action [was] affirmatively and substantially damaging the climate system in a way that will cause human deaths, shorten human lifespans, result in widespread damage to property, threaten human food sources, and dramatically alter the planet's ecosystem."\textsuperscript{138} Yet even such serious allegations would not have violated due process under Glucksberg's narrower history and tradition approach, and is only possible under Obergefell's broader and evolving approach to due process.\textsuperscript{139} In particular, courts have traditionally avoided making the judiciary the direct or innovative policymaker of climate change policy until Judge Aiken's decision.\textsuperscript{140}

\textsuperscript{133} See Juliana v. United States, 217 F. Supp. 3d 1224, 1249-50 (D. Or. 2016) (implicitly acknowledging that plaintiffs' due process claims were viable under Obergefell's new expansive reading of the Due Process Clause, but not under the prior history and tradition standard of interpretation); see also infra Part II.

\textsuperscript{134} Juliana, 217 F. Supp. 3d at 1250 (quoting Obergefell, 135 S. Ct. at 2598 (majority opinion)).

\textsuperscript{135} Id.

\textsuperscript{136} Id.

\textsuperscript{137} Id.

\textsuperscript{138} Id.

\textsuperscript{139} See infra Part II. See generally Juliana, 217 F. Supp. 3d at 1249-50.

\textsuperscript{140} See David Markell & J.B. Ruhl, An Empirical Assessment of Climate Change in the Courts: A New Jurisprudence or Business as Usual?, 64 FLA. L. REV. 15, 22, 77-78, 85-86 (2012) (arguing that most court decisions have treated climate change cases as business as usual rather than as opportunity to make new law).
Judge Aiken in the Juliana decision next explained that the Due Process Clause usually does not create an affirmative duty on the part of the government to act.\textsuperscript{141} However, she explained that government inaction can be subject to the Due Process Clause in two circumstances: "(1) the 'special relationship' exception; and (2) the 'danger creation' exception."\textsuperscript{142} The special relationship exception applies when the government takes an individual into custody against his or her will such as through imprisonment, and was not relevant to the plaintiffs.\textsuperscript{143} However, the court concluded that the plaintiffs had successfully alleged sufficient facts at the motion to dismiss stage of litigation that the government defendants had violated the "danger creation" exception because the federal government had possibly acted with deliberate indifference to the safety of the plaintiffs by failing to take steps to address and ameliorate serious risks from climate change.\textsuperscript{144}

The Juliana decision rejected the governments' argument that the "danger creation" exception should not be applied in the context of climate change litigation.\textsuperscript{145} Judge Aiken noted that several "rigorous proof requirements" limited such claims.\textsuperscript{146} She stated:

A plaintiff asserting a danger-creation due process claim must show (1) the government's acts created the danger to the plaintiff; (2) the government knew its acts caused that danger; and (3) the government with \textit{deliberate indifference} failed to act to prevent the alleged harm. These stringent standards are sufficient safeguards against the flood of litigation concerns raised by defendants — indeed, they pose a significant challenge for plaintiffs in this very lawsuit.\textsuperscript{147}

Judge Aiken observed that she was bound to accept the plaintiffs' factual allegations at the motion to dismiss stage, and that they would have to prove their case at trial.\textsuperscript{148} She reasoned that the plaintiffs' allegations, if true, were sufficient to state a substantive due process

\textsuperscript{141} Juliana, 217 F. Supp. 3d at 1250-51.
\textsuperscript{142} Id. at 1251 (citation omitted).
\textsuperscript{143} Id.\textsuperscript{144} Id. at 1251-52.
\textsuperscript{145} See id. at 1252.
\textsuperscript{146} Id.
\textsuperscript{147} Id. (footnote omitted).
\textsuperscript{148} Id.
challenge for the defendants' failure to adequately regulate CO\textsubscript{2} and GHG emissions.\textsuperscript{149} She summarized those allegations as follows:

Plaintiffs have alleged that defendants played a significant role in creating the current climate crisis, that defendants acted with full knowledge of the consequences of their actions, and that defendants have failed to correct or mitigate the harms they helped create in deliberate indifference to the injuries caused by climate change.\textsuperscript{150}

By denying the defendants' motions to dismiss, Judge Aiken allowed the plaintiffs to go forward with their "substantive due process challenge to defendants' [alleged] failure to adequately regulate CO\textsubscript{2} emissions."\textsuperscript{151} As is discussed in Part II of this Article, the \textit{Juliana} plaintiffs' substantive due process challenge is viable in the light of Obergefell's evolving due process standard, but would likely have failed under Glucksberg's history and tradition standard.\textsuperscript{152}

\textbf{E. Public Trust Claims}

In Part IV of her \textit{Juliana} opinion, Judge Aiken addressed the plaintiffs' claim that the federal government plaintiffs had violated their duty under the public trust doctrine ("PTD") to protect air and other natural resources from the government's failure to regulate greenhouse gases that threaten "imminent" catastrophic climate change.\textsuperscript{153} She characterized the PTD as an inherent limit on sovereignty of government because the current government may not destroy important natural resources that should be available to future legislatures.\textsuperscript{154} The \textit{Juliana} decision observed that the PTD predated the United States, with roots in Roman law and the English common law.\textsuperscript{155} The protection of submerged lands under tidal and navigable waters is at the core of the PTD.\textsuperscript{156} However, Judge Aiken quoted a

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{149} See id.
  \item \textsuperscript{150} Id.
  \item \textsuperscript{151} Id.
  \item \textsuperscript{152} Obergefell v. Hodges, 135 S. Ct. 2584, 2611-12, 2616-23 (Roberts, C.J., dissenting) (criticizing the majority opinion for departing from Glucksberg's history and tradition standard, and, thereby giving judges too much discretion to overrule legislative decisions); see Lamparello, supra note 10, at 47-52 (same); infra Part II.
  \item \textsuperscript{153} \textit{Juliana}, 217 F. Supp. 3d at 1252-61, 1267, 1272 (assuming that plaintiffs' allegations of imminent harm are true at this stage of litigation).
  \item \textsuperscript{154} See id. at 1252-53, 1260-61.
  \item \textsuperscript{155} Id. at 1253, 1260-61.
  \item \textsuperscript{156} See Idaho v. Coeur d'Alene Tribe of Idaho, 521 U.S. 261, 284 (1997)
\end{itemize}
broad definition of the PTD in the sixth century Institutes of Justinian, which declared that "the following things are by natural law common to all — the air, running water, the sea, and consequently the seashore." 

Judge Aiken noted that "the seminal [U.S.] Supreme Court case on the public trust is Illinois Central Railroad Company v. Illinois." The Supreme Court held that the Illinois legislature had violated the PTD when it conveyed title to "part of the submerged lands beneath the harbor of Chicago, with the intent to give the company control over the waters above the submerged lands against any future exercise of power over them by the state." Despite the Institutes of Justinian's reference to air resources, the Illinois Central decision and other Supreme Court decisions cited in Juliana demonstrate that the protection of public access to navigation and submerged lands are at the core of the PTD.

Professor James Huffman has argued that the vast majority of American public trust decisions have followed the English common law in "narrowly apply[ing]" the PTD "to navigable waters for the purposes of navigation, commerce, fishing and sometimes bathing" rather than "the broad and sweeping language of Justinian." Thus, the government defendants and private intervenors appropriately questioned whether the scope of the PTD could be expanded beyond submerged lands to include the

(“American law adopted as its own much of the English law respecting navigable waters, including the principle that submerged lands are held for a public purpose.”); Phillips Petrol. Co. v. Mississippi, 484 U.S. 469, 473 (1988) (“At common law, the title and dominion in lands flowed by the tide water were in the King for the benefit of the nation. . . . Upon the American Revolution, these rights, charged with a like trust, were vested in the original States within their respective borders . . . .” (quoting Shively v. Bowlby, 152 U.S. 1, 57 (1894))); Austin W. Probst, Note, Go With the Flow: The Public Trust Doctrine and Standing, 62 WAYNE L. REV. 535, 537-40 (2017).

The Institutes of Justinian codified Roman law and "is the foundation for modern civil law systems" in many nations. Juliana, 217 F. Supp. 3d at 1253 (citing Timothy G. Kearley, Justice Fred Blume and the Translation of Justinian's Code, 99 LAW LIBR. J. 525, ¶ 1 (2007)).

Id. (citing J. Inst. 2.1.1 (J.B. Moyle trans.)); see also Michael O'Loughlin, Understanding the Public Trust Doctrine Through Due Process, 58 B.C. L. REV. 1321, 1331-32 (2017) (discussing the Public Trust Doctrine in Roman Law and Justinian Institutes).

Juliana, 217 F. Supp. 3d at 1254 (citing Ill. Cent. R.R. Co. v. Illinois, 146 U.S. 387 (1892)).

See id. (quoting Ill. Cent. R.R Co., 146 U.S. at 452-54) (internal quotation marks omitted).

See sources cited supra note 160.

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atmosphere. Judge Aiken ultimately did not decide whether the PTD included air resources, but instead found that plaintiffs had properly alleged violations of the PTD in connection with the territorial sea and submerged tidal lands affected by ocean acidification and rising ocean temperatures linked to climate change.

The government defendants and private intervenors argued that the "federal government, unlike the states, has no public trust obligations." Alternatively, they contended that any common law public trust claims applicable to the plaintiffs' alleged climate change impacts have been displaced by federal environmental statutes such as the Clean Air Act. Finally, they maintained that even if there is a federal public trust, that the plaintiffs lacked a right to enforce it because any enforcement actions by a federal court would conflict with, and be displaced by, federal statutory law. Judge Aiken disagreed with all three of these arguments.

Judge Aiken concluded that the argument of the defendants and intervenors that the PTD applied only to states and not to the federal government was wrongly based on dictum in PPL Montana, LLC v. Montana, which was a case focusing on the "equal footing doctrine" and not a PTD case. In PPL Montana, the Court stated that the equal-footing doctrine, which gives new states title to tidal or navigable riverbeds within its boundaries, is a federal constitutional doctrine, but that "the [PTD] remains a matter of state law." In Juliana, Judge Aiken reasoned that PPL Montana's phrase treating the PTD as state law was mere dictum that did not prevent federal courts from recognizing "the viability of federal public trust claims with respect to federally-owned trust assets" because the PPL Montana

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163 Juliana, 217 F. Supp. 3d at 1254-55.
164 Id. at 1255-56; Blumm & Wood, supra note 58, at 45. In footnote 10, Judge Aiken suggested that she thought that the PTD includes air resources, and observed that the "dearth of litigation focusing on atmosphere may reflect the limited state of scientific knowledge rather than signal a determination that the air is outside the scope of the public trust." Id. at 1255 n.10 ("Hypothesizing that the atmosphere does not appear in early public trust case law because air was long thought to be indestructible and incapable of privatization." (citing Mary C. Wood, Atmospheric Trust Litigation Across the World, in FIDUCIARY DUTY AND THE ATMOSPHERIC TRUST 113 (Ken Coghill et al. eds., 2012))).
165 Juliana, 217 F. Supp. 3d at 1255-59.
166 Id. at 1255, 1259-60.
167 Id. at 1255, 1260-61.
168 Id. at 1256-61.
169 See id. at 1256-58 (discussing PPL Montana, LLC v. Montana, 565 U.S. 576 (2012)).
Court never addressed whether a federal PTD obligation exists.\textsuperscript{171} She acknowledged that the U.S. Supreme Court has partially treated the crucial \textit{Illinois Central} decision as an interpretation of Illinois law.\textsuperscript{172} However, she interpreted the Court's decision in \textit{Idaho v. Coeur d'Alene Tribe of Idaho}\textsuperscript{173} to treat the \textit{Illinois Central} decision and PTD as a more general "American [PTD], which has diverged from the English public trust doctrine in important ways."\textsuperscript{174} If there is an "American [PTD]," Judge Aiken reasoned that "[t]here is no reason why the central tenets of \textit{Illinois Central} should apply to another state, but not to the federal government."\textsuperscript{175}

Judge Aiken explicitly disagreed with the \textit{Alec L.} decision\textsuperscript{176} by the federal district court for the District of Columbia, which held that the PTD did not apply to the federal government.\textsuperscript{177} The \textit{Alec L.} case was "substantially similar" to the \textit{Juliana} action, with youth plaintiffs suing a number of federal agency heads seeking declaratory and injunctive relief for their failure to reduce GHGs and to meet their public trust obligations to protect the Earth's atmosphere.\textsuperscript{178} The \textit{Alec L.} decision dismissed the suit with prejudice because it relied on \textit{PPL Montana}'s treatment of the PTD as state law as binding even if that statement was

\begin{footnotes}
\item[171] \textit{Juliana}, 217 F. Supp. 3d at 1257. But see Matthew Schneider, \textit{Where Juliana Went Wrong: Applying the Public Trust Doctrine to Climate Change Adaptation at the State Level}, 41 ENVIRONS ENVTL. L. & POL'Y J. 47, 58 (2017) (disagreeing with Judge Aiken's reasoning that \textit{PPL Montana}'s phrase treating the PTD as state law was mere dictum because "lower courts still generally treat it as precedent-setting").
\item[172] \textit{Juliana}, 217 F. Supp. 3d at 1257.
\item[175] \textit{Id.}
\item[177] \textit{Juliana}, 217 F. Supp. 3d at 1258.
\item[178] \textit{Compare Id.} at 1233-34 (describing "youth plaintiffs" and their argument that the government defendants' actions promoting fossil fuels caused climate change violating their due process rights and rights under the public trust doctrine), 1258 (stating "\textit{Alec L.} was substantially similar to the instant action: five youth plaintiffs and two environmental advocacy organizations sued a variety of heads of federal agencies, alleging the defendants had 'wasted and failed to preserve and protect the atmosphere Public Trust asset.' 863 F.Supp.2d at 12.") with \textit{Alec L.}, 863 F. Supp. 2d at 12 ("Five young citizens and two organizations, Kids vs. Global Warming and Wildearth Guardians, bring this action seeking declaratory and injunctive relief for Defendants' alleged failure to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. The Plaintiffs allege that Defendants have violated their fiduciary duties to preserve and protect the atmosphere as a commonly shared public trust resource under the public trust doctrine.") (footnotes omitted).
\end{footnotes}
technically dictum. In the alternative, the Alec L. court concluded that the PTD should be treated as state law in light of the doctrine’s historical development even if the PPL Montana decision was not binding on lower courts.

Furthermore, the Alec L. decision concluded that the Clean Air Act had displaced the PTD relying upon the displacement analysis in the AEP decision, which held that the Act displaced federal common law public nuisance claims. The court concluded that the AEP decision had clearly intended to bar “any” federal common law claims and not just public nuisance claims. Additionally, the Alec L. decision interpreted the AEP decision as determining that federal judges may not set limits on GHGs and CO₂ when Congress has delegated those policy decisions to a federal agency via statute. Thus, the district court in Alec L. concluded that decisions regarding reductions in GHGs and CO₂ emissions “are determinations that are best left to the federal agencies that are better equipped, and that have a Congressional mandate, to serve as the primary regulator of greenhouse gas emissions.” Accordingly, the Alec L. court found that “even if Plaintiffs allege a public trust claim that could be construed as sounding in federal common law, the court [found] that that cause of action [was] displaced by the Clean Air Act.”

Similar to the Alec L. decision, the Court of Appeals of New Mexico in Sanders-Reed ex rel. Sanders-Reed v. Martinez concluded that the New Mexico Air Quality Control Act had incorporated and displaced any public trust obligations by the State for the protection of New Mexico’s natural resources. Consequently, the Sanders-Reed court held that the New Mexico law precluded a separate common law cause of action under the state PTD. The state law provided for judicial review of decisions of the New Mexico Environmental Improvement Board, including those related to regulation of GHGs. Furthermore, under separation-of-powers principles, the Court of Appeals of New Mexico concluded that the New Mexico law precluded a separate common law cause of action under the state PTD.

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179 Alec L., 863 F. Supp. 2d at 15. The Alec L. decision did not address either standing or the political question doctrine. See id. at 12-17.
180 See id. at 15.
182 Id. at 16.
183 Id. at 16-17.
184 Id. at 17 (quoting Am. Elec. Power Co., 564 U.S. at 428).
185 Id.
187 Id. at 1226.
Mexico concluded that administrative agencies were the proper branch to decide policy questions relating to regulation of GHGs and climate change rather than courts.\footnote{See id. at 1227.} Moreover, the Court of Appeals held that courts lacked the technical expertise possessed by environmental agencies.\footnote{Id.} Accordingly, the New Mexico Court of Appeals affirmed a district court order granting the State’s motion for summary judgment against the plaintiffs’ complaint seeking a declaratory judgment that the common law PTD imposed a duty on the State to regulate GHG emissions in New Mexico.\footnote{Id. at 1222, 1227.}

In \textit{Juliana}, Judge Aiken disagreed with the reasoning of the \textit{Alec L.} court that the \textit{PPL Montana}’s phrase treating the PTD as state law was binding, because she reasoned that the Supreme Court’s language was merely dicta.\footnote{See \textit{Juliana v. United States}, 217 F. Supp. 3d 1224, 1258 (D. Or. 2016).} She instead relied on two district court decisions from the 1980s that had found that the federal government’s acquisition of submerged land beneath navigable rivers or tidelands was not dependent on state law public trust obligations, but was instead subject to federal public trust limitations.\footnote{Id. at 1258-59 (first citing \textit{United States v. 1.58 Acres of Land}, 523 F. Supp. 120, 124 (D. Mass. 1981); and then citing \textit{City of Alameda v. Todd Shipyards Corp.}, 635 F. Supp. 1447, 1450 (N.D. Cal. 1986)).} She distinguished the \textit{AEP} decision, which held that federal common law public nuisance claims were displaced by the Clean Air Act, because unlike the nuisance claims in \textit{AEP}, the public trust claims “concern[ed] inherent attributes of sovereignty” that could not be legislated away. Therefore, a displacement analysis simply did not apply.”\footnote{Id. at 1259-60.} In her earlier discussion of whether the plaintiffs’ claims raised a nonjusticiable political question, she had rejected the view that the dispute would require a federal court to dictate to federal agencies how to reduce GHG and CO\textsubscript{2} emissions.\footnote{Id. at 1239, 1260.}

Although it was an unpublished per curiam memorandum decision, it is notable that the D.C. Circuit’s decision in \textit{Alec L.} affirming the district court’s decision in the same case was written by three noted appellate judges.\footnote{See \textit{Alex L. ex rel. Loorz v. McCarthy}, 561 Fed. App’x. 7, 7 (D.C. Cir. 2014).} The first member of the panel was Chief Judge Merrick B. Garland, a distinguished jurist who was unsuccessfully nominated by President Obama to serve as a Justice on the Supreme Court of the United States.
The second judge was Judge Sri Srinivasan, who was one of three judges interviewed by President Obama for the Supreme Court nomination that went to his colleague, Chief Judge Garland. The third judge, Senior Judge Douglas H. Ginsburg, served as Chief Judge of the D.C. Circuit from 2001 until 2008 and was a former Professor of Law at the Harvard Law School. Judge Ginsburg was unsuccessfully nominated by President Reagan in 1987 to serve as a Justice on the Supreme Court. It is possible that these three distinguished judges misinterpreted the PPL Montana decision as Judge Aiken argued. However, their differing interpretation of the PPL Montana decision raises doubts whether the public trust portion of the Juliana decision will be affirmed by the Ninth Circuit or by the U.S. Supreme Court.

F. Judge Aiken’s Conclusions and the Future of the Case

The defendants argued that even if the PTD applies to the federal government it is unenforceable either because no cause of action exists or any action to enforce the doctrine is displaced by federal statutes such as the Clean Air Act. Judge Aiken’s Juliana decision rejected the defendants’ non-enforcement arguments by “locat[ing] the source

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199 Roberts, supra note 198.


201 Compare id. at 1257-58 (arguing the Court’s PPL Montana decision phrase treating the PTD as state law was mere dictum), with Alec L. ex rel. Loorz v. McCarthy, 561 F. App’x. 7, 8 (D.C. Cir. 2014) (interpreting the PPL Montana’s phrase treating the PTD as state law as binding law that rejected any federal public trust doctrine).

202 Juliana, 217 F. Supp. 3d at 1259-60.
of plaintiffs' public trust claims" and concluding that the "plaintiffs' public trust rights both predated the Constitution and are secured by it." She observed that the PTD "defines inherent aspects of sovereignty" that predate the Constitution just as the founders of the United States relied upon Social Contract theory for the propositions that "people possess certain inalienable [r]ights and that governments were established by consent of the governed for the purpose of securing those rights." Judge Aiken explained that "the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution did not create the rights to life, liberty, or the pursuit of happiness — the documents are, instead, vehicles for protecting and promoting those already-existing rights." Citing Illinois Central, she reasoned that that the PTD was similar to "police power" in that state and federal governments "possess certain powers that permit them to safeguard the rights of the people; . . . powers [that] are inherent in the authority to govern and cannot be sold or bargained away." However, even though the PTD predates the U.S. Constitution, Judge Aiken determined that the enforcement of the doctrine was based upon the Constitution's substantive due process rights. She relied upon one of Glucksberg's progeny cases for the proposition that "the Due Process Clause's substantive component safeguards fundamental rights that are 'implicit in the concept of ordered liberty' or 'deeply rooted in this Nation's history and tradition.'" Judge Aiken reasoned that the "Plaintiffs' public trust rights, related as they are to inherent aspects of sovereignty and the consent of the governed from which the United States' authority derives, satisfy both tests." Because the public trust is not enumerated in the Constitution, she saw the PTD as deriving from the Constitution's Ninth Amendment.

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203 Id. at 1260.
204 Id.
205 Id. at 1260-61.
206 See id. at 1261.
207 Id.
209 Juliana, 217 F. Supp. 3d at 1261.
210 Id.; see U.S. CONST. amend. IX ("The enumeration in the Constitution, of certain rights, shall not be construed to deny or disparage others retained by the people.").
However, Judge Aiken grounded the enforcement of the PTD directly in the Due Process Clause of the Constitution's Fifth Amendment.211

In Juliana, Judge Aiken concluded by acknowledging that the defendants were "correct that plaintiffs likely could not obtain the relief they seek through citizen suits brought under the Clean Air Act, the Clean Water Act, or other environmental laws."212 However, she reasoned that existing limitations on statutory remedies did not apply because the threat of “imminent” catastrophic climate change violated the plaintiffs' fundamental due process rights to life and liberty.213 Judge Aiken did not address why she presumed federal judges were more competent than members of Congress or the President to address climate change issues.214 By contrast, relying in part on Glucksberg's history and tradition standard, U.S. District Judge Nancy G. Edmunds of the Eastern District of Michigan in her 2017 decision for Lake v. City of Southgate215 concluded that there was no Supreme Court or Sixth Circuit precedent establishing a fundamental liberty interest and constitutional right to her health or freedom from bodily harm from environmental harms, and, therefore, concluded that there was no substantive due process right to health or freedom from bodily harm as defined in Glucksberg.216 Judge Edmunds was aware of the recent Juliana decision because she cited the case, but implicitly disagreed with that decision by concluding that the City of Southgate

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211 Juliana, 217 F. Supp. 3d at 1261. A recent commentator has argued that courts should recognize the public's interest in the PTD as a due process right under the U.S. Constitution because it is a "protected property interest," fits within the police power, and is consistent with precedent. O'Loughlin, supra note 158, at 1340-53. His argument assumes the "PTD's longstanding tradition." Id. at 1339-41, 1344, 1351-53. But Judge Aiken's approach of applying the PTD to climate change is arguably a radical change. See Juliana, 217 F. Supp. 3d at 1249-50 (implicitly acknowledging that plaintiffs' due process claims were viable under Obergefell's new expansive reading of the Due Process Clause, but not under the prior history and tradition standard of interpretation).

212 See id. at 1261, 1267, 1272 (assuming that plaintiffs' allegations of imminent harm are true at this stage of litigation).

213 See id. at 1249-50 (assuming judges have a right under the due process clause to protect fundamental rights even if the legislature disagrees).


215 Id. at *3-4 & *4 n.4 (citing Washington v. Glucksberg, 521 U.S. 702, 720-21 (1997)). Judge Aiken might distinguish public trust claims from a constitutional right to health or freedom from bodily harm from environmental harms because of the long history of PTD predating the U.S. Constitution. See Juliana, 217 F. Supp. 3d at 1260-61. Part III of this Article will address why Glucksberg precludes climate change challenges under a due process fundamental rights theory. See infra Part III.
plaintiffs must rely upon statutory protections rather than new found constitutional "rights." 217

Judge Aiken rejected the defendants’ argument that the case should be dismissed because it was “unprecedented” and “groundbreaking.” 218 Presumably, she would respond in the same way to Judge Edmunds’ City of Southgate decision rejecting a constitutional right to health or freedom from bodily harm stemming from environmental harms because it was unprecedented. 219 Judge Aiken opined in dicta that “[f]ederal courts too often have been cautious and overly deferential in the arena of environmental law, and the world has suffered for it.” 220 Her Juliana decision concluded, “[e]ven when a case implicates hotly contested political issues, the judiciary must not shrink from its role as a coequal branch of government.” 221

However, the Alec L. decision, the Alaska Supreme Court’s Kanuk decision, and the New Mexico Court of Appeals’ decision in Sanders-Reed ex rel. Sanders-Reed concluded that administrative agencies and legislatures were better suited than the judiciary to addressing the impacts of GHGs and CO2. 222 Therefore, these cases call into question the Juliana court’s view that courts must solve the problems relating to climate change. 223 Similarly, Judge Alsup dismissed a public nuisance suit against major oil companies because he concluded that Congress and the Executive Branch should decide climate change policy questions instead of federal courts because of the significant foreign affairs and international relations implications of energy policy. 224

Professors Blumm and Wood, who are strong supporters of PTD suits challenging the federal government for failing to prevent climate change, argue that Judge Aiken’s Juliana decision will enable her to put the federal government and the fossil fuel industry on trial for causing “imminent” catastrophic climate change. 225 Days before President Obama left office, the federal defendants submitted an answer to the complaint that admitted that fossil fuels contribute to

217 See City of Southgate, 2017 WL 767879 at *3-4 & *4 n.4.
218 Juliana, 217 F. Supp. 3d at 1262.
219 City of Southgate, 2017 WL 767879 at *3-4.
220 Juliana, 217 F. Supp. 3d at 1262.
221 Id. at 1263.
223 See supra Parts 1.B & 1.E; infra Conclusion.
225 Blumm & Wood, supra note 58, at 54-55.
potentially dangerous CO₂ emissions. Professors Blumm and Wood contend that these admissions will make it difficult for the Trump Administration to contest the plaintiffs' climate change claims at trial. Accordingly, the Trump Administration may need to wait until an appeal to the Ninth Circuit or to the U.S. Supreme Court to a panel of appellate judges like in the Alec L. case, the Kanuk case, or the Sanders-Reed case that are more skeptical of public trust climate change challenges against the federal government or state governments than Judge Aiken.

G. Trump Administration Seeks Mandamus and Stay in Ninth Circuit

After Judge Aiken published her Juliana decision, the Trump Administration pursued lengthy and complicated litigation in the Ninth Circuit and Supreme Court to dismiss the case, or at least to stay the discovery and scheduled trial, but those efforts have so far been unsuccessful. The Ninth Circuit and Supreme Court appeared to be reluctant to stop all discovery or prevent the trial altogether before the plaintiffs can have an opportunity to present their case. However, both the Ninth Circuit and Supreme Court have separately suggested, but not required, that the trial court narrow the scope of the discovery and scheduled trial.

On June 9, 2017, one day after Judge Aiken denied the U.S. Government’s request for an interlocutory appeal, the U.S. Department of Justice (“DOJ”) filed a Ninth Circuit Petition for a Writ of Mandamus and a Request to Stay the proceedings in the Juliana case on behalf of the U.S. Government. The DOJ sought to dismiss the case, and to stay the District Court's broad discovery orders that

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226 Id. at 58.
227 Id. Professors Blumm and Wood state, “The Trump Administration lawyers could offer an amended answer disputing the climate science but, as Professor Michael Burger has observed, ‘The last thing a Trump Administration [D]epartment of [J]ustice actually wants is to have the science of climate change go on trial.’” Id. at 58 (quoting Megan Darby, Obama Ties Trump Admin into Accepting CO₂ Dangers, CLIMATE CHANGE NEWS (Jan. 19, 2017, 4:04 PM), http://www.climatechangetrumps.com/2017/01/19/obama-ties-trump-admin-into-accepting-co2-dangers).
228 See supra Parts I.B & I.E; infra Conclusion.
229 See infra Part I.G.
230 Id.
231 Id.
require the Government to provide a wide range of documents concerning government energy policy decisions for the past fifty years. In the Writ Petition, the DOJ brought similar challenges to the suit as those unsuccessfully discussed above in Part I, except the Writ did not address the political question doctrine. The DOJ argued that the plaintiffs lacked standing because their “alleged injuries were widely shared by every member of Society.” Furthermore, the DOJ argued that the Juliana decision’s expansive interpretation of the PTD was wrong in light of the reasoning of the Alec L. decision, which concluded that there was either no federal PTD because the public trust doctrine is a state and not a federal doctrine, or that the Clean Air Act displaced any federal trust obligations.

Additionally, the DOJ argued that there was no history, tradition or precedent for a due process right to a stable climate system. “No court ha[d] ever recognized an implied Fifth Amendment cause of action directly against the federal government itself that would allow plaintiffs to seek, through injunctive and declaratory relief, a fundamental re-ordering of national priorities to address an environmental problem.” Judge Aiken would likely acknowledge that her due process analysis was unprecedented, but would reason that a groundbreaking approach was needed to address what she saw as the threat of “imminent” catastrophic climate change. The DOJ criticized the district court’s constitutional rights approach to climate change policies for usurping the authority of Congress, the President, and federal agencies “to determine national policy regarding energy development, use of public lands, and environmental protection.” Thus, the due process analysis in this case is interrelated to the broader question addressed in Parts I and II of whether judges or the political branches should make energy and environmental policy choices.

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234 Id. at 1.
235 Id. at 10-31; supra Parts I.C-E.
236 Petition for Writ of Mandamus, supra note 233, at 10; see id. at 11-21 (arguing plaintiffs failed to prove standing, injury, causation, and redressability).
237 Id. at 28-31.
238 Id. at 22-28.
239 Id. at 27.
240 See Juliana, 217 F. Supp. 3d at 1233-34, 1250-52, 1261-63, 1267, 1272 (assuming that plaintiffs’ allegations of imminent harm are true at this stage of litigation).
241 Petition for Writ of Mandamus, supra note 233, at 31-32.
242 See supra Parts I.B, I.D & I.E; infra Part II.
The Government argued that a writ of mandamus and stay was necessary to prevent “onerous and disruptive” discovery seeking huge numbers of documents compiled over decades, and to avoid an infringement upon the President’s confidential communications with both federal agencies and foreign governments.\textsuperscript{243} The DOJ relied on Judge Aiken’s own admission that the relief sought in the \textit{Juliana} case was “unprecedented” to argue that immediate appellate review was essential.\textsuperscript{244} Furthermore, the Government argued that a stay of proceedings would not harm the plaintiffs because any further emissions during the duration of the stay would be small compared to “the cumulative effects of CO\textsubscript{2} emissions from every source in the world over decades.”\textsuperscript{245}

After the Government filed its petition for a writ of mandamus and stay in the Ninth Circuit, there were some developments in the case. On June 28, 2017, Magistrate Judge Coffin allowed the industry intervenors to withdraw from the case over the plaintiffs’ objections.\textsuperscript{246} Additionally, he scheduled a February 2018 trial date,\textsuperscript{247} which was subsequently postponed until October 2018.\textsuperscript{248} On July 25, 2017, a three-judge panel of the Ninth Circuit issued a temporary stay order.\textsuperscript{249} The Ninth Circuit’s July 25th order also announced, “[t]he petition for a writ of mandamus and all other pending motions will be addressed by separate order.”\textsuperscript{250}

On December 11, 2017, the Ninth Circuit held oral argument on whether to stay the case and the trial date set by Judge Coffin.\textsuperscript{251} The three-judge panel hearing the case consisted of Chief Judge Sidney

\begin{footnotes}
\footnotetext[243]{Petition for Writ of Mandamus, \textit{supra} note 233, at 32-37, 39.}
\footnotetext[244]{Id. at 37-38.}
\footnotetext[245]{Id. at 39.}
\footnotetext[247]{Id.}
\footnotetext[249]{“The Court stays district court proceedings, temporarily, pending further order from this court.” Temporary Stay Order at 1, United States v. U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of Oregon, No. 17-71692 (D. Or. July 25, 2017).}
\footnotetext[250]{Id.}
\footnotetext[251]{Abby Smith, Kids’ Lawsuit over Climate Change Faces Big Test in Federal Court, BLOOMBERG BNA (Dec. 8, 2017), https://www.bna.com/kids-lawsuit-climate-n73014472918/.}
\end{footnotes}
Thomas, an appointee of President Clinton; Judge Marsha Berzon, also appointed by President Clinton; and Judge Alex Kozinski, an appointee of President Reagan. Commentators interpreted the tenor of questions during the oral argument to suggest that Judges Berzon and Thomas would reject the DOJ’s request to dismiss the case, although they might vote to narrow the scope of the case. By contrast, Judge Kozinski’s questions appeared more sympathetic to the DOJ’s position on the ultimate resolution of the case against the plaintiffs, but it was not clear that he is willing to grant the mandamus petition because it is an extraordinary remedy. On December 18, 2017, Judge Kozinski announced his immediate retirement in the wake of alleged sexual misconduct.

252 See Id.


254 See Allied Chem. Corp. v. Daiflon, Inc., 449 U.S. 33, 34 (1980) (per curiam) ("[T]he remedy of mandamus is a drastic one, to be invoked only in extraordinary situations."); R. Henry Weaver & Douglas A. Kysar, Courting Disaster: Climate Change and the Adjudication of Catastrophe, 93 NOTRE DAME L. REV. 295, 348 (2017) (observing that U.S. Government faces an uphill battle in winning mandamus petition from the Ninth Circuit in the Juliana case because such writs are difficult to obtain, but acknowledging the possibility that the court of appeals could grant the request); Reeves, 9th Circuit Judges, supra note 253 (suggesting Judge Kozinski would ultimately deny the U.S. Government’s mandamus request because it is an extraordinary remedy); see also Smith, Judge from Kids’ Climate Suit, supra note 253 (suggesting that Judge Kozinski was skeptical of plaintiffs’ claims, but reporting that Professor Michael Gerrard was uncertain whether Kozinski would have voted for the plaintiffs or Government).

On March 7, 2018, the Ninth Circuit denied the U.S. Government's Petition for a Writ of Mandamus without prejudice. The Ninth Circuit concluded that the U.S. Government's petition was premature, that the Government had failed to demonstrate the “extraordinary circumstances” required for mandamus relief when a party asks an appellate court to review a case before the trial court proceedings have concluded, and that the District Court could remedy the Government’s concerns about overly broad discovery requests by the plaintiffs. Accordingly, the district court could proceed to hold a trial on the plaintiffs’ claims, but the Ninth Circuit perhaps suggested that the district court should consider narrowing the claims before it. As Chief Judge Thomas noted, the court was “mindful that some of the plaintiffs’ claims as currently pleaded [were] quite broad, and some of the remedies the plaintiffs seek may not be available as redress.” The Ninth Circuit further observed, “[c]laims and remedies often are vastly narrowed as litigation proceeds; we have no reason to assume this case will be any different.”

In May 2018, the DOJ filed a Motion for Judgment on the Pleadings with Magistrate Judge Coffin arguing that President Trump was immune from suit in the Juliana case because the Constitution’s separation of powers doctrine prohibited federal courts from forcing the president into taking action on any policy issue, including climate change. Specifically, the DOJ contended that long standing precedent forbade federal courts from issuing an injunction against the President of the United States for official acts. The federal government's motion sought to block a scheduled October 2018 trial

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257 In re United States, 884 F.3d at 837; see Smith & Mehrotra, supra note 256.

260 In re United States, 884 F.3d at 838.


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in Oregon on the merits of the plaintiff's climate change claims. Additionally, the DOJ filed a separate motion for a Protective Order and for a Stay of All Discovery arguing that the Administrative Procedure Act ("APA") and constitutional separation of power principles barred all discovery because federal courts are limited to reviewing the record of the applicable agencies rather than creating a new record through discovery requests.

On May 25, 2018, Magistrate Judge Coffin denied the defendants' motion for a protective order and for a stay of discovery because the court concluded that the Government's claim that the case should be reviewed under the APA was false because "the plaintiffs' complaint [did] not contain an APA claim," and "the defendants [had] no ability to edit the complaint to cobble the claim into one of their choosing to derail discovery." He suggested that the DOJ's motion for a protective order and for a stay of discovery was essentially an attempt to re-litigate the Government's failed effort to dismiss the case before Judge Aiken and then the Ninth Circuit. Finally, Judge Coffin determined that the Government's separation of powers arguments for denying all discovery were "based on wholly hypothetical scenarios that may implicate matters of privilege during the discovery process." Instead, the DOJ should have sought a protective order when the plaintiffs sought specific information that the Government asserted is privileged.

On July 17, 2018, the Department of Justice filed a motion in the U.S. Supreme Court seeking to stay discovery and halt the trial in the Juliana case. In an order dated July 30, 2018, the Supreme Court

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263 See id. at 5.
267 Id. at 2.
268 Id. at 2-3.
269 Id. at 3.
denied the Government's motion without prejudice. Nevertheless, the Court warned the District Court:

The breadth of respondents' claims is striking, however, and the justiciability of those claims presents substantial grounds for difference of opinion. The District Court should take these concerns into account in assessing the burdens of discovery and trial, as well as the desirability of a prompt ruling on the Government's pending dispositive motions.

In light of the Supreme Court's order, lawyer Philip Gregory of the Gregory Law Group, who is serving as co-counsel for the youth plaintiffs in the Juliana case, thanked the Court for allowing the case to go forward, but also acknowledged that the District Court would need to "promptly address narrowing the claims so that the trial can go forward" as scheduled on October 29, 2018 in Eugene, Oregon.

II. A CRITIQUE OF OBERGEFELL'S DUE PROCESS ANALYSIS

Part II will criticize the due process analysis in Justice Kennedy's Obergefell decision. Accordingly, this article will challenge Judge Aiken's approach to due process in Juliana because it relied heavily upon his Obergefell decision. Justice Kennedy's theory of judges using their "reasoned judgment" to create an evolving number of fundamental due process rights is profoundly anti-democratic. Judge Sutton has argued that "[a] principled jurisprudence of constitutional evolution turns on evolution in society's values, not evolution in judges' values." He explained, "[t]he theory of the living constitution rests on the premise that every generation has the

272 Id.
274 See infra Part II.
275 See Juliana, 217 F. Supp. 3d at 1249-50 (implicitly acknowledging that plaintiffs' due process claims were viable under Obergefell's new expansive reading of the Due Process Clause, but not under the prior history and tradition standard of interpretation); infra Part II.
277 See generally Obergefell, 135 S. Ct. at 2611-12, 2616-23 (Roberts, C.J., dissenting).
right to govern itself. If that premise prevents judges from insisting on principles that society has moved past, so too should it prevent judges from anticipating principles that society has yet to embrace." Like Chief Justice Robert's dissenting opinion in Obergefell, Judge Sutton's opinion in DeBoer v. Snyder argued that courts should defer to state legislatures in deciding whether to accept same sex marriage. His opinion was overruled by Obergefell.

Judge Sutton warned that the judicial creation of a constitutional right to same sex marriage would open the door to other groups demanding constitutional rights in other areas. He reasoned that "[t]he more the Court innovates under the Constitution, the more plausible it is for the Court to do still more — and the more plausible it is for other advocates on behalf of other issues to ask the Court to innovate still more." Judge Sutton cautioned that the expansion of constitutional rights would make judges more like legislators and, as a result, intensify battles over the confirmation of judges. Judge Aiken's use of Obergefell's expansive "reasoned judgment" model of establishing fundamental constitutional rights shows that Judge Sutton was right that a decision establishing a constitutional right to same sex marriage would lead advocates to seek the expansion of constitutional rights in other areas.

However, a decision establishing a constitutional right to same sex marriage through a rational basis test under the Equal Protection Clause would have posed less dangers of future judicial law-making than Justice Kennedy's "reasoned judgment" due process analysis. Judge Posner, in his Seventh Circuit decision of Baskin v. Bogan, invalidated two state statutes defining marriage as exclusively heterosexual by using a rational basis analysis under the Equal Protection Clause while deliberately avoiding the issue of whether such marriages are a fundamental right under the Due Process

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279 Id.
280 See generally Obergefell, 135 S. Ct. at 2611-12, 2616-23 (Roberts, C.J., dissenting).
281 See DeBoer, 772 F.3d at 416-18.
282 Id.
283 Id. at 418.
284 Id.
286 DeBoer, 772 F.3d at 418.
Judge Posner concluded that there was no rational or reasonable basis for Indiana and Wisconsin to forbid same-sex marriage based upon tradition, when there was no proof that allowing same-sex marriage would change the marriage decisions of heterosexual persons. Because he concluded that discrimination against same-sex marriage was irrational and invalid under the Equal Protection Clause, Judge Posner determined that he could avoid the issue of whether same-sex marriage is a fundamental right under the Due Process Clause.

Judge Aiken in Juliana implicitly acknowledged that she could not have used a rational basis analysis under the Equal Protection Clause to establish a new constitutional right to a stable climate system. She conceded that present environmental and energy statutes and regulations regulating climate change are rational and only fail if they are subjected to strict scrutiny under Justice Kennedy's evolving due process approach in Obergefell. Judge Aiken accepted that it was clear and undisputed that the government's actions approving various types of fossil fuel extraction and burning would pass rational basis review. Accordingly, it would have been impossible for Judge Aiken in Juliana to apply a rational basis analysis under the Equal Protection Clause to establish a new constitutional right to a stable climate system.

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288 See, e.g., Baskin v. Bogan, 766 F.3d 648, 654-57, 671-72 (7th Cir. 2014); Lamparello, supra note 10, at 59-60; see also Obergefell v. Hodges, 135 S. Ct. 2584, 2623 (2015) (Roberts, C.J., dissenting) (arguing Justice Kennedy's majority opinion in Obergefell failed to use the modern Equal Protection Clause's means-end methodology in favor of a vague argument that there is "synergy" between that Clause and the Due Process Clause).

289 See Baskin, 766 F.3d at 654-72. Judge Sutton in DeBoer disagreed that rational basis analysis under the Equal Protection Clause necessitated the invalidation of bans on same-sex marriage because he reasoned that a state could distinguish between heterosexual couples who are potentially capable of sexual procreation from same sex couples who need assisted reproduction to have children, and because he gave more deference to the traditional definition of marriage as being heterosexual in nature, although he acknowledged societal costs to same sex couples and their children. Cf. DeBoer, 772 F.3d at 404-08. Whether Judge Posner or Judge Sutton was correct in reaching different conclusions about whether bans on same-sex marriage are valid under rational basis review is beyond the scope of this article.

290 Baskin, 766 F.3d at 656-57.

291 See Juliana, 217 F. Supp. 3d at 1249-50 (discussing Obergefell, 135 S. Ct. at 2598).

292 Id. at 1248-50.

293 Id. at 1248-49.

294 See id. at 1249-50.
Another possible way to cabin the *Obergefell* decision is Professor Kenji Yoshino’s argument that Justice Kennedy’s evolving conception of due process should be interpreted as a vision of liberty that he calls “antisubordination liberty” that protects “historically subordinated groups.” While racism or sexism may in some cases exacerbate the impacts of climate change, the phenomenon of climate change generally affects the entire U.S. population. Poor people may be affected more than others depending upon their location and their means to adapt to climate change. By contrast, gay individuals were subject to directed prejudice by both public officials and some of their fellow citizens in the enforcement of antisodomy laws that much more easily qualifies as illegal discrimination under Yoshino’s “antisubordination liberty” interpretation of fundamental rights under the Due Process Clause. Under both the Equal Protection Clause and Professor Yoshino’s “antisubordination liberty” due process analysis, courts should defer to the political branches in addressing the impacts of climate change on the poor and minority groups unless clear examples of intentional bias can be proven.

III. ALTERNATIVES TO ADDRESSING CLIMATE CHANGE WITHOUT JUDICIAL INTERVENTION

Some commentators believe that the Earth is approaching an “imminent” catastrophic tipping point where it will impossible to stop a runaway train of climate disaster. They conclude that immediate


296 See, e.g., Cooney, *supra* note 22 (contending climate change disproportionately affects women); Rodriguez, *supra* note 22 (arguing President Trump’s withdrawal from the Paris Climate Accord will “especially [harm] people of color, who often unfairly bear the brunt of climate change’s effects”).


298 See generally Goldenberg, *supra* note 23.


300 See Alexander v. Sandoval, 532 U.S. 275, 293 (2001) (holding Title VI of the Civil Rights Act does not include private right of action based upon disparate impact, and, therefore, requiring plaintiffs to prove government officials committed intentional acts of racial or other prohibited discrimination).

judicial intervention is essential because the U.S. political system will not respond in time. Accordingly, they applaud Judge Aiken's Juliana decision. However, commentators also recognize that the Juliana decision is a preliminary decision that is a prelude to a lengthy trial on the merits, and that her decision will eventually be scrutinized by the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals and probably by the U.S. Supreme Court.

Not all commentators would agree that climate change likely poses "imminent" catastrophic consequences because human society is already adapting to changes and because new technologies can limit the total amount of possible global warming caused by fossil fuels. New research by scientists, led by Richard Millar of the University of Oxford, concludes that human beings have approximately twenty years until 2038 to limit global warming to a total increase of 1.5 degrees Celsius, which would avoid further worsening the consequences of climate change. If the Earth is not facing an "imminent" climate change catastrophe, there is a strong argument for allowing Congress and the President to resolve the issue rather than

"By the end of the century, the global temperature is likely to rise more than 2 degrees Celsius, or 3.6 degrees Fahrenheit. This rise in temperature is the ominous conclusion reached by two different studies using entirely different methods published in the journal Nature Climate Change on [July 31, 2017] . . . ."; David Wallace-Wells, The Uninhabitable Earth, NYMAG.COM: DAILY INTELLIGENCER (July 9, 2017), http://nymag.com/daily/intelligencer/2017/07/climate-change-earth-too-hot-for-humans.html (arguing catastrophic climate change has already begun to affect the Earth and will worsen).

302 Blumm & Wood, supra note 58, at 87; Weaver & Kysar, supra note 254, at 296-97, 304-12, 354-56.

303 Blumm & Wood, supra note 58, at 84-87; Weaver & Kysar, supra note 254, at 356.

304 Blumm & Wood, supra note 58, at 62; Weaver & Kysar, supra note 254, at 348.

305 See Oren Cass, Truth Is Just a Detail, CITYJ. (July 11, 2017), https://www.cityjournal.org/html/truth-just-detail-15316.html (criticizing New York Magazine article predicting catastrophic climate change because it "ignores humanity's capacity for adapting to changes that will occur slowly over decades or centuries"); Andrew Freedman, No, New York Mag: Climate Change Won't Make The Earth Uninhabitable by 2100, MASHABLE (July 10, 2017), http://mashable.com/2017/07/10/new-york-mag-climate-story-inaccurate-doomsday-scenario/#u2OodZ1QXPl (criticizing New York Magazine article predicting catastrophic climate change and reporting "climate scientists nearly universally say that there is still time to avert the worst consequences of global warming").

306 Chris Mooney, New Climate Change Calculations Could Buy the Earth Some Time — If They're Right, WASH. POST (Sept. 18, 2017), https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/energy-environment/wp/2017/09/18/new-climate-calculations-could-buy-the-earth-some-time-if-theyre-right/?utm_term=.ce38c6bb48ff (Millar's study "finds that we have more than 700 billion tons [of carbon dioxide] left to emit to keep warming within 1.5 degrees Celsius, with a two-thirds probability of success. That's about 20 years [from 2017] at present-day emissions.")
through unprecedented judicial intervention in energy policy issues that is contrary to fundamental separation of powers principles in the U.S. Constitution.\footnote{See generally Massachusetts v. EPA, 549 U.S. 497, 535-36 (2007) (Roberts, C.J., dissenting) (arguing that climate change is a global political problem that should be decided by the political branches, and, therefore, is a nonjusticiability general grievance unsuitable for resolution by the federal courts).}

According to Bloomberg New Energy Finance ("BNEF"), rapid technological developments in solar power, wind power and battery storage will force coal and even natural gas fossil fuel power plants out of business faster than previously forecast.\footnote{Shankleman & Warren, supra note 29.} As a result of the growth of cheaper renewable energy, the amount of energy from coal burning plants in the U.S. will be roughly half of what it is in 2017 by 2040, despite President Trump's efforts to promote fossil fuels.\footnote{Id.} In Europe, coal power capacity will fall by eighty-seven percent in the same time period.\footnote{Id.} By 2021, solar power should cost roughly the same as new coal power plants in developing countries such as China and India.\footnote{Id.} In 2016, China installed so many solar panels that it made up close to half of the global market, and the International Energy Agency estimates that 1000 gigawatts of renewables will be installed in the five years from 2018 through 2022.\footnote{Id.} While President Trump's policies favoring fossil fuels will have some impact on energy outcomes,\footnote{Id.} the surge of cheaper renewable energy and rising investments in renewables suggest that CO\textsuperscript{2} emissions from fossil fuels may decline after 2026, which is a sharp contrast with previous forecasts that predicted rising emissions for decades to come.\footnote{See Salena Zito, Don't Be So Quick to Dismiss Trump's Coal Mining Initiative, N.Y. POST (June 17, 2017, 7:31 PM), http://nypost.com/2017/06/17/dont-be-so-quick-to-dismiss-trumps-coal-mining-initiative/ (arguing President Trump's favorable policies have helped to revive coal mining industry).} Judge Aiken refused to dismiss the \textit{Juliana} case because she found the plaintiffs' predictions of "imminent" catastrophic climate change plausible at that stage of litigation.\footnote{Shankleman & Warren, supra note 29.} However, their claims may be based on outdated CO\textsuperscript{2} emissions predictions.\footnote{Id.} 

\begin{footnotesize}
\item[\footnote{307}] See generally Massachusetts v. EPA, 549 U.S. 497, 535-36 (2007) (Roberts, C.J., dissenting) (arguing that climate change is a global political problem that should be decided by the political branches, and, therefore, is a nonjusticiability general grievance unsuitable for resolution by the federal courts).
\item[\footnote{308}] Shankleman & Warren, supra note 29.
\item[\footnote{309}] Id.
\item[\footnote{310}] Id.
\item[\footnote{311}] Id.
\item[\footnote{313}] See Salena Zito, Don't Be So Quick to Dismiss Trump's Coal Mining Initiative, N.Y. POST (June 17, 2017, 7:31 PM), http://nypost.com/2017/06/17/dont-be-so-quick-to-dismiss-trumps-coal-mining-initiative/ (arguing President Trump's favorable policies have helped to revive coal mining industry).
\item[\footnote{314}] Shankleman & Warren, supra note 29.
\item[\footnote{315}] Juliana v. United States, 217 F. Supp. 3d 1224, 1244, 1250-52, 1261, 1272 (D. Or. 2016) (assuming that plaintiffs' allegations of imminent harm are true at this stage)
\end{footnotesize}
While climate change is an important and concerning issue, federal courts should follow Glucksberg's history and tradition standard for deciding which challenges are pursuant to the Due Process Clause.\(^{317}\) As Judge Aiken implicitly acknowledged, newly articulated claims to right to a stable climate system could only qualify under Obergefell's evolving due process analysis and not under Glucksberg's history and tradition standard.\(^{318}\) Courts should apply a rational basis review standard, and, as Judge Aiken conceded, federal environmental and energy laws and policies are rational and not a violation of due process rights as they are defined in Glucksberg.\(^{319}\)

The Alec L. decision made a strong argument that the PTD has been defined by state decisions, and that it is not clear that a separate federal PTD exists.\(^{320}\) Furthermore, the Alec L. decision reasoned that any possible federal PTD regarding climate change is displaced by the Clean Air Act in the same manner as the analysis in AEP.\(^{321}\) Judge Aiken made a plausible counter-argument that the PTD defines the rights of the federal government and not just state governments because it predates and informs the meaning of the Constitution.\(^{322}\) But even if the Clean Air Act does not completely displace all possible federal PTD claims, courts should look to the history of how the PTD has been applied by American courts to determine the scope of the PTD under either state or federal law. Pursuant to Glucksberg's history and tradition standard for determining which challenges are fundamental rights under the Due Process Clause,\(^{323}\) the public interest in submerged lands in Illinois Central might possibly qualify as a fundamental right or at least raise serious constitutional questions.\(^{324}\)
Creating a new constitutional right to climate stability is different from recognizing that the PTD has traditionally limited the right of governments to alienate title or control of submerged lands under tidal or navigable waters that was the central holding of the Supreme Court's *Illinois Central* decision.\(^{325}\) Accordingly, the *Alec L.* decision correctly determined that the EPA's interpretation of the Clean Air Act should decide climate change policy questions, and not judges applying the PTD to novel questions of climate change.\(^{326}\) Accordingly, both Judge Aiken's substantive due process analysis and her understanding of the PTD are flawed because they depart too greatly from the history and traditions of the Clause and the PTD.\(^{327}\)

**CONCLUSION**

The *Alec L.* decision in the District Court of the District of Columbia, Judge Alsup's *City of Oakland* decision, the Alaska Supreme Court's *Kanuk* decision, and the New Mexico Court of Appeals' decision in *Sanders-Reed ex rel. Sanders-Reed*, all offer a more appropriate delineation between the roles of the judiciary and the political branches in addressing the problems relating to climate change than the *Juliana* decision.\(^{328}\) Furthermore, the *Alec L.* decision, the *Kanuk* decision, and the *Sanders-Reed* decision each aptly recognized that administrative agencies have more expertise than courts in addressing environmental challenges, including climate change.\(^{329}\) The separation of powers principles in the U.S. Constitution and state constitutions give executive agencies the authority to enforce environmental laws and remedies rather than courts.\(^{330}\) Instead of

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\(^{325}\) *Ill. Cent.,* 146 U.S. at 452-54.


\(^{327}\) *See supra* Parts I.D, II.

\(^{328}\) *See generally Alec L.,* 863 F. Supp. 2d at 15-16 (deferring to the political branches on policy question of addressing climate change and regulation of greenhouse gases); *Kanuk ex rel.* Kanuk v. State, Dep't of Nat. Res., 335 P.3d 1088, 1097-1103 (Alaska 2014) (same); *Sanders-Reed ex rel. Sanders-Reed v. Martinez,* 350 P.3d 1221, 1226-27 (N.M. Ct. App. 2015) (same); Order Granting Motions to Dismiss Amended Complaints at 10-16, City of Oakland vs. BP P.L.C. (N.D. Cal. June 28, 2018) (No. 3:17-cv-06011-WHA & No. 3:17-cv-06012-WHA) (same); *supra* Parts I.B, I.E (discussing the argument that the political branches are better equipped to address policy questions of climate change and regulation of greenhouse gases).

\(^{329}\) *Alec L.*, 863 F. Supp. 2d at 15-16; *Kanuk,* 335 P.3d at 1097-1103; *Sanders-Reed,* 350 P.3d at 1226-27.

\(^{330}\) *Sanders-Reed,* 350 P.3d at 1226-27; *see Kanuk,* 335 P.3d at 1097-1103 (citing
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usurping executive power under the guise of substantive due process, courts should limit their role in environmental and energy cases to reviewing the administrative actions of executive agencies to determine their compliance with the law.331

Despite Judge Aiken's attempt to distinguish between common law tort and common law PTD claims,332 the Alec L. decision provides strong reasoning that the Clean Air Act has displaced any claims regarding climate change under a possible federal PTD in a similar way as the Supreme Court had determined that the Act displaced federal common law public nuisance claims against large GHG and CO2 emitters in AEP.333 The district court in the Alec L. decision rightly concluded that decisions regarding reductions in GHGs and CO2 emissions "are determinations that are best left to the federal agencies that are better equipped, and that have a Congressional mandate, to serve as the 'primary regulator of greenhouse gas emissions.'"334 Accordingly, the Alec L. decision appropriately determined that any possible federal PTD claims regarding climate change are displaced by the Clean Air Act.335 The problems of climate change are primarily the responsibility of the political branches, and the ancient PTD cannot be reworked to justify judicial supremacy even if one does not agree with the environmental policies of the current President or Congress.336

prudential grounds for dismissing public trust suit where political branches are better capable than courts in deciding environmental policy questions).

331 Sanders-Reed, 350 P.3d at 1226-27; see Kanuk, 335 P.3d at 1097-1103.


334 Id. at 17 (quoting Am. Elec. Power Co. v. Connecticut, 564 U.S. 410, 428 (2011)).

335 Id.

336 Professor Kysar and two co-authors in two different articles have argued that climate change suits could serve as prods or pleas to encourage the political branches to consider climate change legislation rather than as a judicial fiat ordering them to do so. See Benjamin Ewing & Douglas A. Kysar, Prods and Pleas: Limited Government in an Era of Unlimited Harm, 121 Yale L.J. 350, 350, 355-57, 359-67, 423-24 (2011); Weaver & Kysar, supra note 254, at 342-56. However, Judge Aiken's use of substantive due process to deny the U.S. Government's motion to dismiss threatens to serve as the type of anti-democratic judicial fiat that Judge Sutton warned against in DeBoer v. Snyder, because using a substantive due process analysis to strike down a statute has profoundly anti-democratic impacts. DeBoer v. Snyder, 772 F.3d 388, 416-18 (6th Cir. 2014), overruled by Obergefell v. Hodges, 135 S. Ct. 2584 (2015); Slugh, supra note 13 (criticizing the Juliana decision for using Obergefell's substantive due process approach to create a new constitutional due process right to a stable climate).