Executive Action and Nonaction

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Executive action and nonaction should be amenable to judgment by federal courts, distinguishing unlawful from permissible discretion. Previous commentators have been largely skeptical of standing for Congress to challenge executive action and nonaction, but most of that commentary preceded the Supreme Court’s revival of legislator standing last term in Arizona State Legislature v. Arizona Independent Redistricting Commission, and the Court’s recent invitation in the order granting certiorari in United States v. Texas (affirmed by an equally divided court) to consider the meaning of the President’s obligation to take care that the laws be faithfully executed. Problems a court might encounter in crafting an effective injunctive remedy in the context of executive nonaction can be overcome by seeking declaratory judgment relief. Legislators’ interests are of two types: to see laws they enacted enforced and to overcome impediments to their legislative functions. The former interest should be sufficient to justify legislators’ standing if the current Congress at the time of a lawsuit announces its support for enforcement of a law by authorizing litigation. The second kind of legislator interest can be found under the specific constitutional power of impeachment, exercised by the House of Representatives. This interest is present even if the House does not take a vote on impeachment, just as the Congress’ oversight authority exists

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apart from an actual vote on a bill. Involving the judicial branch in challenges to executive action and nonaction cases has functional advantages, including providing the executive with a potentially face-saving premise to change a previous approach to enforcement or nonenforcement. Following a court determination, the House Judiciary Committee, through its impeachment authority, would serve as the monitor of whether such a change of approach has taken place.

INTRODUCTION

The concept of executive action involves matters within the exclusive authority of the President which the President has the right to decide, matters where the President encroaches on the exclusive authority of the Congress, and matters for which responsibility is shared between the President and Congress. It involves both action
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and inaction by the President. This Article adds to recent literature by developing, contrary to the approach of other commentators, a theory for judicial involvement in setting the proper bounds between the executive and legislative branches. There are well-established means for a court to determine whether an executive action or inaction is lawful, and this Article offers specific drafting suggestions for Congress to enhance the likelihood of having such questions heard by a court.

Executive action has been an issue from the earliest days of our country, though recent years have presented an increasing set of examples. The more recent controversies include President Obama commencing military involvement in Libya in 2011 for 222 days without congressional authorization; bombing in Syria, starting in 2014 and continuing without congressional authorization; refusing to


deport categories of aliens who are illegally in the United States\(^5\) and granting three-year work permits to persons in those categories;\(^6\) declining to prosecute marijuana possession cases in states that have legalized private possession of marijuana with a strong state regulatory system;\(^7\) suspending the employer mandate under the new health insurance law for the year 2014;\(^8\) suspending the individual mandate for those who lost their health insurance coverage in 2014;\(^9\) permitting expanded categories of Medicaid financing for low income persons in states that did not set up exchanges;\(^10\) appointing members to the National Labor Relations Board during what the President, but not the Senate, considered a congressional recess;\(^11\) refusing to print “Israel” as the birthplace of American citizens born in Jerusalem on their U.S. passports, though a statute required it;\(^12\) and announcing a policy of nonenforcement of the sanctions regime imposed upon Iran, in connection with Iran’s agreement regarding its nuclear capability.\(^13\)


\(^6\) Executive Actions on Immigration, supra note 5.

\(^7\) See Memorandum from James M. Cole, Deputy Att’y Gen., U.S. Dep’t of Just., to All U.S. Att’ys (Aug. 29, 2013), https://www.justice.gov/iso/opa/resources/3052013829132756857467.pdf [https://perma.cc/7G7B-ZT4U].


\(^10\) King v. Burwell, 135 S. Ct. 2480, 2487 (2015) (“The IRS addressed the availability of tax credits by promulgating a rule that made them available on both State and Federal Exchanges. As relevant here, the IRS Rule provides that a taxpayer is eligible for a tax credit if he enrolled in an insurance plan through ‘an Exchange,’ which is defined as ‘an Exchange serving the individual market . . . regardless of whether the Exchange is established and operated by a State . . . or by HHS[,]’”) (first quoting 26 C.F.R. § 1.36B–2 (2013); then quoting 45 C.F.R. § 155.20 (2014); and then citing 77 Fed. Reg. 30,377, 30,378 (2012)).


\(^13\) President Barack Obama, Statement by the President on Iran (July 14, 2015), in WHITE HOUSE, THE IRAN NUCLEAR DEAL: WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT THE
Earlier examples of executive action involved significant controversy. These included President Truman’s seizure of America’s steel mills during the Korean War; President Nixon’s impoundment of funds authorized and appropriated by Congress; President Franklin Roosevelt’s sale of U.S. warships to Great Britain in return for leases on British territories in the Western Hemisphere, despite a congressional requirement of neutrality before America entered World War II; President Franklin Roosevelt’s extinguishing of claims of American citizens against the Soviet Union, as an effort to normalize relations with USSR; President Reagan’s invasion of Grenada without congressional authorization; President George H.W. Bush’s invasion of Panama without Congressional authorization; and President Clinton’s bombing of Yugoslavia for seventy-nine days in 1999 without congressional authorization.

As evidenced by these examples, controversial executive action and nonaction can be drawn from both international and domestic contexts.

The structure of Justice Jackson’s famous concurrence in the *Steel Seizure* case forms the outline for this Article’s consideration.

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16. This use of executive power is aptly described by the passage that follows:

Then on September 3 [, 1940,] it was announced that the United States had entered into an agreement under which, in return for the lease of certain sites for naval bases in the British west Atlantic, our government had handed over to Britain fifty overage destroyers which had been recently reconditioned and recommissioned. Although the transaction was directly violative of at least two statutes and represented an exercise by the President of a power which by the Constitution is specifically assigned to Congress, it was defended by Attorney General, now Justice, Jackson as resting on the power of the President as Commander-in-Chief to ‘dispose’ the armed forces of the United States which was ingeniously, if not quite ingenuously, construed as the power to ‘dispose of’ them!

of executive action: Within the Constitution, there are areas uniquely committed to the executive branch, areas uniquely committed to the legislative branch, and areas of shared authority. Part I discusses the areas of exclusive authority to the President and Part II discusses the areas of exclusive authority to the legislative branch. After a brief consideration of the first two areas, this Article, in Part III, devotes most attention to the third: where legislative and executive authority overlap. Under that heading, the area of most interest is where Congress has passed a law, but the President chooses not to enforce it. Part IV addresses the question of which remedies are available in that circumstance and concludes that, among other possible remedies, declaratory judgment relief would cover the broadest range of circumstances and would satisfy federal court justiciability requirements. Part V next considers who would have standing to bring such an action. Private parties who were aggrieved would certainly qualify, but they would not be present in many cases. Thus, the issue of legislative standing is presented. The Supreme Court has very recently confirmed its standard for legislative standing, in a phrasing that would support legislative branch standing either to sue to compel the executive branch to enforce the law, or at least to obtain a declaratory judgment that the President’s failure to enforce the law was indefensible. The premise for legislative standing in such a legal action is bolstered by reference to the specific power of impeachment, given to the House of Representatives, even if formal impeachment proceedings are not commenced. The resort to judicial remedies should lead to less confrontational means of resolving interbranch disputes with the enhanced possibility of face-saving withdrawals by each branch from an extreme position. A brief conclusion follows.

I. INHERENTLY EXCLUSIVE AUTHORITY OF THE PRESIDENT

Among the most common assertions of inherent power by the President have been those under his commander-in-chief authority, such as initiating the use of America’s armed forces in the absence of a congressional declaration of war, and especially asserting power in regard to the President’s conduct of a war once declared.23

22. Youngstown Sheet & Tube Co. v. Sawyer (Steel Seizure), 343 U.S. 579, 635–37 (1952) (Jackson, J., concurring).
23. The power given to the President once war is declared is quite broad:

A declaration of war didn’t tell the president how to fight the enemy, or how vigorously, or even when to begin: All it did was declare that we were at war with
Nevertheless, challenges to the President’s assertion of inherent authority in this realm date to the earliest days of our country. President George Washington announced a policy of neutrality in the war between France and Great Britain; then-Congressman James Madison challenged his right to do so, since, he argued, the closest analogous power was the right to declare war, and that was vested exclusively in the Congress. Alexander Hamilton defended the President’s inherent rights in a manner that Madison characterized as monarchical—in a literal sense—Hamilton, he claimed, had to derive the President’s inherent rights from the powers the United States inherited from the British Crown, which inhered in the President unless specifically granted to Congress:

Washington’s so-called “Proclamation of Neutrality” upon the outbreak early in 1793 of war between France and Great Britain declared the intention of the United States to “pursue a course friendly and impartial to both belligerent powers”. In brief, Hamilton’s argument comprises the following contentions: first, that the opening clause of Article II is a grant of power; secondly, that the succeeding more specific grants of the article, except when ‘coupled with express restrictions or limitation,’ “specify the principal articles” implied in the general grant and hence serve to interpret it; thirdly—by inference—that the direction of foreign policy is inherently an “executive” function. [Madison] proceeds to charge Hamilton with seeking to annex to the Presidency the prerogative of the British Crown. [Madison] proceeds to charge Hamilton with seeking to annex to the Presidency the prerogative of the British Crown. Madison’s own theory is that the right to determine the foreign policy of the United States devolves upon Congress by virtue of its power to declare war.

The inherent rights of the Presidency prevail not only where Congress is silent, as it was at the time of President Washington’s


25. Id.
26. Id. (citations omitted).
Proclamation of Neutrality, 27 but also when Congress attempts to legislate within the area of the Presidential reserve. 28 Even when they sign laws, Presidents do not appear to feel bound by those provisions that impinge on their exclusive authority, and they will issue signing statements expressing that they reserve the right not to obey some part of the law. 29 That happened, for instance, in connection with the federal law giving children born of U.S. citizen parents in Jerusalem the right to have their passports record their place of birth as “Jerusalem, Israel.” 30 Since this assertion of congressional authority impinged on the President’s inherent authority to recognize foreign states, and to carry on diplomacy with them, the law was held unconstitutional. 31

This kind of a conflict might soon recur, should President Obama’s normalization of relations with Cuba extend to extinguishing the claims of those whose property was nationalized by the Communist government. In 1996, Congress passed the Helms-Burton Act, ensuring that private parties whose property was nationalized by the Castro regime in Cuba could sue in federal court to prevent the transfer of such property to other parties. 32 Since Congress has control over the jurisdiction of federal courts, it had authority to do so. 33 By creating rights in third parties with access to courts to enforce those rights, Congress gave a forum to private parties with standing to vindicate Congress’ point of view regarding the communist regime in Cuba. However, in the context of the Soviet Union, sixty years before, the Court found in the President’s inherent authority the right to extinguish private claims to assets seized by the

Soviets in the Russian Revolution. If the Court followed that precedent, the Helms-Burton Act would be held unconstitutional to the extent it purported to prevent the President from undertaking this aspect of diplomacy.

The President's claim to inherent authority is sometimes upheld because of the difficulty a court would have doing otherwise, in a practical sense. When President Carter terminated the Mutual Defense Treaty with the Republic of China (Taiwan), at the same time recognizing the People’s Republic of China, Senator Goldwater and congressional colleagues (with an authorization from a majority of the Senate) sued to enjoin President Carter’s actions, claiming that since the treaty’s adoption required ratification by two-thirds of the Senate, its abrogation would too. The district court accepted Senator Goldwater’s reasoning. The D.C. Circuit reversed per curiam, recognizing both presidential and senatorial prerogatives, but holding the former prevailed since there was no explicit constitutional grant to the Senate regarding terminating treaties. The U.S. Supreme Court granted certiorari, vacated the opinion, and ordered the case dismissed, without opinion.

We can only speculate what grounds would have been furnished had the Supreme Court issued a full opinion. In addition to the reasoning of the D.C. Circuit that the President’s inherent diplomatic authority required maximum deference, this Article offers the pragmatic concern of how a court would structure relief. Once a treaty has been ratified, to what extent the United States abides by its

34. United States v. Belmont, 301 U.S. 324, 326–27 (1937) (upholding the President’s executive agreement with the Soviet Union terminating private ownership in assets located in New York). The President’s action was given precedence over New York’s public policy against confiscation of property: “[n]o state policy can prevail against the international compact here involved.” Id. at 327.


36. Id.

37. The court described that

[the constitutional institution of advice and consent of the Senate, provided two-thirds of the Senators concur, is a special and extraordinary condition of the exercise by the President of certain specified powers under Article II. It is not lightly to be extended in instances not set forth in the Constitution. Such an extension by implication is not proper unless that implication is unmistakably clear.


obligations to another country is a matter entrusted to the President (in the absence of a self-executing provision creating enforcement rights in third parties). For diplomatic purposes, our country might wish to be more or less vigilant in adhering to treaty provisions, as relations with the other country change over time. It would have been impractical, therefore, to implement the following order entered by the district court:

In view of the foregoing, it is the declaration of this Court that the President’s notice of termination must receive the approval of two-thirds of the United States Senate or a majority of both houses of Congress for it to be effective under our Constitution to terminate the Mutual Defense Treaty of 1954. It is further ordered that the Secretary of State and his subordinate officers are hereby enjoined from taking any action to implement the President’s notice of termination unless and until that notice is so approved.39

If, following the district court’s order, the Secretary of State simply stopped staffing the U.S. embassy in Taipei, what could the district court do? Could it order a skeleton crew to arrive? Could it order the U.S. ambassador to take up residence there? If the ambassador had left (pursuant to President Carter’s order), could the district court order the President to nominate a replacement?40 The practical difficulties associated with enforcing the district court’s order reveal the sound logic of holding that the decision to abide by a treaty is within the exclusive purview of the President.41

The assertion of inherent executive authority does not always succeed, of course. Most famously, President Truman asserted his right as commander in chief to nationalize our nation’s steel mills when a strike and lock-out were threatened.42 The Supreme Court held that labor strife involved interstate commerce, an area of shared responsibility between the President and Congress, and that Congress

40. By contrast, where a treaty provides that the United States (through the executive branch) shall not undertake a particular action, an injunction sought by a U.S. senator to prevent that action from taking place could be more easily ordered. Perhaps that was why the district court raised no impediment based on lack of standing to Senator Dole’s lawsuit to prevent the return of the Crown of Saint Stephen to Hungary, though ruling against him on the merits. See Dole v. Carter, 444 F. Supp. 1065, 1067–68 (D. Kan. 1977).
41. The difficulty of drafting a judicial remedy reoccurs in the context of shared power, where Congress has acted and the President has chosen not to enforce a law passed by Congress. This Article argues below that a declaratory judgment can be an effective remedy in such cases. See infra Section IV.C.
42. Youngstown Sheet & Tube Co. v. Sawyer (Steel Seizure), 343 U.S. 579, 582 (1952).
had occupied the field with the Taft-Hartley Act.\textsuperscript{43} The characterization of the power in question determined that outcome. Had the Court instead characterized Truman’s action as that of the commander in chief in connection with conducting a war, the outcome would likely have been to uphold his actions, as in the Jerusalem passport case.\textsuperscript{44}

II. INHERENTLY EXCLUSIVE CONGRESSIONAL AUTHORITY

Similarly, Congress possesses inherent authority that may not be exercised by the President. Among those powers is the authority to present the President with a single piece of legislation, to which the President’s assent or veto is then applied. Giving the President the right to break up that legislation, as it was crafted by the Congress, into some pieces he would approve and others he would not (through exercise of the line-item veto) has been held to take the power of crafting a single legislative instrument away from Congress.\textsuperscript{45}

Confirming or rejecting Presidential appointments is another prerogative of Congress—in this case, the Senate.\textsuperscript{46} If an individual exercises executive authority, and cannot be characterized as merely ministerial,\textsuperscript{47} then the Senate has the prerogative to confirm or reject that individual’s appointment. This was the basis of Senator Riegle’s unsuccessful lawsuit against the Federal Reserve’s Federal Open Market Committee, which includes not only the governors of the Federal Reserve system, who are appointed by the President and subject to Senate approval or rejection, but also representatives of five of the member federal reserve banks, elected by their own boards and not confirmed by the Senate.\textsuperscript{48} If those member bank

\textsuperscript{43} Id. at 585–86.

\textsuperscript{44} Zivotofsky \textit{ex rel.} Zivotofsky v. Kerry, 135 S. Ct. 2076, 2096 (2015).

\textsuperscript{45} Clinton v. City of New York, 524 U.S. 417, 436–49 (1998) (arguing that the line item veto takes the power from Congress to present a single piece of legislation to the President since the President used the line item veto to invalidate portions of the law, and ruling that this power is unconstitutional as it is one which the Constitution did not grant to the President).

\textsuperscript{46} For an example of a claim raised by the House of Representatives under its powers separate from those of the Senate, see Sissel v. U.S. Dep’t of Health & Human Servs., 951 F. Supp. 2d 159, 166–74 (D.D.C. 2013), aff’d, 760 F.3d 1 (D.C. Cir. 2014), \textit{cert. denied}, 136 S. Ct. 925 (2016) (dismissing claims that President Obama’s Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act law operates as a tax that did not originate in the House).

\textsuperscript{47} U.S. \textit{CONST.} art. II, \S 2 (excluding only “inferior Officers,” whose appointment would not require Senate confirmation).

representatives exercise executive authority through the Federal Reserve Open Market Committee, then Senator Riegle argued that they should then have been appointed by the President and made subject to Senate confirmation, under Article II, section 2, of the Constitution.49

Sometimes Congress willingly attempts to give away its power to the executive branch. The nondelegation doctrine, however, stands for the proposition that the Congress may not give away its inherent right to legislate.50 Though applications of the doctrine in majority opinions of the Supreme Court have not occurred in recent years, the non-delegation doctrine remains an important principle that individual justices and lower federal courts have not abandoned.51 It holds that Congress cannot constitutionally give to an executive agency the authority to promulgate regulations having the force of law without constraining the agency’s discretion at least in broad ways.52

49. Riegle, 656 F.2d at 874–77.
51. This point is supported by Jeffrey Bossert Clark:

While Professor Sunstein is fond of pointing out that the nondelegation doctrine has had only one good year—1935—because that was the only year in which the Supreme Court has ever invalidated any statutes under the doctrine, it is simply not true that the doctrine has been entirely dormant ever since the 1937 “switch in time that saved nine.” In the so-called Benzene Case, a plurality of Justices led by that latter-day fellow traveler of the Four Horsemen, Justice Stevens, construed the Occupational Safety and Health Act of 1970 to avoid nondelegation problems. Then-Justice Rehnquist, in a concurrence, would have gone farther and simply declared the statute unconstitutional, rather than attempting to save it. The simple point, however, is that given Benzene, it is just not true that the nondelegation doctrine is dead, or that it is the product of a fringe on the new judicial right. After Benzene, in a careful and scholarly opinion, Judge Williams of the D.C. Circuit, applied the nondelegation doctrine to the so-called Lockout/Tagout case, invalidating and remanding certain rules issued by the Occupational Safety & Health Administration (OSHA).

52. See Am. Trucking Ass’ns, Inc. v. EPA, 175 F.3d 1027, 1038 (D.C. Cir. 1999).
Another recent example of Congress asserting its exclusive prerogatives is the House of Representatives’ suit against the Department of Health and Human Services for giving subsidies to insurance companies offering discounted health care policies under President Obama’s Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (‘‘ACA’’). The district court upheld the House’s view that there has been no appropriation for this expenditure, as required by the U.S. Constitution. This assertion goes to the heart of a congressional prerogative: the power of the purse.

If the President purports to exercise authority that cannot lawfully be taken away from the Congress, the remedy is straightforward: a party suffering individualized harm from the President’s action can bring an action to enjoin it.

III. SHARED POWER BETWEEN CONGRESS AND THE PRESIDENT

Areas of overlapping authority between the President and Congress exist, either by the explicit structure of the Constitution or where Congress has delegated authority to the President. An example of the former is the overlap between Congress’ power to declare war and the President’s power to wage the war as commander in chief. Examples of the latter, delegated authority, include some very broad and some very detailed delegations. A broad delegation was contained in the congressional joint resolution passed after the September 11, 2001, attacks. The U.S. Congress conveyed the full extent of its shared authority to the President, without any expiration date, and without a specific identification of the parties or states


54. See Burwell, 130 F. Supp. 3d 53, 58 (D.D.C. 2015) (granting standing to the House to proceed); see also U.S. CONST. art. I, § 9, cl. 7 (“No money shall be drawn from the Treasury, but in Consequence of Appropriations made by Law.”).

55. See S. DOC. NO. 103-6, at 156.

56. Though unsuccessful on the merits, an example of such congressional claims includes House members’ attempts to stop President Carter from turning over property to Panama in the Panama Canal Zone. Edwards v. Carter, 580 F.2d 1055, 1055–56 (D.C. Cir. 1978). These attempts were allegedly in violation of the U.S. Constitution’s article IV, section 3, cl. 2 requirement that property of the United States be disposed of by Congress, not simply pursuant to a treaty ratified by the Senate, which was only one part of Congress. Id.

57. U.S. CONST. art. I, § 8, cl. 11.

against whom that power could be used. An example of a very narrow delegation is the 1973 War Powers Act, which became law in a very different historical context—the Vietnam conflict. Under that statute, the President has detailed obligations to inform Congress about the insertion of U.S. military into hostilities, and then to withdraw U.S. military after sixty days, barring explicit authorization by Congress. Similarly, in the case of Iran’s pursuit of nuclear weapons, Congress had imposed sanctions, but allowed the Secretary of the Treasury to waive them when in the national interest. This shared power made it possible for President Obama to reach agreement with Iran, but did not effectuate a permanent change in law. Hence, President Trump can order the Secretary of the Treasury to revoke the waiver.

In the domestic sphere, a recent example of broad delegation of authority is the Dodd-Frank Act, enacted after the Wall Street collapse of 2008. There are 398 specific calls in the statute for regulatory agencies, including the newly created Consumer Financial Protection Bureau, to issue rules, interpreting vague concepts such as “unfairness” by financial institutions, and “systemic risk.” Under this authority, the executive branch has stretched to address problems totally unconnected with the 2008 financial crisis, including whether banks show racial patterns in the rates they charge for car loans and the tuition charged by for-profit colleges. A contrasting example,

59. The language of this authorization declared that

the President is authorized to use all necessary and appropriate force against those nations, organizations, or persons he determines planned, authorized, committed, or aided the terrorist attacks that occurred on September 11, 2001, or harbored such organizations or persons, in order to prevent any future acts of international terrorism against the United States by such nations, organizations, or persons . . . . [T]he Congress declares that this section is intended to constitute specific statutory authorization within the meaning of . . . the War Powers Resolution.


63. Id.


66. Steven Davidoff Solomon, Protection Bureau’s Stormy Path to Reform the Auto Finance Industry, N.Y. TIMES, Dec. 2, 2015, at B5. Whether so broad a stretch could break the limits set by the nondelegation doctrine depends on whether Dodd-Frank can be said
where Congress limited the role of the President in an area of shared power, was the *Steel Seizure* case: the executive could deal with impending labor strife only by the specific tools provided in the Taft-Hartley Act to handle strikes with national impact.67

### A. The President Acts, Congress Does Not

Where, in an area of constitutional federal authority, no statute has been passed, the President is free to act.68 In *Chenoweth v. Clinton*,69 Congresswoman Chenoweth and three colleagues asserted that the President could not act in an area where Congress might have acted, but decided not to do so: designating certain rivers as historically significant and in need of preservation.70 She was denied standing for lack of a particularized harm.71 If a private party with sufficient standing had been the plaintiff, the likely outcome would have been against the plaintiff. It might be that the President’s action in a space of Congressional nonaction stimulates a legislative response; but until that happens, the President’s policy prevails in the shared space.

As another example, a President might choose to designate a national monument over an area that had been considered, but rejected, for “National Park” status by Congress.72 It is unwise to infer from Congress’ decision not to proceed in any given area that Congress does not wish the President to act. Indeed, it is difficult to infer anything from congressional nonaction. The decision not to proceed might reflect the existence of more pressing business, or simply that the individual leading the legislative initiative was not popular with colleagues.

to provide an “intelligible principle” for the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau to use in asserting authority over the practices mentioned. See S. Doc. No. 103-6, at 78 (1992).


68. *Cf. Steel Seizure*, 343 U.S. at 637 (Jackson, J., concurring) (“When the President acts in absence of either a congressional grant or denial of authority, he can only rely upon his own independent powers, but there is a zone of twilight in which he and Congress may have concurrent authority, or in which its distribution is uncertain. Therefore, congressional inertia, indifference or quiescence may sometimes, at least, as a practical matter, enable, if not invite, measures on independent presidential responsibility.”).


70. *Id. at 112–13.*

71. *Id. at 117.*

B. Congress Acts and the President Acts

In an area of shared responsibility, it is critical to ascertain whether Congress intended to fully occupy the field.\(^\text{73}\) The degree of detail in a statute is one indicator of Congress’ desire to exclude the executive.\(^\text{74}\) The War Powers Act, for instance, does so in stating

> [t]he constitutional powers of the President as Commander-in-Chief to introduce United States Armed Forces into hostilities, or into situations where imminent involvement in hostilities is clearly indicated by the circumstances, are exercised only pursuant to (1) a declaration of war, (2) specific statutory authorization, or (3) a national emergency created by attack upon the United States, its territories or possessions, or its armed forces.\(^\text{75}\)

In other words, without action by Congress (clauses one and two), the President cannot act unless there has been an attack on the United States.

The constitutionality of the War Powers Act has never been determined,\(^\text{76}\) but its structure and language leave no doubt of Congress’ intent to “occupy the field” of initiating military operations. In other statutes less clear than the War Powers Act, however, congressional intent to occupy the field might need to be clarified by adding the following template:

The structure of this act is intended to be the exclusive means for dealing with [fill in the subject area], excluding the President and executive agencies from taking actions not explicitly authorized to be taken by them in this act to the maximum extent constitutionally permissible.

Had such language been included in President Obama’s ACA, the Supreme Court decision regarding Medicaid subsidies to states

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\(^\text{73}\) Steel Seizure, 343 U.S. at 637–38, 637 n.4 (Jackson, J., concurring).

\(^\text{74}\) In the Steel Seizure case, the Court relied on the fact that Congress had addressed the problem that might necessitate seizure of private assets in two statutes: the Selective Service Act of 1948 and the Defense Production Act of 1950. See id. at 586. It was also important that Congress dealt with labor disputes in another, the Labor Management Relations Act. See id. The Court considered it determinative that none of them granted the President the power he was asserting in the case before the Court. See id. at 586.

\(^\text{75}\) 50 U.S.C. § 1541(c) (2012).

\(^\text{76}\) The statute is, I believe, a workable compromise between the Congress’ right to declare war and the President’s right to wage war, and to defend against attacks as commander in chief. The statute was passed over President Nixon’s veto, see Campbell v. Clinton, 203 F.3d 19, 28–29 (D.C. Cir. 2000) (Silberman, J., concurring), and Presidents since then have asserted its unconstitutionality.
that did not set up their own exchanges would almost certainly have been different. In that case, the Court was left with conflicting signals. The statute appeared to require that a state set up an exchange in order to receive federal financial help for its lower income residents. Indeed, that conclusion was famously suggested as the intended purpose for the conditional language—to induce states to create exchanges since the federal government could not directly compel them to do so. However, the majority found that the overwhelming purpose of the ACA was to foster maximum participation of the population in health insurance coverage, which would be encouraged by subsidies to the states. In light of that goal, the predicate of having an exchange was not required for a state to receive a subsidy. The statutory template this Article proposes above could have removed this ambiguity between the Act’s purpose and its structure.

Of course, Congress may wish to invite expansive executive activity by explicitly calling for executive branch regulations, as in the Dodd-Frank statute discussed above, or by drafting the governing law in the broadest terms. If this is Congress’ intent, then it would not use the template language this Article proposed.

C. Congress Acts, the President Does Not

The President has authority to allocate scarce enforcement resources, as in choosing whom to prosecute in the criminal field, or

77. See generally King v. Burwell, 135 S. Ct. 2480 (2015) (interpreting the Affordable Care Act’s exchange provisions, after determining that they were ambiguous, as requiring tax credits for insurance purchased on any exchange, both state and federal).
80. Id. at 2495–96.
82. Congress might also prefer to let the courts develop a sort of common law to implement its broad policy goals. The antitrust laws are such examples. See Donald Dewey, The Common-Law Background of Antitrust Policy, 41 VA. L. REV. 759, 759 (1955).
83. Heckler v. Chaney, 470 U.S. 821, 832 (1985) (“Finally, we recognize that an agency’s refusal to institute proceedings shares to some extent the characteristics of the decision of a prosecutor in the Executive Branch not to indict—a decision which has long been regarded as the special province of the Executive Branch, inasmuch as it is the
using discretion in the administrative law context, contemplated by the specification of its opposite—“abuse of discretion,” in the Administrative Procedure Act (“the APA”).

What principle can be used to distinguish permissible executive discretion from circumstances that could be the basis of a successful challenge? The key is to determine whether the structure of the law written by Congress was undermined by the executive’s nonaction.

One can imagine instances where selective executive branch nonenforcement destroys the law’s structure. For instance, the National Labor Relations Act was amended in 1947 to extend the National Labor Relations Board’s authority to outlaw unfair labor practices to reach such practices by labor unions. From its passage in

Executive who is charged by the Constitution to ‘take Care that the Laws be faithfully executed.’” (quoting U.S. CONST. art. II, § 3)).


One answer to the question is this

[i]f the core executive function is to apply general laws to particular cases, the central legislative task is to formulate general laws and policies for the executive and judicial branches to implement. The executive branch thus exceeds its proper role, and enters the legislature’s domain, if without proper congressional authorization it uses enforcement discretion to categorically suspend enforcement or to license particular violations.

Price, supra note 1, at 676.

This allows for the conclusion that “policies that amount in practice to a prospective guarantee of nonenforcement to broad categories of offenders should be presumptively improper.” Price, supra note 21, at 1137. For examples of where nonenforcement undermines the basic policy of the statute in the context of President Obama’s ACA, see Price, supra note 1, at 750–54. Professor Price contrasts this kind of nonenforcement from a decision “to turn a blind eye to some violations so as to concentrate on others—that is, to set priorities for enforcement without altering the basic policy of the statute.” Price, supra note 21, at 1137.

A slightly different formulation, by Professor Sant’Ambrogio, calls the President’s nonaction into question if Congress has spoken clearly in favor of enforcement, and the President has chosen to “completely abandon the enforcement of the statute.” Michael Sant’Ambrogio, The Extra-Legislative Veto, 102 GEO. L.J. 351, 397 (2014). Professor Sant’Ambrogio writes:

[T]he Executive cannot use its enforcement discretion to wholly abdicate its responsibilities under the statute. As the Court explained in Chaney, the presumption against reviewability does not apply when the agency has “‘consciously and expressly adopted a general policy’ that is so extreme as to amount to an abdication of its statutory responsibilities.”

Id. at 395 (quoting Adams v. Richardson, 480 F.2d 1159, 1162 (D.C. Cir. 1973) (en banc)).

I believe Sant’Ambrogio’s formulation, while true to the language of Chaney, is a bit too forgiving. The structure of a statute could be undermined by selective enforcement, as well as by completely abandoning enforcement.

1935 until the Taft-Hartley Act in 1947, the Act had only identified unfair labor practices by employers. If a National Labor Relations Board followed a policy of only pursuing unfair labor practices by employers today, it would eviscerate the balance sought by Congress in 1947. This would not be an instance of marshalling scarce enforcement resources towards the highest priorities; it would be an undoing of the balance within the congressional scheme.

Another hypothetical of impermissible nonenforcement is for a President, with a strong pro-investor point of view, to order the Internal Revenue Service (“the IRS”) not to pursue taxpayers for omitting to pay tax on capital gains. It would be entirely permissible for the IRS to pursue large tax evaders over smaller ones, but to exclude a class of income covered by the Internal Revenue Code from effective taxation entirely would destroy the structure of that statute.

An illustration of where nonenforcement does not undermine the structure of a statute is the Obama administration’s decision not to devote scarce law enforcement resources to prosecute marijuana possession in states where such possession is legal under state law. While Congress has outlawed marijuana possession, it does not violate the congressional scheme for the President to choose to enforce the law in states where the assistance of local law enforcement is more forthcoming. The President might be involved in selective prosecution, but not in a way contrary to the congressional scheme.

A more complex case involves the decision by a President simply not to enforce some laws at all rather than mere selective prosecution. Does this undermine the congressional scheme in enacting the law? Consider an example: neither the U.S. Department of Justice, which is under the President’s direction, nor the Federal Trade Commission, an independent agency, has since 2000 brought an action against a


89. See generally Memorandum from James M. Cole, supra note 7 (explaining this decision).

90. See Price, supra note 1, at 757. The contrary argument would be that Congress considered transportation of marijuana between states to be of particular concern, so that nonenforcement anywhere undermined the overall fabric of enforcement. This view was also voiced by the Department of Justice, focusing on “preventing the diversion of marijuana from states where it is legal under state law in some form to other states.” Memorandum from James M. Cole, supra note 7.
wholesaler for discriminating in price among retailers. Each agency considers enforcing the Robinson-Patman Act, which outlaws such discriminatory pricing behavior, a very low priority, especially since private enforcement is available for parties who can show they were harmed in a way that damaged competition. Hence, the executive branch’s failure to enforce the Robinson-Patman Act does not eviscerate congressional intent in outlawing price discrimination: at least some victims can sue in their own right.

These examples aid us in analyzing the actual case of the Obama administration’s actions deferring deportation of whole categories of individuals. Congress enacted a comprehensive immigration policy, identifying categories of persons entitled to apply for permanent residency. In sequential executive pronouncements, the Obama administration stated it would not deport children illegally brought into this country by their parents, and it would not deport parents of children born in this country, though the parents had entered illegally.

Congress had enacted a complex scheme to identify which aliens could apply for legal residency. The President treated those categories as nonexhaustive: the categories of aliens that Congress sought to protect would be allowed to stay, but the President proposed to protect others, too. The states suing President Obama, by contrast, argued that Congress intended to occupy the field of which aliens could stay in America, so that the President’s failing to

91. AM. BAR ASS’N, ANTITRUST LAW DEVELOPMENTS 497–98 (7th ed. 2012) (“While the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) and the Department of Justice both have jurisdiction to enforce the act, in practice the FTC is the only agency that exercises it. The FTC has brought few cases since the 1980s and last brought a case in 2000.”). See William F. Baxter, Separation of Powers, Prosecutorial Discretion, and the “Common Law” Nature of Antitrust Law, 60 TEX. L. REV. 661, 662 n.6 (1982) (describing the Robinson-Patman Act as not a “true” antitrust law). Baxter was the Assistant Attorney General for Antitrust in the Reagan administration while I was Director of the Bureau of Competition, the antitrust enforcement arm of the Federal Trade Commission.


93. Baxter, supra note 91, at 682, 690–91. Not every price discrimination has an effect on the market, in which case a private party denied the benefit of a lower price would not be able to sue. See generally J. Truett Payne Co. v. Chrysler Motors Corp., 451 U.S. 557 (1981) (holding a violation of the Robinson-Patman Act to be insufficient to state a claim without a showing of actual antitrust injury and damages).


95. See Mayorkas, supra note 5; Executive Actions on Immigration, supra note 5.

96. See Mayorkas, supra note 5; Executive Actions on Immigration, supra note 5.

97. There is ambiguity in the statutory scheme. The deportation provisions of the statute require a specific order for each individual to be deported, signed by the Attorney General. 8 U.S.C. § 1227(a) (2012) (“Any alien . . . in and admitted to the United States shall, upon the order of the Attorney General, be removed if the alien is within one or
deport those not included in Congress’ categories was a violation of his duty to “take Care that the Laws be faithfully executed.” The Solicitor General claimed that President Obama’s deferred action orders were no different in kind from President George W. Bush’s decision to allow foreign students whose studies were interrupted by Hurricane Katrina to stay an extra semester, or the decision by President Obama to grant temporary protected status to citizens of countries where Ebola made it unsafe for them to return.

The distinction between these examples illustrates the fundamental point at issue. In deciding specific nonenforcement out of compassion for victims of a natural disaster, or for those for whom return would pose especially high health risks, President Bush and President Obama were not making decisions that undermined the immigration structure established by Congress. However, President Obama’s decision to treat certain categories specified by Congress as nonexclusive to allow lawful residence may well have frustrated the immigration structure. An established maxim of statutory interpretation is that to express one case is to exclude others. It

more of the following classes of deportable aliens . . . ”). This statutory language strongly suggests that an individualized determination had to be made within the executive branch, even for those who did not fall within the categories specifying whom Congress wanted to stay. As pointed out above in the context of the state exchanges under President Obama’s health insurance law, it would have been quite helpful for Congress to have inserted into the immigration statute that the categories it created for individuals to stay in America lawfully were intended to be exclusive.

98. U.S. CONST. art. II, § 3, cl. 4; Texas v. United States, 787 F.3d 733, 746 (5th Cir. 2015), aff’d on other grounds, 809 F.3d 134 (5th Cir. 2015), aff’d by an equally divided court, 136 S. Ct. 2271 (2016) (mem.).


100. Press Release, U.S. Citizenship & Immigration Servs., USCIS Announces Interim Relief for Foreign Students Adversely Impacted by Hurricane Katrina (Nov. 25, 2005), http://www.uscis.gov/sites/default/files/files/pressrelease/F1Student_11_25_05_PR.pdf [https://perma.cc/Q4F5-R7K7].

101. Temporary Protected Status, U.S. CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGR. SERVS (Oct. 26, 2016), https://www.uscis.gov/humanitarian/temporary-protected-status [https://perma.cc/S12K-AJXE] (stating that “[t]he Secretary of Homeland Security may designate a foreign country for TPS due to conditions in the country that temporarily prevent the country’s nationals from returning safely, or in certain circumstances, where the country is unable to handle the return of its nationals adequately”). A recent example is Guinea, added because of the Ebola epidemic. Designation of Guinea for Temporary Protected Status, 79 Fed. Reg. 69,511, 69,511 (Nov. 21, 2014).

would be difficult to infer that, having specified with great care all the 
criteria for lawful admission, Congress’ will was not subverted by a 
President’s determination that he could allow others to stay in the 
United States who entered it unlawfully, and did not meet the 
specified criteria.103 Indeed, President Obama appeared to believe so 
himself, at least throughout his first term.104

For a court to require the executive to justify its failure to act is 
not unprecedented. Indeed, courts do so whenever an executive 
agency’s action is challenged as discriminatory under the 
Administrative Procedure Act.105 Discrimination in enforcement 
would be subject to correction by the reviewing court if it were found 
to be “arbitrary, capricious, an abuse of discretion, or otherwise not in 
accordance with law.”106

Discrimination has two components: enforcing the law against 
one group and not enforcing it against another. The executive can 
defend against such a claim by identifying a reason for both. Taken 
alone, an administrative agency’s decision not to take an enforcement 
action has, since Heckler v. Chaney,107 been held to be

103. See Delahunty & Yoo, supra note 1, at 853–54.
Remarks by the President at Univision Town Hall, White House (Mar. 28, 2011), https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2011/03/28/remarks-president-univision-town-hall [https://perma.cc/ZD9U-KFS3] (declaring that “[w]ith respect to the notion that I can just suspend deportations through executive order, that’s just not the case, because there are laws on the books that Congress has passed. . . . There are enough laws on the books by Congress that are very clear in terms of how we have to enforce our immigration system that for me to simply through executive order ignore those congressional mandates would not conform with my appropriate role as President”). When President Obama announced his decision to act unilaterally, despite the immediately foregoing statement, he explained that he was doing so in the face of an intransigent Congress, and that he would have preferred to solve the problem legislatively. See Remarks by the President in Address to the Nation on Immigration, White House (Nov. 20, 2014), https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/issues/immigration/immigration-action [https://perma.cc/KB9X-TLK5].
106. Id. § 706 (2012). Indeed the statute explicitly grants review when an agency 
withholds an action. Id. (“The reviewing court shall—(1) compel agency action unlawfully 
withheld or unreasonably delayed; and (2) hold unlawful and set aside agency action, 
findings, and conclusions found to be—(A) arbitrary, capricious, an abuse of discretion, or 
otherwise not in accordance with law; (B) contrary to constitutional right, power, 
privilege, or immunity; [or] (C) in excess of statutory jurisdiction, authority, or limitations, 
or short of statutory right . . . .”). The Administrative Procedure Act provides the standard 
for interested parties to challenge action by federal departments and agencies; it is the 
most common vehicle for attempting to overturn agency rule-making and adjudication in 
individual cases. See II ADMINISTRATIVE LAW TREATISE § 11.4, at 1018–22 (Richard J. 
nonreviewable. A claim of discrimination, however, remains
cognizable and adjudicating any such claim necessarily involves a
court’s consideration of the agency’s decision not to act in one case
while acting in another.

Suppose it was statistically proven that the Food and Drug
Administration (“the FDA”) cracked down on the sale of drugs not
authorized by the FDA predominantly where the pharmacist was of a
minority race. The FDA could defend on the basis that some other
factor was at work—for example, that fewer complaints were received
of illegal drug use in majority race neighborhoods, which tended to
have majority race pharmacists. In making that explanation, the FDA
would be defending its decision not to enforce the law, in the case of
white pharmacists, on the basis of complaints, not race.

Consider next the case where the FDA enforced the registration
requirement for the sale of pharmaceuticals only in states that
promised to provide the FDA substantial inspection and enforcement
assistance. The pharmacist against whom the FDA seeks enforcement
action could argue the FDA’s decision was arbitrary and capricious,
and “not in accordance with law,” since obtaining assistance from
state agencies was nowhere in the scheme of the FDA action. The
basis for the difference in treatment was thus ultra vires. The FDA
would defend, successfully, by claiming it was exercising a degree of
judgment that was contemplated in administrative law and not
undermining of the scheme of the FDA statute.

Finally, consider the case where the FDA fails to enforce the
drug registration requirement anywhere. Assuming there is a party
with standing, the premise for the challenge and the defense by the
FDA would be the same as in the first two instances. There either was
or was not a basis for the FDA’s choosing not to proceed. If not,
FDA’s inaction would be arbitrary and capricious. If there was a
basis, the question would turn to whether that basis was contemplated
by the statute, or undermined the statute. In the latter case, the
FDA’s action would be deemed not in accordance with law.

108. Id. at 831 (holding it was not an abuse of discretion for the U.S. Food and Drug
Administration to refuse to interfere with the use of lethal drugs in carrying out the death
penalty).

109. See III ADMINISTRATIVE LAW TREATISE, § 17.5, at 1587–88 (Richard J. Pierce,


111. See III ADMINISTRATIVE LAW TREATISE, supra note 109, § 17.1, at 1559–60.

agency action, findings, and conclusions found to be . . . not in accordance with law.”).
Administrative law, therefore, already contains all the elements required to evaluate a challenge to executive nonaction. The difference between administrative law cases evaluating agency enforcement practices under an “arbitrary and capricious” standard and the broader cases of executive nonenforcement is not that it is difficult or novel to compel the executive to explain its nonaction. Rather, it comes down to whether a court can expect to order meaningful relief, and whether a plaintiff with standing exists.

IV. REMEDIES

Thus, a court does have the means to identify unlawful executive action and nonaction. But, can a court order a meaningful remedy?

Where the President acts in an area reserved to the exclusive authority of Congress, the remedy is for a court to invalidate the President’s action, leaving Congress a free rein.

Where the President has failed to act, however, the question of remedy is more complicated. Sometimes the deficiency is specifically identified, as in the Environmental Protection Agency (“the EPA”) grant to New York City that President Nixon impounded, and then the party that would benefit from the President enforcing the law can obtain an order that the executive do so. Where the President’s reluctance to enforce a law does not have such an identifiably harmed private party, however, the question arises whether Congress can itself take steps to force the President to start enforcing the law. In the Sections that follow will discuss what remedies might be available

113. Another example of the courts already making the kind of decisions required to analyze executive nonaction is the doctrine of severability. Under this doctrine of constitutional law, courts have had to decide whether a part of a law, held to be unconstitutional, was essential to the congressional intent in passing the law. See Alaska Airlines, Inc. v. Brock, 480 U.S. 678, 684 (1987). See generally Tom Campbell, Severability of Statutes, 62 HASTINGS L.J. 1495 (2011) (arguing that the severability process should be entirely abolished because severability creates law that the legislature never intended). The same kind of analysis is required to conclude whether a President’s failure to enforce part of a law undermines congressional intent.

114. Love and Garg argue against the likelihood or efficacy of judicial review of agency inaction, for reasons of justiciability, among others. See Love & Garg, supra note 1, at 1227–29.

115. Likewise, in the instance of Congress acting in an area of inherent exclusive executive authority, the remedy is straightforward: a court can rule the congressional action (a statute) unconstitutional, and the executive proceeds unimpeded. See, e.g., Zivotofsky ex rel. Zivotofsky v. Kerry, 135 S. Ct. 2076, 2096 (2015).

116. Train v. City of New York, 420 U.S. 35, 40. The Court held that the EPA had no discretion to refuse to allocate the full amount appropriated by Congress for specific water pollution control projects, even though the President had ordered funds impounded due to the budget deficit. Id. at 44–48.
to Congress, whether they would be practical, and whether current jurisprudence would grant Congress standing to pursue such relief.

A. Nonjudicial Remedies

Congress has many tools available to put pressure on the President.\(^ \text{117} \) For example, disagreeing with the President’s failure to spend money as they wish, members of subcommittees of the Appropriations Committees in both the House and the Senate can threaten to withhold appropriations in particular areas in subsequent years, which may cause the executive branch to accommodate. In my personal experience, report language in appropriations bills, even though not part of the legislative enactment,\(^ \text{118} \) constitute memorials of such understandings. Other weapons in a war between the branches over the President’s failure to take action include a Senate hold on the confirmation of a Presidential appointee, often, but not necessarily, in the same field as the challenged presidential nonaction.\(^ \text{119} \)

These political weapons should not be the only means at Congress’ disposal to vindicate its legitimate right to see its laws enforced, nor should they be the preferred means in every case. The political weapons could be too strong. The ultimate threat Congress has is to shut down funding for the federal government, but that escalates what might have been a limited area of disagreement with the President into a massive consequence affecting the entire nation. Further, not every dispute between the President and Congress is political in nature; a good faith dispute over constitutional authority ought not be resolved by the balance of brute political force that might exist between a President and a Congress at any particular time. Therefore, redress of a dispute between the political branches through the nonpolitical third branch could be very beneficial.\(^ \text{120} \)

\(^{117}\) Christenson and Kriner make this the focus of their article, explaining that the failure of Presidents to take more unilateral action is due to the threat of informal retaliation from Congress, and the public. See Christenson & Kriner, supra note 2, at 908.


\(^{119}\) President Clinton refused to bring reverse discrimination cases in areas of race-conscious action by government that his administration considered benign. In response, the Senate, controlled by the Republicans during the last six years of his presidency, refused to confirm his designee as Assistant Attorney General for Civil Rights. See Christopher Marquis, Clinton Sidesteps Senate to Fill Civil Rights Enforcement Job, N.Y. TIMES, Aug. 4, 2000, at A14; Clinton Makes Lee Acting Civil Rights Chief, CNN (Dec. 15, 1997), http://www.cnn.com/ALLPOLITICS/1997/12/15/lee/ [https://perma.cc/KDT6-YKYA].

\(^{120}\) See TOM CAMPBELL, SEPARATION OF POWERS IN PRACTICE 193–97 (2004).
B. Injunctive Remedies

The Supreme Court has held that a decision by the executive branch not to enforce a law is presumptively unreviewable by a court.\textsuperscript{121} Practical considerations underlie that conclusion. A plaintiff has to show that the remedy a court is able to order is likely to ameliorate the plaintiff's concrete injury.\textsuperscript{122} It is difficult, however, to craft an injunction that a court would use to grant relief in a case of nonaction. For instance, President Obama chose not to deport classes of individuals not legally present in the United States.\textsuperscript{123} If a court had ordered him to do so, how many deportations would have sufficed? He also ordered the Department of Justice not to indict individuals for marijuana possession in states that have legalized private possession.\textsuperscript{124} If ordered to abandon that policy, would President Obama have shown sufficient compliance by bringing ten such cases a year?\textsuperscript{125}

\textsuperscript{121} Heckler v. Chaney, 470 U.S. 821, 831 (1985) (holding that “[r]efusals to take enforcement steps generally involve precisely the opposite situation, and in that situation we think the presumption is that judicial review is not available”). This is the case despite the APA's empowerment of federal courts to “compel agency action unlawfully withheld or unreasonably delayed.” 5 U.S.C. § 706(1) (2012). Hence, this Article concludes that the Heckler court treated the APA as though it had an additional phrase at the end of Section 706(1), as if it read “where the court can accomplish such a result.”

\textsuperscript{122} The Supreme Court has held

on several occasions over many years that an agency's decision not to prosecute or enforce, whether through civil or criminal process, is a decision generally committed to an agency's absolute discretion. This recognition of the existence of discretion is attributable in no small part to the general unsuitability for judicial review of agency decisions to refuse enforcement.

Heckler, 470 U.S. at 831 (citations omitted). “[I]t must be ‘likely,’ as opposed to merely ‘speculative,’ that the injury will be ‘redressed by a favorable decision.’” Lujan v. Defs. of Wildlife, 504 U.S. 555, 561 (1992) (quoting Simon v. E. Ky. Welfare Rights Org., 426 U.S. 26, 38, 43 (1976)). See also Massachusetts v. EPA, 549 U.S. 497, 517 (2007) (citing Lujan, 504 U.S. at 560-61) (holding that “[t]o ensure the proper adversarial presentation, Lujan holds that a litigant must demonstrate that... it is likely that a favorable decision will redress that injury.”).

\textsuperscript{123} See Mayorkas, supra note 5; Executive Actions on Immigration, supra note 5.

\textsuperscript{124} See Memorandum from James M. Cole, supra note 7.

\textsuperscript{125} Professor Stern has noted that

[i]t is difficult to envision a ruling that would ensure that the Executive enforced a law in a manner satisfactory to congressional plaintiffs. Precise metrics do not exist for assessing the adequacy of such efforts, and the Court might well rear back from issuing a potentially messy, if not futile, decree. The judiciary’s lack of competence to supervise military training was a significant factor in the Court’s holding that a suit seeking such relief presented a political question. Similar considerations of manageability could inform its ruling on legislator standing to force the Executive to do its job.
When the Supreme Court has overruled a President’s nonaction, it has been in the context of a very specific circumstance, such as an EPA project for which Congress appropriated money for New York City that President Nixon nevertheless failed to fund.126 No general order to fund environmental projects was requested; New York City had a specific project on the list of EPA-approved beneficiaries, and all the Court had to do was unfreeze the money.127 Similarly, in Dunlop v. Bachowski,128 the Court felt it appropriate to order the Secretary of Labor to undertake an investigation of a kind specifically authorized in the governing statute when details of an individual case were presented to the Secretary.129 When the EPA refused to

Stern, supra note 1, at 44–45 (footnote omitted).


127. While the Court in Massachusetts v. EPA, 549 U.S. 497 (2007), did order the EPA to make a finding regarding greenhouse gas emissions from automobiles, it did not have before it the adequacy of what the EPA did upon making such a finding. Id. at 534–35. A change in Presidential administrations mooted the difficulty the Court would have had in determining how much EPA activity would constitute compliance with the Court’s holding that nonaction was unacceptable. Cf. Love & Garg, supra note 1, at 1227 (crediting the widespread publicity of greenhouse gas regulation as the reason why the Court decided to step in, and recognizing that many other “low-salience instances of executive inaction” never receive their day in court).


129. Id. at 573. In Heckler v. Chaney, the Court explained this as a departure from the usual rule of deferring to the executive branch’s discretion:

Dunlop v. Bachowski, relied upon heavily by respondents and the majority in the Court of Appeals, presents an example of statutory language which supplied sufficient standards to rebut the presumption of unreviewability. Dunlop involved a suit by a union employee, under the Labor-Management Reporting and Disclosure Act (LMRDA), asking the Secretary of Labor to investigate and file suit to set aside a union election. Section 482 provided that, upon filing of a complaint by a union member, “[t]he Secretary shall investigate such complaint and, if he finds probable cause to believe that a violation . . . has occurred . . . he shall . . . bring a civil action . . . .” After investigating the plaintiff’s claims the Secretary of Labor declined to file suit, and the plaintiff sought judicial review under the APA. This Court held that review was available. It rejected the Secretary’s argument that the statute precluded judicial review, and in a footnote it stated its agreement with the conclusion of the Court of Appeals that the decision was not “an unreviewable exercise of prosecutorial discretion.” Our textual references to the “strong presumption” of reviewability in Dunlop were addressed only to the § (a)(1) exception; we were content to rely on the Court of Appeals’ opinion to hold that the § (a)(2) exception did not apply. The Court of Appeals, in turn, had found the “principle of absolute prosecutorial discretion” inapplicable, because the language of the LMRDA indicated that the Secretary was required to file suit if certain “clearly defined” factors were present. The decision therefore was not “beyond the judicial capacity to supervise.”

promulgate rules on greenhouse gas emissions, the Court was also willing to order executive action: namely, that the EPA commence administrative rulemaking on that subject. The Court intimated, however, that it would likely not order any specific enforcement action if the EPA did not wish to bring a case against any given greenhouse gas emitter.\textsuperscript{130}

The Court has also allowed review of executive nonenforcement of law where the heart of the challenge to executive nonaction is discriminatory treatment.\textsuperscript{131} One way by which this occurs is where the executive enforces a law against some but not others if the first entity can claim the difference in treatment is due to a basis that would violate the Fifth or Fourteenth Amendments.\textsuperscript{132} In such a case, a court can craft a remedy by simply ordering the action against the first entity to cease.\textsuperscript{133}

For example, if the President ordered that no income tax evasion cases be brought against white taxpayers, a black taxpayer would have standing to challenge a tax evasion action against her. This would be an indirect remedy, since the court would not actually order

\footnotesize{(D.C. Cir. 1973) (en banc)) (discussing the Chaney Court’s treatment of Bachowski and the lower court opinion ordering executive action in Adams).}

\textsuperscript{130} The Supreme Court also stated that

\[\text{[s]ome debate remains, however, as to the rigor with which we review an agency’s denial of a petition for rulemaking. There are key differences between a denial of a petition for rulemaking and an agency’s decision not to initiate an enforcement action. In contrast to nonenforcement decisions, agency refusals to initiate rulemaking “are less frequent, more apt to involve legal as opposed to factual analysis, and subject to special formalities, including a public explanation.” They moreover arise out of denials of petitions for rulemaking which (at least in the circumstances here) the affected party had an undoubted procedural right to file in the first instance. Refusals to promulgate rules are thus susceptible to judicial review, though such review is “extremely limited” and “highly deferential.”} \]

\footnotesize{Massachusetts v. EPA, 549 U.S. at 527–28 (citations omitted) (overruling EPA’s decision not to regulate greenhouse gas emissions). See Sant’Ambrogio, supra note 86, at 397.}

\textsuperscript{131} See Yick Wo v. Hopkins, 118 U.S. 356, 369 (1886); cf. Heckler, 470 U.S. at 838 (“No colorable claim is made in this case that the agency’s refusal to institute proceedings violated any constitutional rights of respondents, and we do not address the issue that would be raised in such a case.”).\textsuperscript{132}

\footnotesize{Discriminatory enforcement by the federal executive would violate the Fifth Amendment’s requirement that no person be “deprived of life, liberty, or property without due process of law.” U.S. CONST. amend V. State executive action of that kind would violate the Fourteenth Amendment’s prohibition against denying any person the “equal protection of the laws.” U.S. CONST. amend. XIV. Such discrimination could be litigated under the judicial review provision of the Administrative Procedure Act. See 5 U.S.C. § 702 (2012); 28 U.S.C. § 1983 (2012).}

\textsuperscript{133} This is what occurred as a result of the Supreme Court’s remand in Yick Wo. See Yick Wo, 118 U.S. at 374.
the President to enforce the law against white taxpayers. The action
the court can take only indirectly puts pressure on the executive
branch. The heart of the complaint is that the President has used a
statute in an unconstitutional way, and the remedy is to end the
discrimination by stopping prosecutions, not by ordering them.134

Beyond the exceptions noted, however, it is generally difficult to
see how a court could effectively draft an order to compel
enforcement of a law in the face of the executive’s wholesale policy
decision not to do so.135

C. Declaratory Judgment Relief

To overcome the practical obstacle of crafting a decree where the
President has taken no action, congressional plaintiffs might ask a
federal court simply to issue a declaratory judgment,136 that the
President or an executive agency under the President’s direction, had
violated the Administrative Procedure Act by failing to act.137

134. Such an approach has storied antecedent in the law of remedies. When a singer
violated her contract to perform, the impresario could not obtain an injunction compelling
her to sing, but could prevent her from singing in another music hall. Lumley v. Wagner

135. Where the relief requested is very specific, a court can fashion an order that will
was the situation in Train v. City of New York, where the federal grant to New York City
was ready to be issued, but was held up by the President’s order. Id. Unlocking that order
was all that was needed for New York City to obtain relief. See id. at 40. In any case
involving more complex action, however, a court would be involved in an impossible task
of monitoring the executive’s compliance. Lumley v. Wagner is once again instructive: the
court could not order an opera singer to sing as required by her contract with the music
hall, since she might intentionally perform poorly. Lumley, 42 Eng. Rep. at 687, 1 DeG., M
& G. at 604. That is why the English court ordered the equitable relief not of ordering her
to sing, but of preventing her from singing elsewhere. Id.

136. See Federal Declaratory Judgment Act, 28 U.S.C. § 2201(a) (2012) (“In a case of
actual controversy within its jurisdiction . . . any court of the United States, upon the filing
of an appropriate pleading, may declare the rights and other legal relations of any
interested party seeking such declaration, whether or not further relief is or could be
sought. Any such declaration shall have the force and effect of a final judgment or decree
and shall be reviewable as such.”)

137. A purely advisory opinion is not permitted to federal courts because of the federal
judiciary’s restriction to “cases and controversies,” U.S. CONST. art III, § 2. What keeps a
declaratory judgment from being considered such an advisory opinion is the presence of
specific parties, with a specific dispute against each other. In MedImmune, Inc. v.
Genentech, Inc., the Court explained the difference by stating that

[t]here was a time when this Court harbored doubts about the compatibility of
declaratory-judgment actions with Article III’s case-or-controversy
requirement. . . . We dispelled those doubts, however, in Nashville, C. & St. L. R.
Co. v. Wallace, holding (in a case involving a declaratory judgment rendered in
state court) that an appropriate action for declaratory relief can be a case or
Alternatively, a complaint might be permitted that the President had failed to “take Care that the Laws be faithfully executed.” Would such a declaration constitute sufficient redress of the plaintiffs’ injury as to satisfy Article III’s requirement of a case or controversy?

The answer should be yes, where the executive branch has made clear its intention not to enforce the law. By way of illustration, suppose a President fails to take some action on the grounds that taking such action would be unconstitutional. A declaratory judgment could be sought by the Congress that the President enforcing the law would, in fact, not be unconstitutional—so long as the context was in a specific circumstance of a Presidential failure to act, the “case or controversy” requirement of Article III, section 2,
would be met. Once that issue was resolved at the level of the U.S. Supreme Court, if the President persisted in failing to perform the requested action, such an attitude would more clearly approach dereliction of duty than if there had not been such a court ruling. The Court’s role would be to say whether or not the law was constitutional, a function squarely within the judicial role to “say what the law is.” Whether or not the President’s failure to enforce a law would be grounds for an impeachment is the House of Representatives’ prerogative.

141. To take an actual illustration, consider the facts in INS v. Chadha, 462 U.S. 919 (1983). Chadha, an alien who had illegally overstayed his visa, had nevertheless been allowed to stay in the United States by the Immigration and Naturalization Service. Id. at 923–24. However, pursuant to a law that gave each house of Congress the right to overturn a stay of deportation by the executive branch, the House of Representatives had ordered Mr. Chadha’s deportation. Id. at 925–26. The Board of Immigration Appeals ruled it lacked jurisdiction to strike down the law that the House had utilized, so it ordered the deportation. Id. at 928. Mr. Chadha appealed the Board of Immigration Appeals’ decision to the circuit court, which held unconstitutional the law under which the House had acted. Id. At that point, both sides (Mr. Chadha, and the Immigration and Naturalization Service, the parent agency of the Board of Immigration Appeals) were on the same side. The circuit court had afforded them both the relief they each sought: a stay of Mr. Chadha’s deportation. Id. The INS wanted to appeal to the U.S. Supreme Court to obtain a definitive ruling that the law was unconstitutional. Id. at 928–29. Mr. Chadha was safe; what INS wanted was in essence a declaratory judgment that the statute was, indeed, unconstitutional. All other relief had been granted: Mr. Chadha’s deportation had been suspended. Id. at 928. The Supreme Court entertained the appeal, claiming sufficient adversity existed to constitute a “case or controversy” by reason of the intervention at the appellate level by the House of Representatives—long after the rulings by the Immigration Judge, and the Bureau of Immigration Appeals, of which Mr. Chadha had complained. 462 U.S. at 939 & n.5. The logic of INS v. Chadha, therefore, supports the conclusion that a declaratory judgment action to rule some governmental action unconstitutional is sufficient to constitute a case or controversy, for Article III, section 2 purposes, so long as a specific set of facts and parties is before the court. U.S. CONST. art. III, § 2.

142. In Campbell v. Clinton, 203 F.3d 19 (D.C. Cir. 2000), the D.C. Circuit denied standing to members of Congress seeking declaratory judgment that President Clinton had violated the War Powers Act and the U.S. Constitution by his military actions in Kosovo. Id. at 24. In listing alternative remedies available to the House members, Judge Silberman said, “[T]here always remains the possibility of impeachment should a President act in disregard of Congress’ authority on these matters.” Id. at 23.


144. U.S. CONST. art. I, § 2, cl. 5. It is entirely permissible, even admirable, for a President to insist on his own view that a law is unconstitutional, even if the courts have held that it is constitutional. It remains with the House of Representatives to decide whether the President’s insistence is pretextual, or worthy of respect even if different from the view of the courts. This framework has been described by noting that

[t]he Constitution establishes a belt, suspenders, and rope approach to its defense, with Congress, the courts, the states, the people, and the President all having roles to play. Congress should consider the constitutionality of the bills it debates; the courts must do the same when presented with a claim of unconstitutionality; and
constitutionality, therefore, does not intrude into the authority of a co-equal branch, which would violate the political question doctrine.145

The President might change his approach of nonenforcement in the face of such a declaratory judgment. If failing to see enforcement of a law it passed constitutes cognizable “concrete and particularized injury” to the Congress—a point on which there is dispute146—then the likelihood that a declaratory judgment would lead the President to start enforcing the law would satisfy the justiciability requirements set out by the U.S. Supreme Court.147

D. Qui Tam Actions

Another possible judicial means of redress for the executive’s failure to enforce a law is in a qui tam action by a private party under the False Claims Act.148 If an expenditure of money has occurred that is contrary to law, but the President has not enforced the law that would have prohibited that payment of money, a private party can

the people must decide whether their agents have been faithful to the Constitution. The fact that the President has multiple means of defending the Constitution and thereby satisfying his oath is hardly surprising.

Devis & Prakash, supra note 1, at 537.

145. The Supreme Court has explained this, stating that

[r]esolution of litigation challenging the constitutional authority of one of the three branches cannot be evaded by courts because the issues have political implications in the sense urged by Congress. Marbury v. Madison was also a “political” case, involving as it did claims under a judicial commission alleged to have been duly signed by the President but not delivered. But “courts cannot reject as ‘no law suit’ a bona fide controversy as to whether some action denominated ‘political’ exceeds constitutional authority.”

Chadha, 462 U.S. at 943 (citations omitted).

146. See infra Section V.B.1–.2. Three Supreme Court cases have come to different conclusions on legislators’ standing. Coleman v. Miller, 307 U.S. 433, 438 (1939), granted standing to state legislators whose votes were sufficient to stop a result, when the result was allowed to happen anyway. Raines v. Byrd, 521 U.S. 811 (1997), denied standing to a U.S. Senator who complained about the change in the legislative system wrought by a law giving the President the line-item veto. Id. at 815–18. Arizona State Legislature v. Arizona Independent Redistricting Commission, 135 S. Ct. 2652 (2015), granted standing to state legislators complaining that a citizens’ initiative had taken away their redistricting power. Id. at 2658–59. Raines, the case that denied standing, actually contained the most accommodating language to the claim that legislators who passed a law would have standing to sue when the law was not enforced; but that phrasing was not necessary to the holding of the case. See Raines, 521 U.S. at 815–17. But see Goldwater v. Carter, 617 F, 2d 697, 701–02 (D.C. Cir. 1979) (en banc), vacated, 444 U.S. 996 (1979) (mem.).


present a demand to the executive to do so.\textsuperscript{149} When rebuffed, the private party can then proceed to court on his or her own to prove the illegal payment, keeping a portion of the eventual judgment as reward for having vindicated the public interest.\textsuperscript{150} Not every instance of executive nonaction, of course, will involve a payment of money from the federal treasury. Where those circumstances are met, however, the law can be enforced by a “private attorney general” in a qui tam action.\textsuperscript{151}

In a qui tam situation, an actual case or controversy exists because a fraud has occurred. The False Claims Act is violated because of the payment of money to someone not entitled to it.\textsuperscript{152} The redress is the payment of three times the money owed to the government, and a fine,\textsuperscript{153} as well as the kind of recovery available in civil litigation.\textsuperscript{154} The executive’s failure to act is not technically cured; a qui tam court does not order the executive branch to enforce the law against other miscreants in the future. However, as in the case of the negative injunction discussed above, qui tam cases indirectly vindicate congressional desire to enforce the False Claims Act expansively when the President does not choose to enforce it.\textsuperscript{155}

One illustration of a potentially successful action under the False Claims Act would be that of a qui tam action brought by a citizen complaining of a bill to be paid to a private contractor for the Department of Defense, transporting soldiers to fight in a war that was illegal either as a violation of the War Powers Resolution, or as because Congress did not declare war, as the U.S. Constitution requires.\textsuperscript{156}

Drawing together the previous two Sections, I conclude that courts are capable of deciding when executive action or inaction is

\begin{quote}
\textsuperscript{149} \textit{Id.} § 3730(b)(2).
\textsuperscript{150} \textit{Id.} § 3730(d)(1)–(2).
\textsuperscript{151} \textit{Cf.} \textit{Cook Cnty. v. United States ex rel Chandler}, 538 U.S. 119, 122 (2003). Despite the False Claims Act, the executive branch might stymie enforcement of some qui tam claims by failing to confiscate property in question, an issue on which there has not been recent jurisprudence. See Price, \textit{supra} note 1, at 714–15, 721–22 (discussing the Confiscation Cases, 74 U.S. (7 Wall.) 454 (1868)).
\textsuperscript{152} 31 U.S.C. § 3729 (2012).
\textsuperscript{153} \textit{Id.}
\textsuperscript{154} \textit{Id.} § 3730.
\textsuperscript{155} \textit{Cook Cnty}, 538 U.S. at 129 (“Congress wrote expansively, meaning ‘to reach all types of fraud, without qualification, that might result in financial loss to the Government.’”) (citing United States v. NeifertWhite Co., 390 U.S. 228, 232 (1968)).
\textsuperscript{156} The False Claims Acts states that “any person who . . . knowingly presents, or causes to be presented, a false or fraudulent claim for payment or approval” violates the False Claims Act. 31 U.S.C. § 3729 (a)(1)(A). It further explains that “the terms ‘knowing’ and ‘knowingly’ . . . require no proof of specific intent to defraud.” \textit{Id.} § 3729(b)(1)(B).
\end{quote}
unlawful and of ordering meaningful relief that would likely alter executive behavior. However, federal courts can only act in an actual case or controversy and that requires finding a party with standing to bring the case to court. It is to that question that I now turn.

V. STANDING

Either private individuals hurt by executive action, or the legislature that passed a law which the executive failed to enforce, might have standing to challenge the executive.

A. Individual, Nongovernment Parties

Individual parties who have been harmed by executive action alleged to have infringed on the rights of Congress have standing to sue. Examples of such include a soldier ordered to go to war without a congressional declaration of war or resolution under the War Powers Act,157 or conservative nonprofit public policy advocates whom the IRS subjected to more stringent review than other groups.158 The remedy, if the executive action is illegal, is to cease the executive action.159 Sometimes there will be individual parties who have been harmed by executive inaction of sufficient specificity that they can obtain relief: the child whose parents wanted “Jerusalem, Israel” on his passport;160 or New York City, which had its EPA grant impounded by the Nixon administration.161 There will be other cases, however, without individual parties with adequate standing to complain of executive inaction. In such circumstances, a judicial remedy can only be fashioned if legislators bring suit.

159. The archetypical case is SEC v. Chenery Corporation, 318 U.S. 80 (1943), wherein the Court sustained the appellate court’s decision to set aside the order of the SEC, an executive branch agency, at the request of the party aggrieved by the SEC’s order. Id. at 95.
B. Legislative Standing

1. New Language in Future Statutes to Help Congress Establish Standing

Where members of Congress have sought a judicial remedy for presidential actions in recent years, the President has often won on the basis that the case is nonjusticiable because the Congressmembers lack standing.¹⁶² Nonjusticiability has a constitutional basis in the requirement that the federal judicial power extends to “cases” and “controversies,” not hypothetical questions.¹⁶³ It also has a prudential component.¹⁶⁴ Congress can use its authority to set the jurisdiction of

¹⁶². Some commentators have concluded that the challenges to congressional standing are insurmountable. See, e.g., Delahunty & Yoo, supra note 1, at 786. These commentators base their opinions on a string of cases that give a basis for such a conclusion. See generally Chenoweth v. Clinton, 181 F.3d 112 (D.C. Cir. 1999) (denying standing to congressmembers suing over President Clinton’s designation of environmentally protected rivers); Kucinich v. Obama, 821 F. Supp. 2d 110 (D.D.C., 2011) (denying standing to congressmembers suing over President Obama’s going to war in Libya); Campbell, 52 F. Supp. 2d 34 (denying standing to congressmembers suing over President Clinton’s going to war in Yugoslavia without Congressional approval). But see U.S. House of Representatives v. Burwell, 130 F. Supp. 3d 53, 77 (D.D.C. 2015) (granting standing to the House of Representatives challenging the Secretary of HHS’ subsidizing health insurers without an appropriation from Congress).


¹⁶⁴. This is described in the Windsor opinion, which states

[there is a] distinction between two principles: the jurisdictional requirements of Article III and the prudential limits on its exercise. The latter are “essentially matters of judicial self-governance.” The Court has kept these two strands separate: “Article III standing, which enforces the Constitution’s case-or-controversy requirement; and prudential standing, which embodies ‘judicially self-imposed limits on the exercise of federal jurisdiction[].”

United States v. Windsor, 133 S. Ct. 2675, 2685 (2013) (citations omitted). Lower courts have also written about this prudential element:

The most satisfactory means of translating our separation-of-powers concerns into principled decisionmaking is through a doctrine of circumscribed equitable discretion…. The standard would counsel the courts to refrain from hearing cases which represent the most obvious intrusion by the judiciary into the legislative arena: challenges concerning congressional action or inaction regarding legislation. Yet this standard would assure that non-frivolous claims of unconstitutional action which could only be brought by members of Congress will be reviewed on the merits…. We would welcome congressional plaintiff actions involving non-frivolous claims of unconstitutional action which, because they could not be brought by a private plaintiff and are not subject to legislative redress, would go unreviewed unless brought by a legislative plaintiff. In this last situation, there are no prudential considerations or separation-of-powers concerns which would outweigh the mandate of the federal courts to “say what the law is.”
federal courts\textsuperscript{165} to overcome judicial resistance to hearing cases based on prudential, nonconstitutional, considerations by adding language like the following to any law it passes:

To enforce the provisions of this act, either house of Congress shall, upon passage of a resolution of that house, have standing to the maximum extent constitutionally permissible to pursue a declaratory judgment against the appropriate executive branch employee, department, or agency, and no court shall dismiss such action except on the grounds of unconstitutionality.\textsuperscript{166}

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\textsuperscript{165} U.S. CONST. art. III, § 2, cl. 2.

\textsuperscript{166} Judge McGowan advised that such congressional circumscription of a federal court’s equitable discretion to refuse to hear a legislator’s challenge would be within Congress’ power:

The decision by Congress to remove a federal court’s discretion to award a declaratory judgment should not raise any constitutional concerns. Even if Congress stipulates that the courts lack discretion in one particular subject area, the courts are still free to reject the claim on the merits. The freedom of the federal courts to reach a decision either way on the merits avoids the constitutional infirmities discussed in \textit{United States v. Klein}. The power of Congress over a federal court’s equitable discretion is a more murky question. It can be argued that such discretion is part of the ‘judicial power’ and therefore can be exercised only by the tribunal from which an equitable remedy is sought. On the other hand, if it is constitutional for Congress to withdraw a federal court’s equitable powers, the relatively less-intrusive act of requiring courts to grant an equitable remedy to a prevailing party might seem part of Congress’ power over the lower federal courts granted by Article I, section 8 of the Constitution.


Professor Harrison, by contrast, argues that enacting such a law would be beyond Congress’ authority, as it would interfere with the executive branch’s duty to enforce the law. John Harrison, \textit{Legislative Power, Executive Duty, and Legislative Lawsuits}, 31 J.L. & POL. 103, 115 (2015).

Judge McGowan has the better side of the argument; Professor Harrison proves too much when he claims giving Congress the right to sue results in impermissible supervision of the executive. \textit{Id.} at 116 (“Requiring that officers perform their legal duties is a form of supervision.”). I agree, but the supervision is by the court, not by the plaintiff. A private party, with standing, all would concede, suing the executive to perform a function beneficial to that party does not suprize the executive, but asks a court to supervise the executive. The same is true in a lawsuit by the Congress. It would be asking the judicial branch to supervise the executive branch insofar as the executive branch has failed in a statutory or constitutional duty. United States v. Nixon, 418 U.S. 683, 696–97 (1974). \textit{See also} Jonathan Remy Nash, \textit{A Functional Theory of Congressional Standing}, 114 MICH. L. REV. 339, 346 n.36 (2015) (“Unlike Article III standing, prudential standing is not grounded in the Constitution; doctrines of prudential standing are generated by the courts, and Congress remains free to revise and override them.”) (citing \textit{Warth v. Seldin}, 422 U.S. 490, 500–01 (1975)); \textit{cf.} James A. Turner, Comment, \textit{The Post-Medellín Case for...
While Congress cannot create a justiciable case where there is no specific harm or party aggrieved, the Court has recently spoken deferentially of Congress’ special ability to identify harm that a court might not otherwise have found. In ruling that an individual could have standing to sue a credit reporting agency for an error in its report about him, the Court explicitly showed deference to Congress’ judgment in the Fair Credit Reporting Act that intangible harms were cognizable. Further, the court explained:

[i]n addition, because Congress is well positioned to identify intangible harms that meet minimum Article III requirements, its judgment is also instructive and important. Thus, we said in Lujan that Congress may “elevat[e] to the status of legally cognizable injuries concrete, de facto injuries that were previously inadequate in law.” Similarly, Justice Kennedy’s concurrence in that case explained that “Congress has the power to define injuries and articulate chains of causation that will give rise to a case or controversy where none existed before.”

Thus, if Congress were to add the language this Article suggests to future legislation, it should substantially advance its claim to standing to sue for the intangible harm of executive nonaction.

2. Supreme Court Precedent for Legislators’ Standing

The modern starting point for Supreme Court holdings on legislators’ standing is Coleman v. Miller. Coleman granted standing to a majority of Kansas state senators to challenge the effect of the lieutenant governor’s vote to break a tie in the Kansas Senate, which resulted in the ratification by Kansas of an amendment to the U.S. Constitution to allow Congress to prohibit child labor. In 2015, in Arizona State Legislature v. Arizona Independent Redistricting

169. _Id. But see id._ at 1547–48 (“Injury in fact is a constitutional requirement, and ‘[i]t is settled that Congress cannot erase Article III’s standing requirements by statutorily granting the right to sue to a plaintiff who would not otherwise have standing.’”) (citations omitted).  
171. _Id._ at 446. The amendment was proposed in light of the U.S. Supreme Court’s ruling that Congress lacked authority to ban child labor. Hammer v. Dagenhart, 247 U.S. 251, 276–77 (1918) overturned by _United States v. Darby_, 312 U.S. 100 (1941). The amendment was never adopted, as _Darby_ rendered it unnecessary. _Darby_, 312 U.S. 116–17.
the Court affirmed its holding in Coleman. Arizona Independent Redistricting Commission granted standing to the Arizona State Legislature as an institution to challenge the creation of an independent commission to perform the redistricting function that the legislature believed was reserved for them under the U.S. Constitution:

Coleman, as we later explained in Raines, stood “for the proposition that legislators whose votes would have been sufficient to defeat (or enact) a specific legislative Act have standing to sue if that legislative action goes into effect (or does not go into effect), on the ground that their votes have been completely nullified.”

Under this formulation, the legislative branch would have standing to sue when the executive branch fails to enforce a law, in other words, when “legislative action . . . does not go into effect.” The Raines Court’s phrasing of the test, quoted in Arizona Independent Redistricting Commission, was, however, broader than the facts of the case in Coleman, where the action of the state senate prevented a result that was implemented anyway. What is of interest for the purposes of this Article is the converse: where action the legislative branch desires is not taken by the executive. The quote from Raines, repromulgated in Arizona Independent Redistricting Commission, is obiter dicta as to the instance of executive nonaction.

Further, while the test announced in Raines holds legislators’ interests in seeing their laws enforced to be sufficient, the decision itself was against legislative standing, as will be discussed below. There has not been a Supreme Court decision on the question of legislative standing in the context of executive inaction. Is it safe, therefore, to rely on the Raines’ rephrasing of Coleman that holds legislators’ interests in seeing their laws enforced to be adequate for standing?

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173. Id. at 2665.
The conclusion I reach below is that Coleman remains good law; but, since it is not controlling precedent, it would be wise for Congress to identify a more particularized harm than simply wanting to see its laws enforced to enhance the prospect of congressional standing when challenging executive inaction.

3. Raines Decision Does Not Vitiate Coleman

Coleman was distinguished in Raines v. Byrd. In Raines, Congress had passed a law giving the President line-item veto authority over budgets. Senator Robert Byrd had voted against the law; and when it passed, he sued claiming the line-item veto had undercut his authority as a senator. The Supreme Court denied standing to Senator Byrd. In Arizona Independent Redistricting Commission, Raines was explicitly preserved.

There are several points of distinction between Coleman and Raines. In Arizona Independent Redistricting Commission, the Court noted prominently one key distinction: the plaintiffs in Coleman constituted a majority of the legislative branch whose rights were being asserted; in Raines, the plaintiffs were only six individual members of Congress. Hence, where Congress as an institution

177. Id. at 814.
178. Id. at 816.
179. Id. at 830.
182. Raines, 521 U.S. at 814. The small number of members of Congress suing was significant to the holding of the case:

[A] dispositive factor in the D.C. Circuit’s standing analysis, and subsequently Arizona State Legislature’s analysis, centers around the number of members that sued. The D.C. Circuit rejected legislator standing because the members suing did not constitute a majority. But instances in which a majority of Senate or House members sue over presidential non-enforcement seemingly would satisfy the D.C. Circuit and the Arizona State Legislature’s standing threshold.

183. Raines, 521 U.S. at 829 (stating that “[w]e attach some importance to the fact that appellees have not been authorized to represent their respective Houses of Congress in this action, and indeed both Houses actively oppose their suit”). In Burwell, the district court judge put emphasis on the fact that the House had authorized the lawsuit; it was not brought simply by individual members. U.S. House of Representatives v. Burwell, 130 F. Supp. 3d 53, 67 (D.D.C. 2015). That it was the House alone rather than Congress was identified as a possible issue, but not an impediment, in the court’s opinion. If my theory is accepted that the House would have standing to seek a declaratory judgment regarding
seeks a declaratory judgment that the President has failed to enforce a law, all the standing requirements would be met.\(^{184}\)

Another point of distinction between Coleman and Raines is that, as the Court saw Raines, Senator Byrd lost a legislative vote, and went to court to try to have another chance.\(^{185}\) By contrast, any action

the President’s action or nonaction, because of the House’s constitutional role in impeachment, see discussion infra Section V.B.4, a resolution of the House alone should be sufficient. There are other, limited, instances where prerogatives of the legislative branch are enjoyed by less than a full majority of both houses, and in those instances, standing should be available to the number of House or Senate members requisite to the power being asserted. In Goldwater v. Carter, 617 F.2d 697 (D.C. Cir. 1978), vacated, 444 U.S. 996 (1979), for instance, one-third plus one of the senators should have been granted standing, since the premise of the action was that the power of one-third of the Senate to hold up ratification of a treaty had been eviscerated by the President’s action. \(\text{Id. at 697.}\) Similarly, in Campbell v. Clinton, 203 F.3d 19 (D.C. Cir. 2000), one half of one house, plus one, should have been enough to grant standing, since that vote would have been sufficient to prevent a declaration of war from passing. \(\text{See also Kerr v. Hickenlooper, 824 F.3d 1207, 1212–13 (10th Cir. 2016).}\) Upon remand from the Supreme Court following Arizona Independent Redistricting Commission, the Tenth Circuit reversed its earlier holding of standing for individual Colorado legislators, distinguishing them from the Colorado Legislature as an institution. Kerr v. Hickenlooper, 744 F.3d 1156 (10th Cir. 2014), vacated and remanded, 135 S. Ct. 2927 (2015).

\(^{184}\) A declaration by Congress authorizing a lawsuit would have the additional benefit of insuring that there is, in fact, a live controversy between the legislative and executive branches regarding the public policy behind the law not being enforced. Professor Sant’Ambrogio considers Presidential nonenforcement as a potentially beneficial practice where public favor regarding a law has changed in the intervening years, yet structural impediments prevent a repeal. \(\text{See Sant’Ambrogio, supra note 86, at 377.}\) By restricting standing to the Congress (or one house of Congress), when it has taken a vote to authorize the lawsuit, we can preserve that virtue, yet allow the judicial resolution of a true interbranch dispute. Further, requiring such a resolution of authorization solves the logical question of whether the current Congress is harmed by nonenforcement of a statute passed by an earlier Congress. \(\text{See Harrison, supra note 166, at 114 (insisting that the plaintiff be Congress, or one house thereof, also serves to limit the number of cases that will be brought, as compared to allowing any individual member of Congress the right to sue); Stern, supra note 1, at 45 (opposing legislative standing because, among other reasons, of the potential multiplicity of lawsuits).}\)

\(\text{Dicta in several cases suggests the necessity, though not necessarily the sufficiency, of a formal authorizing vote for Congressional standing: “[T]his case, in which neither a House of Congress nor any congressional committee has issued a subpoena for the disputed information or authorized this suit, is not the setting for such unprecedented judicial action.” Walker v. Cheney, 230 F. Supp. 2d 51, 53 (D.D.C. 2002) (denying standing to the General Accounting Office, an arm of Congress, to obtain information from the Vice President regarding an executive branch task force); see also Senate Select Comm. on Presidential Campaign Activities v. Nixon, 498 F.2d 725, 727. (D.C. Cir. 1974) (en banc) (footnote omitted) (stating that “[w]hile the appeal was pending, the Senate on November 2 passed a resolution stating that the Select Committee is authorized to subpoena and sue the President and that the Committee, in subpoenaing and suing the President, was acting with valid legislative purposes and seeking information vital to the fulfillment of its legitimate legislative functions”).}\)

\(^{185}\) Raines, 521 U.S. at 824.
by a house of Congress complaining about a President’s failure to enforce a law is to vindicate a winning legislative vote. Therefore, when Congress asks a court to direct executive action on a validly passed law, there is no concern that members of Congress are attempting to win judicially what they could not win legislatively. 186

There is one other reason Raines should not preclude Congress from suing for declaratory relief when the President fails to enforce a law: the Court mischaracterized the harm of which Senator Byrd complained. The plaintiff members of Congress, the Court reasoned, “have not alleged that they voted for a specific bill, that there were sufficient votes to pass the bill, and that the bill was nonetheless deemed defeated. In the vote on the Act, their votes were given full effect. They simply lost that vote.” 187 Byrd’s complaint was not that he lost a vote on the legislation that created the line-item veto; he complained that, with the line-item veto in place, his powers as a legislator would be diminished. 188 Although Senator Byrd did not bring up this specific example, one way of seeing how his powers were diminished by the line-item veto is to consider a bill combining something Senator Byrd wanted but the President did not, along with many other provisions the President did want. 189 After the line-item

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186. A clear articulation of this argument is that any intrusion by the judiciary into a dispute between its coequal branches seems fraught with difficulties. The problems are multiplied when the plaintiff could have obtained from Congress the substantial equivalent of the judicial relief sought, because in such cases the court is asked to intrude into the internal functioning of the legislative branch itself.

McGowan, supra note 166, at 242. See id. at 250 n.37, 263 (citing a congressman’s challenge to the nonpresidentially appointed status of members of the Federal Reserve’s Open Market Committee after failing in his attempt to amend the law to require such appointment); see also Reuss v. Balles, 584 F.2d 461, 468 (D.C. Cir. 1978), cert. denied, 439 U.S. 997 (1978).

187. Raines, 521 U.S. at 824.

188. Describing Senator Byrd’s complaint as viewed by the court of appeals, the Supreme Court in Raines said

[the court held that appellees’ claim that the Act “dilute[d]” their Article I voting power” was sufficient to confer Article III standing: “[Appellees’] votes mean something different from what they meant before, for good or ill, and [appellees] who perceive it as the latter are thus ‘injured’ in a constitutional sense whenever an appropriations bill comes up for a vote, whatever the President ultimately does with it…. Under the Act the dynamic of lawmaking is fundamentally altered. Compromises and trade-offs by individual lawmakers must take into account the President’s item-by-item cancellation power looming over the end product.”


189. See generally TODD GARVEY, CONG. RESEARCH SERV., RL33667, PRESIDENTIAL SIGNING STATEMENTS: CONSTITUTIONAL AND INSTITUTIONAL
veto became possible, such a legislative approach would be unavailing. Thus, properly understood, Senator Byrd’s position in *Raines* should have been enough to grant him standing because his structural legislative powers had been diminished. This institutional slight to Congress was the premise under which the line-item veto was eventually struck down by the Supreme Court, when the lawsuit was brought not by a U.S. senator, but by New York City (one of its federal grants had been line-item vetoed by President Clinton). 190

*Coleman* lives, revived by *Arizona Independent Redistricting Commission*. This Article does not ignore that the Court took pains in the latter case to say it was ruling only in the context of a state legislature’s suit, not a suit by Congress, and that separation of powers issues would be presented in the case of a congressional suit against the President not presented in the state legislature’s lawsuit against a state commission. 191 Deference to states’ authority to sort out their own powers, however, was the basis for the holding on the merits in *Arizona Independent Redistricting Commission*. Such a federalism concern suggests strongly that the Court be more circumspect of inserting itself into a claim by state legislators against other organs of state government 192 than it would be to resolve a dispute between the two branches of the federal government. 193 The

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191. *Id.* at 2665 n.12. Contrast this view with Justice Breyer’s dissent: “While I recognize the existence of potential differences between state and federal legislators, I do not believe that those differences would be determinative here, where constitutional, not prudential, considerations are at issue.” *Raines*, 521 U.S. at 843; see also Stern, supra note 1, at 41–42.

192. The defendant in *Coleman v. Miller* was an employee of the Kansas Senate; the plaintiffs were Kansas state senators. *Coleman v. Miller*, 307 U.S. 433, 433 (1939). One might have thought it appropriate for the U.S. Supreme Court to leave the resolution of the dispute to the Kansas Senate, which could have ordered its employee to send a notice to the U.S. Congress to disregard the previous notice of ratification of the proposed U.S. Constitutional amendment. *Id.* at 436. The D.C. Circuit, in dicta in *Campbell v. Clinton*, tried to evade that conclusion by speculating, without more, that such a notice might not have been accepted by the Congress. *Campbell v. Clinton*, 203 F.3d 19, 22–23 (D.C. Cir. 2000). If that were so, however, the *Coleman* court should have dismissed the case as moot.

193. If a subsequent U.S. Supreme Court ruling advances this distinction—denying standing to federal legislators, while having granted it to state legislators—a federalism-based desire not to judge other branches of the national government is a weak reed on which to base such different approaches. The Court has frequently considered itself to be competent to resolve competing institutional powers of the three federal branches, when legislators were not plaintiffs. For consideration of the absence of reluctance shown by the Supreme Court to insert itself in interbranch disputes, see generally Clinton v. City of New York, 524 U.S. 417 (1998) (discussing Congress ceding a line-item veto to the President);
Court has adopted a standing rule to allow a state legislature to seek relief against the usurpation of its power. It would be odd for the Court to hold the Congress could not avail itself of the same relief. At any rate, it has not done so.

4. *Kennedy v. Sampson*: The Closest Case on Point

None of the foregoing cases on legislative standing, however, deals with a law passed by Congress that the President fails to enforce. Only one court decision is on point, the D.C. Circuit’s opinion in *Kennedy v. Sampson*, though two others have some similarity. In *Kennedy*, Senator Ted Kennedy voted in favor of a

Mistretta v. United States, 488 U.S. 361 (1989) (involving the President’s power to remove members from a judicial organ, the U.S. Sentencing Commission); Morrison v. Olson, 487 U.S. 654 (1988) (regarding the authority for Congress to create a special prosecutor outside the direction of the President); INS v. Chadha, 462 U.S. 919 (1983) (concerning the President’s deferring to one house of Congress that purported to veto his decision to parole individuals from deportation). *Cf.* United States v. Nixon, 418 U.S. 683 (1974) (enforcing a subpoena as a judicial instrument, against the President in a criminal investigation). *See generally* Bowsher v. Synar, 478 U.S. 714 (1986) (noting that the Court reached the merits of a case regarding proper executive and legislative roles in budget rescissions, though reserving on the specific issue of congressional standing).


195. For this reason, in his dissent in *Arizona Independent Redistricting Commission*, Justice Scalia opined that no legislator, state or federal, should have standing; he reserved special venom for *Coleman*, attempting to claim it was not actually a majority holding of the Court. *See Ariz. Indep. Redistricting Comm’n*, 135 S. Ct. at 2696 (Scalia, J., dissenting). The majority explicitly ruled against his point of view. *Id.* at 2665 & n.13 (majority).

196. 511 F.2d 430 (D.C. Cir. 1974). The D.C Circuit found standing. *Id.* at 436. At this time, prior to *Raines v. Byrd*, 521 U.S. 811 (1997), the D.C. Circuit was predisposed to legislator standing. For discussion of the D.C. Circuit’s peregrinations on legislative standing, including its adoption of equitable discretion regarding whether or not to grant standing to legislators, see Riegle v. Fed. Open Mkt. Comm., 656 F.2d 873, 880–81 (D.C. Cir. 1981). Granting Senator Kennedy standing in this case was more powerful by the fact that it was not necessary to find legislator standing for there to be any review at all—a private party might have found standing in the facts of *Kennedy*. *See Kennedy*, 511 F.2d at 432. A physician expecting to benefit from a grant under the Family Practice of Medicine Act could have brought the same suit Senator Ted Kennedy did, complaining that since President Nixon did not order the bill enrolled as law, the National Institutes of Health did not make money available as the bill required. *See Public Health Service Act*, S. 3418, 91st Cong. § 761 (1970).

197. The case of concern here is where the legislature acts and the executive ignores it; that’s why *Kennedy* is closest to point. Two other cases involve the situation where the legislature failed to act, but consequences resulted that could only come about from the legislature having acted. *See Coleman*, 307 U.S. at 433 (granting standing when the state senate did not approve the U.S. Constitutional Amendment, but it was sent off to the US Congress as though it had been approved anyway; standing granted); *Campbell*, 203 F.3d at 20–21, 24 (denying standing when Congress took a vote and decided not to declare war or authorize military action under the War Powers Act, but the President waged war anyway).
It passed both houses. President Nixon held it until Congress had gone on holiday recess, and then announced he would not sign it. He did not issue a veto. The President argued that when the tenth day after a bill was sent to him fell within a period when Congress was adjourned, the bill did not become law, by reason of Article I, section 7, of the U.S. Constitution. Senator Kennedy argued that the holiday recess was not an adjournment that prevented the Congress from reconsidering it. Hence, the bill, having been on the President’s desk for more than ten days, automatically became law.

The substantive issue at bar was whether the holiday recess constituted an adjournment within the meaning of Article I, section 7. But the standing issue turned on Senator Kennedy’s complaint that his interest as a senator had been negatively affected when a bill for which he had voted failed to be enforced by the President. The D.C. Circuit held in favor of Kennedy as to both standing and the merits.

5. Two Kinds of Legislative Interests

There are two kinds of interests that Congress might assert relevant to executive nonaction. The first is Congress’ interest in

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198. See Kennedy, 511 F.2d at 432.
199. Id. at 432 & n.3.
200. Id.
201. Id.
202. Id. at 437.
203. Id. at 433.
204. Id.
205. Id. at 436.
206. Id. at 433 (“Two questions are presented for review: (1) does appellee have standing to maintain this suit; and (2) did S. 3418 become a law? We conclude that both questions must be answered in the affirmative.”). Subsequently, in Goldwater v. Carter, the D.C. Circuit distinguished two kinds of injury a legislator might suffer, and indicated that the interest simply in seeing a duly passed law be enforced was not sufficiently institutional. Goldwater v. Carter, 617 F.2d 697, 701 (D.C. Cir. 1979) (en banc), judgment vacated, 444 U.S. 996 (1979) (mem.). The D.C. Circuit’s opinion was vacated by the Supreme Court, so it has no precedential value; and Kennedy v. Sampson has never been overruled. Goldwater, 444 U.S. at 996. See McGowan, supra note 166, at 241.

207. Commentators critical of legislative standing recognize this distinction, and focus their opposition to cases where Congress simply wants to see its policies implemented, rather than the narrower set of cases where Congress complains of being deprived of an institutional prerogative. See, e.g., Harrison, supra note 166, at 105, 110 (using the phrase “impair the legislative power” for the second kind of case).

seeing its laws enforced. Reasonable criticism has been raised about whether this is adequate injury for standing purposes, since all U.S. citizens have an interest in the implementation of laws that their representatives passed. Once the law is enacted, this point of view maintains, members of Congress do not possess any special interest separate from any of their constituents. Nevertheless, the phrasing of Coleman, embraced anew by the U.S. Supreme Court in Arizona Independent Redistricting Commission, would allow this interest to be sufficient, as explained above. Such an interest was also held sufficient by Justices Alito and Thomas in their dissent in United States v. Windsor, the case striking down the Defense of Marriage Act, members of Congress had intervened to represent their own interest in seeing the Defense of Marriage Act upheld.

Id. at 135 (citations omitted).

208. See generally Harrison, supra note 166 (discussing various arguments for congressional standing); Nash, supra note 166 (arguing for limited congressional standing). But see, e.g., Greene, supra note 207, at 582.

209. Greene, supra note 207, at 585 (citing Daughtery v. Carter, 584 F.2d 1050 (D.C. Cir. 1978)) (“The main point was that the Congresspersons shared an interest that all citizens have in presidential enforcement of the law, and thus stated a generalized grievance, insufficient for standing.”).

210. See supra note 173–74 and accompanying text; see Ariz. State Legislature v. Ariz. Indep. Redistricting Comm’n, 135 S. Ct. 2652, 2665 (2015) (explaining that “Coleman, as we later explained in Raines, stood ‘for the proposition that legislators whose votes would have been sufficient to . . . enact . . . a specific legislative Act have standing to sue if that legislative action . . . does not go into effect[,] on the ground that their votes have been completely nullified.’”).

211. 133 S. Ct. 2675 (2013).

212. See id. at 2695–96, 2684. In Windsor, the Court held there to be sufficient concrete adversity between the plaintiffs and the U.S. Treasury, which had refused to make an estate tax refund following the Defense of Marriage Act, even while the Justice Department refused to defend the Defense of Marriage Act: “the Attorney General of the United States notified the Speaker of the House of Representatives, pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 530D, that the Department of Justice would no longer defend the constitutionality of DOMA’s § 3.” Id. at 2683. Justices Alito and Thomas, however, did discuss this distinction, since there were congressional intervenors who claimed harm from not having
The second kind of interest arises when the executive nonaction interferes with the ability of Congress to perform its functions. This occurrence is closer to the actual situation in *Coleman v. Miller*. Though the defendant in that case, Mr. Miller, was the secretary of the Kansas Senate (an officer of the legislature, not the executive), the action he took prevented the Kansas senator plaintiffs from exercising their prerogatives under the Kansas Constitution.213

Another illustration of this second kind of interest arises when a committee of Congress seeks information held by the executive
branch important to Congress’ constitutional functions.\footnote{Sant'Ambrogio, supra note 1, at 1934 (footnote omitted) (explaining that “when Congress subpoenas an executive official and the official refuses to comply with the subpoena, Congress has standing to compel the executive’s compliance in court. The executive’s failure to produce the officer or documents injures Congress in a concrete and actual way”). See also Nash, supra note 166, at 374.}

In the midst of the Watergate investigation, Congress passed, and President Nixon allowed to become law without veto or signature, a statute creating jurisdiction in the United States District Court for the District of Columbia for the Senate Select Committee on Presidential Campaign Activities to enforce its subpoenas against the executive branch.\footnote{Act of Dec. 16, 1973, Pub. L. 93-190, 87 Stat. 736 (1973).}

The D.C. Circuit analyzed this law in its opinion in Senate Select Committee on Presidential Campaign Activities v. Nixon,\footnote{See Senate Select Comm. on Presidential Campaign Activities v. Nixon, 498 F.2d 725, 727 (D.C. Cir. 1974) (en banc).} not intimating any constitutional infirmity in the opinion. However, the D.C. Circuit upheld the trial court’s decision to quash the subpoena sought by the Senate committee in that case, upon a balancing of the equities.\footnote{Id. at 729.} The D.C. Circuit reasoned that, balanced against the President’s executive privilege interests, the interest asserted by the Senate select committee was weaker as it was only generally legislative in nature. The D.C. Circuit suggested that interest of a
grand jury, or the House Judiciary Committee by contrast, would prevail because those bodies were focused on specific crimes or impeachable offenses: “[t]here is a clear difference between Congress’s legislative tasks and the responsibility of a grand jury, or any institution engaged in like functions.” 218 One such “institution engaged in like functions” was clearly the House Judiciary Committee, then looking into impeachment:

In the circumstances of this case, we need neither deny that the Congress may have, quite apart from its legislative responsibilities, a general oversight power, nor explore what the lawful reach of that power might be under the [Senate] Committee’s constituent resolution. Since passage of that resolution, the House Committee on the Judiciary has begun an inquiry into presidential impeachment. The investigative authority of the Judiciary Committee with respect to presidential conduct has an express constitutional source. 219

Importantly, that House Judiciary Committee eventually voted out articles of impeachment, one of which charged President Nixon with failing “to take care that the laws were faithfully executed.” 220

An impeachment proceeding, therefore, would present the clearest case for congressional standing to seek a declaratory judgment that a President’s nonenforcement of a statute was unlawful. 221 The House Judiciary Committee would ask a court to rule

218. Id. at 732.
219. Id.

[j]e has failed to take care that the laws were faithfully executed by failing to act when he knew or had reason to know that his close subordinates endeavored to impede and frustrate lawful inquiries by duly constituted executive, judicial, and legislative entities concerning the unlawful entry into the headquarters of the Democratic National Committee, and the cover-up thereof, and concerning other unlawful activities including those relating to the confirmation of Richard Kleindienst as Attorney General of the United States, the electronic surveillance of private citizens, the break-in into the offices of Dr. Lewis Fielding, and the campaign financing practices of the Committee to Re-elect the President.

Id. at 3–4.
221. Greene, supra note 207, at 591 (stating that “Congress could begin impeachment proceedings, or try to tie the President’s hands in other ways, but these are costly and complex and, more to the point, not directly responsive to the matter at hand. Why not get all three branches into the mix?”). Professor Greene sees the impeachment power as tangential to the concern of standing; I see it as fundamental. Because the House has the explicit constitutional power of impeachment, it has standing to seek a declaratory judgment that could be valuable in exercising that function, an interest apart from the
whether the President’s failure to enforce a law was arbitrary and capricious under administrative law standards, or discriminatory under a constitutional standard.222

Rather than compelling the House Judiciary Committee to commence impeachment proceedings before granting standing for a declaratory judgment, a federal court could take cognizance of the fact that the impeachment power could extend to a failure to enforce a law as an instance of the President’s failure to take care that the laws be faithfully executed. That would create an “express constitutional source” for a declaratory judgment sought by the House.223

The possibility of impeachment would, of course, raise concerns under the political question doctrine. A federal court would be strongly tempted to note that what constitutes “high [c]rimes and [m]isdemeanors”224 is constitutionally committed to another branch: the House of Representatives.225 That is true; but that is not what the House would be asking a federal court to determine. The court would be asked whether a particular instance of a President’s failure to act was “arbitrary, capricious, an abuse of discretion, or otherwise not in accordance with law,” under the long-settled jurisprudence of the
generalized interest all citizens might have in the enforcement of a duly passed law. Professor Greene and I both conclude, however, that it is desirable to “get all three branches into the mix.” Id.

Similar to Professor Greene in seeing impeachment as separate from—as opposed to a premise—for congressional litigation, is Bethany Pickett who in her student note stated

impeachment proceedings are an extreme remedy to presidential nonenforcement. Courts should not encourage impeachment “as a[] preferable alternative to a peaceful judicial determination of constitutional parameters.” Primarily, the President may be a popular president whose performance is exemplary in every other area. Judicial intervention is preferable to impeachment because it addresses the President’s particular area of wrongdoing, instead of broadly attacking the President and, in effect, throwing the baby out with the bathwater.

Pickett, supra note 182, at 465 (footnotes omitted).


225. Id. art. I, § 2, cl. 5. See Baker v. Carr, 369 U.S. 186, 217 (1962) (noting that “a textually demonstrable constitutional commitment of the issue to a coordinate political department” is one of the factors on which a federal court should decline jurisdiction of a case under the political question doctrine).
Administrative Procedure Act,\textsuperscript{226} or violative of a constitutional right under § 1982 of the United States Code. If the President raised the defense that his inaction was necessary to avoid violating the Constitution, then the court would rule on that defense in the course of its judgment. Should a court decide against the President, the House of Representatives would decide whether the President’s failure to act constituted an impeachable offense. In doing so, the House can choose to base its decision on court rulings. For instance, the House could certainly take cognizance of a court decision reached in a lawsuit in which Congress was not a party. The House might have considered President Nixon’s impoundment of funds appropriated for New York City to be impeachable, based on the Supreme Court’s having held his action to be unlawful in \textit{Train v. City of New York}.\textsuperscript{227} Every federal court involved in \textit{Train}, right up to the Supreme Court, knew that its holding might have been the basis for impeachment; but each issued a ruling nonetheless.\textsuperscript{228} What the House of Representatives might choose to do following a federal court ruling does not make the issue before the court a political question.

Whether the House Judiciary Committee would proceed to consider impeachment in any given instance of executive nonaction would likely be informed by the President’s reaction to a declaratory judgment. The President might ignore the court’s ruling. However, he might instead use the occasion of a judicial ruling against him to reconsider and alter his behavior in some way. Whether such modified enforcement was sufficient or not would be within the judgment of the House Judiciary Committee. A superficial, minimalist, begrudging enforcement of a statute might not satisfy that committee—it would be hard for a court to make such a decision. How much enforcement is enough is not an easy determination for a court to make.\textsuperscript{229} It would, however, be an entirely appropriate political decision by the House Judiciary Committee.

\textsuperscript{226} 5 U.S.C. § 706(2)(A) (2012). “An action in a court of the United States . . . stating a claim that an agency or an officer or employee thereof acted or failed to act in an official capacity or under color of legal authority shall not be dismissed . . . that it is against the United States.” \textit{Id.} § 702 (emphasis added).


\textsuperscript{228} In effect, that is also what the Supreme Court’s 8–0 opinion did in \textit{United States v. Nixon}, 418 U.S. 683 (1974). The Court could have dodged the case, asserting separation of powers and political question concerns, for instance. The result of that judicial nonaction would have been to leave the House without crucial evidence about possible wrongdoing, causing a bill of impeachment to proceed on speculation, if it proceeded at all. But the Court did rule, knowing the consequences.

\textsuperscript{229} \textit{See Massachusetts v. EPA}, 549 U.S. 497, 517 (2007); \textit{supra} Section IV.B.
C. Summary of Legislative Standing to Challenge Nonenforcement

The U.S. Supreme Court has most recently reaffirmed the requirements for standing in the following words: “A party has standing only if he shows that he has suffered an ‘injury in fact,’ that the injury is ‘fairly traceable’ to the conduct being challenged, and that the injury will likely be ‘redressed’ by a favorable decision.”230

When a President fails to enforce a law, Congress should be able to challenge the inaction. The injury in fact is that congressional votes resulting in the passage of a law have been completely nullified.231 Normal prosecutorial discretion is anticipated when Congress passes a law,232 so no injury is suffered by Congress through that practice. Undermining the structure of a law, however, does injure Congress. Years of administrative law jurisprudence has built up the means of distinguishing permissible agency discretion from action undermining a statute.233 The congressional resolution authorizing such a lawsuit shows that the current Congress maintains the interest it had in seeing put into effect the law that it (or a previous Congress) had passed.234

232. See III ADMINISTRATIVE LAW TREATISE, supra note 109, § 17.1, at 1559.
233. Id. at § 17.2, at 1565–68. This distinction has been noted by a leading treatise:

At least part of the solution to the problem of agency discretion must lie in judicial review of agency actions. The courts can confine agencies within constitutionally permissible boundaries to the extent that the Constitution provides justiciable standards. In the U.S. system of government, with policymaking power divided between separately elected Legislative and Executive Branches, the judiciary also is required to confine agency discretion within statutorily permissible boundaries… Courts also can reduce the potential for agencies and agency employees to engage in selective exercise of discretionary power for arbitrary or impermissible purposes. See id. § 17.2, at 1565.

Choosing not to pursue a specific case is permissible, but choosing to ignore an entire category of behavior envisioned in the balance, which Congress wrote into a statute, would be impermissible. Creating prosecutorial priorities is permissible, ignoring a specific area of authority for rulemaking is not. See discussion supra Section IV.C.

234. See, e.g., H.R. Res. 676, 113th Cong. (2014) (enacted) (“Resolved, That the Speaker is authorized to initiate or intervene in one or more civil actions on behalf of the House of Representatives in a Federal court of competent jurisdiction to seek any appropriate relief regarding the failure of the President, the head of any department or agency, or any other officer or employee of the executive branch, to act in a manner consistent with that official’s duties under the Constitution and laws of the United States with respect to implementation of any provision of the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act, title I or subtitle B of title II of the Health Care and Education Reconciliation Act of 2010, including any amendment made by such provision, or any other related
The first two prongs of the requirement of standing are thus met: there is injury in fact, and it is traceable to the President’s nonenforcement.

As for the third prong of standing, a declaratory judgment against the President is “likely” to cause him to enforce the law, thus granting relief. This is especially true if the declaratory judgment is sought by the House, which has the authority to commence impeachment proceedings. An actual impeachment process should not need to have been initiated; the latent threat should be sufficient to convince a court that granting the requested declaratory judgment would be likely to bring relief.

Dicta from the D.C. Circuit suggests that the House would suffer an additional kind of injury if it issued a subpoena to the President in aid of an investigation and the President refused to respond to it. This kind of harm fits the category of institutional injury, beyond simply a desire to see duly enacted laws enforced. Two specific constitutional provisions add strength to the House’s standing: its impeachment role, and the President’s duty to take care that the laws be faithfully executed. A subpoena in aid of the House’s ability to judge the latter in the potential context of the former is a precise basis for standing. An analogy can be drawn between the desire of the House of Representatives, or the House Judiciary Committee, to obtain subpoenaed information, and the need of the House or the House Judiciary Committee for a declaratory judgment about the President’s nonenforcement of a law.

CONCLUSION

Executive action in excess of constitutional authority can be checked in the courts. So also can executive nonaction.

Where the President’s power is exclusive, the President, of course, may take action. Where the Congress’ power is exclusive, executive action can be enjoined, and executive nonaction is not logically a problem. Where the President and Congress share power, Congress can occupy the field and make independent executive action

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235. See supra note 229 and accompanying text.
238. See supra notes 190–91 and accompanying text.
unlawful. Ambiguity as to whether Congress has done so can be diminished by explicit wording in laws to the effect that Congress intends to occupy the field, to the exclusion of executive action. Without such explicit language, a court must determine from the scheme of the legislation whether Congress intended its structure to be exclusive of executive action. If so, a court can enter an injunction against the executive action.

If the President has failed to enforce a law passed by Congress, a court will be able to order relief where a plaintiff can identify a precise benefit to which they are entitled. A qui tam action can also force the collection of money owed to the government from a private party. In another narrow set of cases, a negative injunction will be available which, while not compelling executive action to enforce a law in the way a President does not wish to enforce it, will nevertheless enjoin his enforcing the law in other contexts where he does wish to enforce it.

Outside of those instances, executive nonaction does not lend itself to judicial resolution by injunctive relief. A declaratory judgment, however, could be brought claiming that such nonaction was unlawful. That would provide a sufficiently concrete remedy because of the likelihood the President would adjust his behavior in the face of such a declaratory judgment. When the plaintiff is the House of Representatives, this is especially likely because of the House’s responsibility under the impeachment clause, even if an actual impeachment motion were not under active consideration. The House would have a further basis for standing in that a declaratory judgment would be directly relevant to its need to gather information in its constitutional function of impeachment.

The cases on legislators’ standing would permit such a suit. The President can defend his nonenforcement on the grounds that the requested enforcement would be unconstitutional, or that his failure to enforce reflects no more than discretion operating under neutral principles (such as conserving scarce enforcement resources) that did not constitute an assault on the structure of the law passed by Congress.