

OUR VIEW

Cameras should be allowed in courtrooms more often

Last week our sister publication, the Dodge County Independent, fell victim to rules that are clearly outdated, when it was denied the right to take photos and videos of the sentencing hearing for ex-Kasson police officer Julio Baez.

The DCI, along with KIMT-TV, petitioned the court in hopes of being able to take photos and videos at one of the most high profile hearings for Dodge County residents in recent history.

In Minnesota, media outlets are only allowed to bring cameras into courtrooms for hearings in which a guilty conviction has already gone on the record. The only other way that the media is allowed to cover is cases in which both parties agree to cameras in the courtroom, but the likelihood of that happening is very slim. This essentially means that the only hearings in which media is allowed to bring their cameras to is for sentencing hearings.

In a perfect world, the media would be allowed to cover any sentencing hearing without any issue, but that is far from the truth.

In order to even be considered to cover sentencing hearings by the means of audio or visual coverage, a media outlet must first file a petition with the court.

From that point, the prosecution and defense have the right to object to it for any reason they see fit. On top of that, any victims or victims' families also have the right to express their concerns about having cameras there.

After filling a petition with the court, the DCI and KIMT were notified that our petitions were denied by the court.

In a memo, the presiding judge stated that both the defense and prosecution expressed the fact that they don't want the hearing to be recorded. The judge in the case also explained the difficulty that would come for the victims of these sexual assaults to potentially make impact statements with cameras in the courtroom.

"Three young women have been sexually assaulted. The victims, their families, and friends may attend this hearing. They may choose to address the court. It would be inappropriate to subject them to video or audio recording on this occasion in addition to the trauma and suffering they have been through," Judge Hayne wrote in her memo. "It would be inappropriate to create, much less broadcast, a permanent audio/video record of them at this moment of emotional exposure. Possibly coverage could be permitted with some limitation on who or what could be recorded. However, policing compliance with such a restriction seems potentially troublesome to me; and more importantly, I do not want victims, family or friends of the victims to be at all concerned about the presence of cameras in the courtroom."

While it is understandable that prosecutors, the defense, and the judge wouldn't want to make victims be subject to being recorded while they testify, it doesn't seem appropriate to eliminate coverage completely.

In many courtrooms across the state, cameras are allowed in courts during sentencing hearings. However, there are restrictions that are explained by court staff before the hearing begins. Often times one of the biggest restrictions is not allowing the recording of any victim impact statements, which could have been done in this case.

Furthermore, in respect to the privacy of the victims, news media outlets do whatever it takes to protect victims' identities, including not publishing names of sexual assault victims. To say that media outlets shouldn't be allowed to use cameras in courts because of the fear that reporters may record victims statements is inappropriate.

The reality is that many states have much more liberal and modern rules when it comes to covering courts.

In some states, for example, the media has the right to cover cases from the time a defendant is brought into court for arraignment to the time the judge hands down the sentence.

While Minnesota has gone a long way in recent years when it comes to allowing cameras in courts, there is still more that needs to be done.

Newspapers, and other media outlets, have an obligation to inform the public about public safety in their communities. Anytime someone is charged with a felony in Minnesota and is over the age of 16 years old, their charges are outlined and becomes public record. There should be absolutely no reason that, at the minimum, journalists can't bring cameras into courts for sentencing hearings.

We urge our state representatives to take action to promote transparency by allowing more access to cameras in Minnesota Courtrooms. The public's right to know hangs in the balance.

The county has lost a passionate fair promoter

He was referred to as "Mr. Happy," by those closest to him. For five years, Mr. Happy led the Steele County Free Fair as its manager and top cheerleader.



Hot Pursuit
RICK BUSSLER

According to Todd Hale, the former publicity director of the fair, running Minnesota's largest county fair was Jim Gleason's dream job. He had strong public relations and marketing skills to enhance the reputation of the fair.

Unfortunately, all good things come to an end. And sometimes they even come to a heartbreaking end, which was the case with Gleason. In October 2017, he was diagnosed with an aggressive form of brain cancer and the prognosis wasn't good. Just a few months later, he was forced to step down from his dream job

in order to fight the greatest challenge of his life.

Gleason gave it a tremendous effort with his cancer battle, but sadly, it was just too much to overcome. Gleason died April 3 in Owatonna at the age of 65.

I had the pleasure of working with Gleason during his reign as manager of the fair. He was one of the most personable people I've ever come into contact with and always had a good word to say no matter what the topic was.

He always had a sparkling glimmer in his eye about the fair and making it better. With a broad smile and positive tone radiating from him, he always made himself available to promote the fair. For me, that was always helpful because I love

fairs and work hard to get the message out about how special and unique the Steele County Fair is to this county and state.

With a strong gift of gab, Gleason was never at a loss for words when it came to talking about the fair or anything else for that matter.

County fairs are more than just a yearly carnival in the middle of summer. The electric atmosphere of the fair stimulates cultivation of a vibrant community and showcases the achievements of young and old alike. They're a chance for community building and leadership development opportunities. The tradition of county fairs goes back decades and is woven into the fabric of nearly every American community.

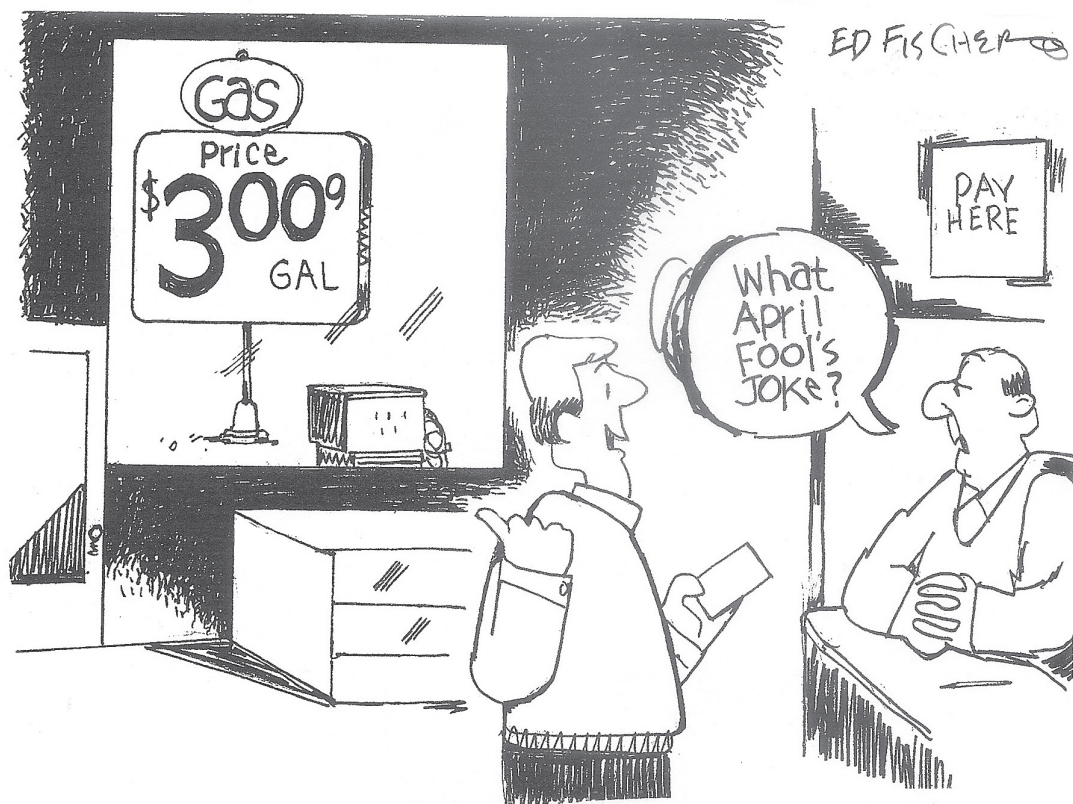
It's too bad that Gleason's time was cut way too short of steering the fair to new heights. At only 64 when he stepped down, Gleason had planned to stay with it

until at least 70 years old. Our communities have lost a gentle giant who loved the fair and bringing recognition to Steele County for having the best fair in the state.

Hale, like others who worked around Gleason, found him to have such positivity with the fair and life in general. Asked what he admired most about Gleason, Hale responded, "His continual positive attitude on everything he did." Hale went on to say that he never once heard Gleason say anything negative about anyone.

Gleason was just a natural for the fair's top position. With his absence, the entire county is going to lose for years to come.

It's a sad day when we lose someone who was so passionate about the fair and went in hot pursuit of keeping it at the high level we've all come to expect from the Steele County Free Fair:



GUEST COLUMN

Some bills are not good news for taxpayers

By JOHN PETERSBURG

The contents of the bills that will fund state government over the next two years are beginning to move forward in the Minnesota House. And from my perspective some of them are not good news for taxpayers.

We have already begun to work up the House transportation finance proposal. There are a lot of things in this bill that I find concerning.

Obviously the increased costs for Minnesota's drivers are going to add up quickly. Much like Governor Walz, House Democrats have proposed a 70% increase in the gasoline tax, or at least 20-cents per gallon. While this is troublesome, it's worth noting that about half of that increase is being put in place just to cover the loss of general revenue that is being pulled out of transportation and going back into the general fund to increase spending elsewhere.

In other words, House Democrats want to take \$420 million that is allocated for roads and bridges, use that money to fund other state government programs, and force you to pay 20-cents per gallon more at the pump to make up for that lost transportation money.

Our omnibus taxes bill is scheduled to be published on April 8. We'll then hear testimony and try to write some amendments to improve the proposal so we'll see where that ends up.

One final note, I am also a member of the conference committee for the "hands free" bill. The approved legislation would allow voice activated cell phone use only in Minnesota, along with one-touch or headsets.

What we're trying to do is figure out the best way to change the behavior and thinking about what distracted driving is. Staring at your cell phone behind the wheel is dangerous, not only for those inside the vehicle but outside who are depending on the person driving without distraction. Our goal in this conference committee is to come up with a plan that will be approved by both bodies, and ensure that more people will keep their eyes on the road and not on their phone.

I will be sure to update you with any progress we make.

John Petersburg is the state representative for District 24A, which covers Steele and Waseca counties. He lives in Waseca.

Rocco Baldelli makes an early impression

Who is Rocco Baldelli?

Hopefully, we Minnesota Twins fans can say some day that Rocco Baldelli led the Minnesota Twins to a world championship.

Baldelli, who was named Minnesota Twins manager in November of 2019, is currently the youngest manager in Major League Baseball at age 37.

Baldelli would love to follow in past Twins Manager Tom Kelly's footsteps. Kelly was named Twins manager late in the 1986 season and in his first full season as Twins manager in 1987, he led his team to a world championship.

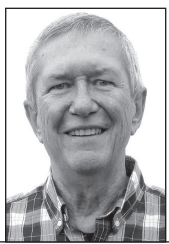
Kelly was Twins manager in 1987 and 1991 when they won the World Series. He managed the team from 1986 to 2001 to become the Twins' longest tenured manager and carved out a record of 1,140-1,244. He was named American League Manager of the Year in 1991.

But, let's forget about Kelly for the moment and talk about Baldelli.

From the moment Baldelli was introduced to the media and to the public last November, words swirled around Major League Baseball that this untested leader would no doubt succeed as a Major League manager.

Baldelli's players have been most complimentary to their new manager. They recognize a young former Major League player who knows baseball from A to Z.

Baldelli doesn't spend much time on the first step of the



Reflections
HOWARD LESTRUD

dugout. Instead, he's right on the bench beside his players. He is also most often a leader who let's his players be themselves.

A young manager who is not afraid to try something new, strategy wise, Baldelli thrives on decision making. In his first exposure to managing against a National League team (Phillies), Baldelli was credited by former Twin Roy Smalley with doing "a perfect job."

Baldelli didn't win that first National League foe but he took it on the chin as a tough competitor. He praised his troops for their performance, even though it was in a loss. "They really kept battling," he said.

Analytics are big in sports, and especially baseball. Baldelli cut his teeth on analytics when he worked for the Tampa Bay Rays.

From Wikipedia, we learn that Baldelli quickly progressed through the minor leagues and made his MLB debut with the Tampa Bay Devil Rays on opening day 2003. During his first two seasons in the majors, he established himself as an excellent offensive and defensive outfielder, coming in third place in voting for American League Rookie of the Year.

Baldelli's career was derailed by a rare metabolic/muscular disorder that caused frequent soft tissue injuries, fatigue, and other ailments, according to Wikipedia. He was unable to play

in 2005, and missed significant time over the following seasons as doctors struggled to diagnose and treat his condition.

Baldelli struggled with retirement and finally called it quits in October of 2010 playing with the Rays.

Following retirement, Baldelli spent three years in the Tampa Bays organization as a roving minor league instructor and special assistant to baseball operations.

Baldelli became a first base coach for the Rays in 2014. He was promoted to major league field coordinator in November of 2017.

It's refreshing to have some new blood, and young blood at that, in the manager's seat for the Twins.

Let's face it though, Baldelli will only be as good as the players that Derek Fawley and Thad Levine supply him. WIN TWINS! WIN BALDELLI!



ROCCO BALDELLI