

Editorials are the institutional voice of The Free Press and independent of the newsroom reporting staff

## OUR VIEW: NOOR TRIAL

# Judge unwise to throttle trial access

One of the biggest murder trials in Minnesota history will open Monday, but restrictions on access will prevent citizens from getting the whole story.

Restrictions imposed by the judge on media and public attendance in the courtroom will put the story in the hands of the government instead of an independent media.

### Why it matters

A Hennepin County District judge has restricted media and public access in a high profile murder case involving a former Minneapolis police officer.

Hennepin County District Court Judge Kathryn L. Quaintance decided to hold the trial in one of the smallest courtrooms in the Hennepin County Government Center, setting limits on how many reporters, family and members of the public may attend.

Quaintance said the restrictions were aimed at maintaining “order and decorum” in the case of former Minneapolis Police officer Mohamed Noor, who is charged with murdering Justine Ruszczyk Damond.

Damond was shot by Noor in a bizarre case. She called police reporting a neighborhood incident, only to die at the hands of Noor who discharged his weapon from inside his squad car as Damond approached it.

The judge limited media to eight spots in the courtroom and the public to 11. Media were allowed on a first-come first-serve basis. While the Star Tribune, KARE 11, KSTP TV, Minnesota Public Radio and the Associated Press were allowed to attend in person, all other local media were relegated to the overflow room where the important nuances of the proceeding will likely be lost in a limited video feed.

On Friday, the judge put further restrictions on press coverage banning the press from seeing body cam video, and suggesting lawyers and others face sanctions if they give interviews. A coalition of media organizations requested a meeting immediately next week with the chief judge in Hennepin County to resolve these issues and suggested the restrictions are unconstitutional.

News organizations and First Amendment groups, including the Minnesota Society of Professional Journalists, have called for the judge to change the courtroom to the largest possible to accommodate a very important public interest in this case. Some Hennepin County courtrooms can hold nearly 100 people.

In fact, having such a high profile trial in such a small courtroom — one with only three rows of seating — will likely make the trial more uncomfortable for those who have to testify as they are very near the audience.

While the judge has the authority to manage the courtroom, the restrictions on public and media access in this case overreach and are an unnecessary infringement of First Amendment rights to public access of a public proceeding.

The restrictions of the court are unprecedented in the history of Minnesota jurisprudence. They are an egregious breach of the public trust.

We urge the chief judge in Hennepin County and the Minnesota Supreme Court administration to change the room in this case to allow the largest possible space and open access to the public who rely on an independent media to report the news of this important trial. And we urge them to drop onerous restrictions to press coverage that may indeed be unconstitutional.

*(Editor's note: Free Press Editor Joe Spear is the president of the Minnesota Society of Professional Journalists.)*

## OTHER VIEW

# Trump averts disaster of his own creation

New York Daily News

“The Special Olympics will be funded, I just told my people,” quoth the gracious leader, days after his own secretary of education endured a righteous bipartisan grilling over plans to slash \$17 million in funding for one of America’s most inspiring and unifying annual events. Thursday afternoon, Trump claimed he had only heard about the cut “this morning.”

See if you can follow: Trump 1) demands massive tax cuts, a windfall to

corporations and the wealthy above all, that balloon budget deficits and debt to record levels, 2) proposes a budget that, in response to declining government revenue, slashes domestic discretionary spending every which way, eviscerating funding for public housing and the social safety net while boosting expenditures on the military and his border wall, 3) lets a member of his own Cabinet be thrown to the wolves; 4) swoops in like a hero to spare one beloved program from the chopping block.



## YOUR VIEWS

# More plausible reasons for tuition increases

In Thursday’s Free Press, Bob Jentges claims that tuition costs have risen because of involvement by the federal government, without ever saying precisely what kind of involvement or how it has affected the costs. His claim strikes us as bizarre.

Here are several more plausible explanations.

1. In order to provide up-to-date instruction and involve students in research, science laboratories have required increasingly expensive technology and equipment. The amount of electronic equipment in other classrooms, faculty offices and computer labs has also increased significantly.

2. Quality education is inherently labor intensive. Teachers cannot be replaced by machines.

3. There have been increased demands from parents and students for on-campus services of all kinds.

4. The quality of athletic facilities has increased dramatically, not only for varsity sports but also for exercise equipment and fitness programs available to all students.

5. Co-curricular activities that benefit student learning and leadership skills have also become more expensive.

6. Food service and student residences offer options not available 60-70 years ago.

All these have contributed to the increased costs of higher education.

Yes, Title IX has increased the attention given to women’s sports, but the goal has been equal access; more elaborate programs have other causes.

And, yes, federal student aid has required people to administer the program, but financial aid has reduced the overall cost of tuition, not increased it. Both public and private colleges are working hard to control and reduce costs where possible, while seeking to increase significantly scholarship assistance from both public and private sources.

If one wants to address increased costs, the causes need to be identified correctly.

*Darrell Jodock, professor emeritus, Gustavus Adolphus College and William Nelsen, former president, Scholarship America*

### State should invest in ‘U’

I am a firm supporter of all higher education institutions and opportunities in Minnesota. However, I am particularly concerned about the future of my alma mater, the University of Minnesota.

The ‘U’ is Minnesota’s only land-grant university. Its mission extends

beyond the educational borders of each campus to include extension and research. As a farmer that uses the university’s ag research and outreach, I am troubled by the chronic underfunding of ‘U’ budget requests in recent years.

We need a strong ‘U’ to generate new cropping practices and help farmers with the next animal health pandemic — which will happen. I want a quality ‘U’ to train our future ag and veterinary specialists to lead the next generation of agriculturalists. We need a successful ‘U’ to help solve Minnesota’s water, energy and health-care challenges.

I do not believe Minnesotans want to lower the quality of education, research and outreach we depend on from the university.

I urge legislative leaders to provide the funding that is critical for the future of higher education by supporting the U’s budget request. My family, our family farm business, our state economy, environment and citizens are counting on a strong University of Minnesota.

An investment in our state’s flagship university system is an investment in a strong future for Minnesota.

*Patrick Duncanson Mapleton*

## NOT REAL NEWS

# ‘Sharia Rights’ video bogus

The Associated Press

A roundup of some of the most popular but completely untrue stories and visuals of the week. None of these is legit, even though they were shared widely on social media. The Associated Press checked these out. Here are the real facts:

**Claim:** California Rep. Maxine Waters, House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and Vermont Sen. Bernie Sanders have passed only six bills during their combined 67 years in office.

**The facts:** The three Democratic members of Congress have together served more than 80 years and have sponsored a total of 13 bills that became law. The false claim about their combined years of service and number of bills passed is circulating on Facebook.

According to Congress.gov, the government’s official website for federal legislative information, Waters has sponsored three bills in her 28 years in office, all of which have passed, including the National Flood Insurance Program Extension Act of 2010.

Sanders has sponsored three bills that have passed during his 28 years in office, including the Veterans Compensation Cost-of-Living Adjustment Act, which increased rates of compensation for disabled veterans.

Pelosi, who was voted speaker of the house for the second time in January, has sponsored seven bills that have been enacted during her 32 years, including the Housing and Economic Recovery Act of 2008, which was introduced to address the mortgage crisis, and the Economic Stimulus Act of 2008, which was passed to help boost the economy. In her time as House speaker, she has played a major role in passing numerous bills, including well-known laws like the Affordable Care Act.

**Claim:** Muslims in California are asking people to not decorate for Easter or Christmas this year out of respect.

**The facts:** There have been no documented cases of any prominent Muslim leaders or Islamic organiza-



Rep. Maxine Waters, D-Calif., the chairwoman of the House Financial Services committee, has sponsored three bills in her 28 years in Congress, each of which has become law.

The Associated Press

tions in California requesting that people not decorate for Easter or Christmas this year, as posts circulating social media suggest. The Council on American-Islamic Relations, the nation’s largest Islam and civil rights advocacy group, said the claim was baseless and conspiratorial in nature.

“I’ve never in my life heard Muslims say you can’t decorate for Easter, Christmas or whatever,” Ibrahim Hooper, CAIR national communications director, told The Associated Press. “Muslims are not opposed to Christians celebrating Easter, they just don’t celebrate it themselves,” he said.

Ishaq Pathan, deputy director of Islamic Networks Group, said his organization had not heard of any such reports. “I’m inclined to believe it’s a hoax,” he said. This claim was circulating widely days after a mosque in Escondido, California, was set on fire, and weeks after the attacks in New Zealand.

**Claim:** Video footage said to show Muslims rallying in New York City demanding their “Sharia Rights.”

**The facts:** A video circulating on social media that claims to show Muslims in New York rallying for Sharia law has been falsely captioned.

The footage was taken during the March 24 “United Against Islamophobia” rally in Times Square. Muslim leaders and allies held the march to combat Islamophobia and show solidarity following the mosque attacks in New Zealand, where at least 50 people were killed on March 15.

Hossam Gamea, outreach director for Majlis Ash-Shura: Islamic Leadership Council of New York, one of the organizers of the event, confirmed to The Associated Press that the footage showed the Sunday rally against Islamophobia.

**Claim:** Disney-Pixar to release “Boo,” a film spinoff from the animated “Monsters, Inc.” franchise, in July 2020.

**The facts:** Disney is not releasing a sequel to the popular animated buddy movie “Monsters, Inc.” this summer, despite social media posts circulating what appears to be a movie poster for “Boo,” which is the name of the child featured in the 2001 movie.

The poster, which shows a grown-up Boo with a teddy bear standing in a doorway, says “SHE KNOWS MONSTERS ARE REAL. JULY 2020.”

The same poster circulated widely in 2016. At that time, an Instagram user took credit for the poster saying it represented a concept for a movie. A Disney-Pixar spokeswoman, who declined to be identified by name, told The Associated Press in an email that Pixar is not releasing “Boo” in 2020 and has no such movie in the works.

According to Associated Press reporting, CEO Bob Iger said Disney is planning a “Monsters, Inc.” series for its upcoming streaming service.

*This is part of The Associated Press’ ongoing effort to fact-check misinformation that is shared widely online.*

FOUNDED IN 1887

# The Free Press

1st Amendment: Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.

STEVE JAMESON, Publisher

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