

Money for Medicine Madness: Hizzoner Hits a Headline

From the story by Piya Sinha-Roy in the Canberra Times of Australia, to the piece by AP Entertainment Reporter Anthony McCartney, to the work of miscellaneous bloggers on the Internet, it seems that virtually everybody picked up on the phrase: Money for Medicine Madness.

It was uttered by Judge Michael Pastor toward the end of his 32-minute excoriation of Dr. Conrad Murray in the physician's involuntary manslaughter sentencing hearing in Los Angeles Tuesday.

The death of pop superstar Michael Jackson took a back seat to the judge's stern lecture and throw-the-book-at-him choice of language.

Those who oppose cameras in the courtroom make many arguments, but they essentially boil down to this:

1. It will change juror behavior and testimony, thereby affecting due process rights in criminal cases and just outcomes in civil trials.
2. It will change the behavior of lawyers, encouraging grandstanding aimed less at justice for the immediate client than marketing for new ones.
3. It will change the behavior of judges, who may have political ambitions or simply want to keep the elected seat they now occupy, reducing them to performing-and-pandering politicians.

So it should come as no surprise in the coming days when, in hushed tones, the colleagues of Judge Michael Pastor -- the judge in the Conrad Murray case -- say, Tsk, tsk, tsk.

They will say that Hizzoner didn't just come up with the snappy phrase "money-for-medicine madness" on the spot. That he wrote it in advance, cogitated on it and considered its impact. Or worse, maybe somebody wrote it for him. The outrage. The scandal. The shame upon the black-robed judiciary.

What's next? Horton Hears a Who?

To all of this I say: baloney (with due respect for judges like retired Justice David Souter, who said cameras would come in over his dead body; to them I say: boiled-beef baloney).

By the time Judge Pastor laid down his wrath and meted out his sentence on Murray, the deal was already sealed. Everybody knew that the man who killed Michael Jackson would get the max, and that's exactly what happened.

The only thing the judge did by his nifty alliteration was make life easier for the copy desks at newspapers around the globe.

That, and create a "sound bite" that even the most disinterested nonlawyer on the planet can appreciate, understand and repeat. Now everybody actually understands what the judge wanted to communicate to the defendant, the court and the public.

And this is the terrible thing we are so worried about? Three cheers for concise court communication. Nice move, judge. Keep up the good work.

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