

People v Trump

2024 NY Slip Op 31375(U)

April 1, 2024

Supreme Court, New York County

Docket Number: Indictment No. 71543-23

Judge: Juan M. Merchan

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SUPREME COURT OF THE STATE OF NEW YORK
COUNTY OF NEW YORK: PART 59

THE PEOPLE OF THE STATE OF NEW YORK

- against -

DONALD J. TRUMP

Defendant

DECISION and ORDER

People's Motion for
Clarification or Confirmation
of An Order Restricting
Extrajudicial Statements

Indictment No. 71543-23

JUAN M. MERCHAN, A.J.S.C.:

BACKGROUND

Defendant is charged with 34 counts of Falsifying Business Records in the First Degree in violation of Penal Law § 175.10. The charges arise from allegations that Defendant attempted to conceal an illegal scheme to influence the 2016 presidential election. Specifically, the People claim that Defendant directed an attorney who worked for his company to pay \$130,000 to an adult film actress shortly before the election to prevent her from publicizing an alleged sexual encounter with Defendant. It is further alleged that Defendant thereafter reimbursed the attorney for the payments through a series of checks and caused business records associated with the repayments to be falsified to conceal his criminal conduct. Trial on this matter is scheduled to commence on April 15, 2024.

On February 22, 2024, the People filed a motion for an order restricting extrajudicial statements by Defendant for the duration of the trial. The restrictions sought were consistent, in part, with those upheld in the U.S. Court of Appeals for the D.C. Circuit in *United States v. Trump*, 88 F4th 990 [2023]. On March 4, 2024, Defendant filed a response in opposition, arguing that his speech may only be restricted by the application of a more strenuous standard than applied by the D.C. Circuit and that the People had failed to meet that standard in this case.

On March 26, 2024, this Court issued its Decision and Order Restricting Extrajudicial Statements by Defendant.

On March 28, 2024, the People filed a pre-motion letter seeking clarification or confirmation of the Order as to whether it proscribes extrajudicial speech against family members of the Court, the District Attorney, and of all other individuals mentioned in the Order. Today, April 1, 2024,

Defendant filed his opposition to the People's motion. The People have today also filed a supplement to their pre-motion letter.

DISCUSSION

The Defendant has a constitutional right to speak to the American voters freely, and to defend himself publicly. The Order issued on March 26, 2024, was narrowly tailored to protect that right. To clarify, the Order *did not* proscribe Defendant's speech as it relates to the family members of the District Attorney or this Court. The Court now amends the March 26, 2024, Order to include the family members of this Court and of the District Attorney of New York County. This Decision and Order is equally narrowly tailored and in no way prevents Defendant from responding to alleged political attacks but does address Defendant's recent speech.

One day following the issuance of said Order, Defendant made several extrajudicial statements attacking a family member of this Court. Contrary to the position Defendant took in his opposition to the People's February 22, 2024 motion for an order restricting extrajudicial statements, i.e. that his statements "plainly constitute core political speech on matters of great public concern and criticism of major public figures," Defendant's opposition to 2/22/24 Motion, pgs. 8-9, this pattern of attacking family members of presiding jurists and attorneys assigned to his cases serves no legitimate purpose. It merely injects fear in those assigned or called to participate in the proceedings, that not only they, *but their family members as well*, are "fair game" for Defendant's vitriol.

Courts are understandably concerned about the First Amendment rights of a defendant, especially when the accused is a public figure. *U.S. v. Ford*, 830 F2d 596 [1987]. That is because "the impact of an indictment upon the general public is so great that few defendants will be able to overcome it, much less turn it to their advantage." 29 Stan.L.Rev. 607, 611. The circumstances of the instant matter, however, are different. The conventional 'David vs. Goliath' roles are no longer in play as demonstrated by the singular power Defendant's words have on countless others. The threats to the integrity of the judicial proceeding are no longer limited to the swaying of minds but on the willingness of individuals, both private and public, to perform their lawful duty before this Court. This is evidenced by the People's representations that "multiple potential witnesses have already expressed grave concerns [...] about their own safety and that of their family members should they appear as witnesses against defendant." People's 3/28/24 Pre-Motion Letter. It is no longer just a mere possibility or a reasonable likelihood that there exists a threat to the integrity of the judicial proceedings. The threat is very real. Admonitions are not enough, nor is reliance on self-

restraint. The average observer, must now, after hearing Defendant's recent attacks, draw the conclusion that if they become involved in these proceedings, even tangentially, they should worry not only for themselves, *but for their loved ones as well*. Such concerns will undoubtedly interfere with the fair administration of justice and constitutes a direct attack on the Rule of Law itself. Again, all citizens, called upon to participate in these proceedings, whether as a juror, a witness, or in some other capacity, must now concern themselves not only with their own personal safety, but with the safety and the potential for personal attacks upon their loved ones. That reality cannot be overstated.

Defendant, in his opposition of April 1, 2024, desperately attempts to justify and explain away his dangerous rhetoric by "turning the tables" and blaming those he attacks. The arguments counsel makes are at best strained and at worst baseless misrepresentations which are uncorroborated and rely upon innuendo and exaggeration. Put mildly, the assortment of allegations presented as "facts" and cobbled together, result in accusations that are disingenuous and not rational. To argue that the most recent attacks, which included photographs, were "necessary and appropriate in the current environment," is farcical.

The People argue in their submission that Defendant's attacks, which include referring to a prosecution witness last week as "death", are based on "transparent falsehoods." People's 4/1/24 Supplement at pg. 2. The People provide a plethora of compelling arguments in support of their claim that Defendant's conduct is deliberate and intended to intimidate this Court and impede the orderly administration of this trial.

The People request in their submission of April 1, 2024, "that any order this Court enters clarifying or confirming the scope of its March 26 Order should also include the relief the People requested in our February 22 Motion for a Protective Order; namely, that defendant be expressly warned that any statutory right he may have to access to juror names will be forfeited by continued harassing or disruptive conduct." People's 4/1/24 Supplement at pg. 7. The Court at that time reserved decision on the People's motion. The People's motion is now **GRANTED**.

It remains this Court's fundamental responsibility to protect the integrity of the criminal process and to control disruptive influences in the courtroom. *See Sheppard v. Maxwell*, 384 U.S. 333 [1966]. "Neither prosecutors, counsel for defense, *the accused*, witnesses, court staff nor enforcement officers coming under the jurisdiction of the court should be permitted to frustrate its function." *Id.* at 363 (emphasis added).

Consistent with the decision dated March 26, 2024, the uncontested record reflecting the Defendant's prior (and most recent), extrajudicial statements establishes a sufficient risk to the

administration of justice consistent with the standard set forth in *Landmark Communications, Inc. v. Virginia*, and there exists no less restrictive means to prevent such risk. 435 US 829, 842-843 [1978].

THEREFORE, Defendant is hereby put on notice that he will forfeit any statutory right he may have to access juror names if he engages in any conduct that threatens the safety and integrity of the jury or the jury selection process; and it is hereby

ORDERED, that the People's motion for clarification is **GRANTED**. The Court's Order of March 26, 2024, did not contemplate the family members of this Court or of the District Attorney. It is therefore not necessary for this Court to determine whether the statements were intended to materially interfere with these proceedings; and it is further

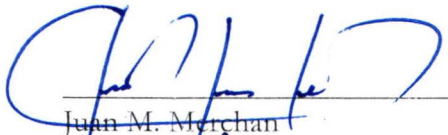
ORDERED, that the Court's Order of March 26, 2024, is amended as indicated below. Defendant is directed to refrain from:

- a. Making or directing others to make public statements about known or reasonably foreseeable witnesses concerning their potential participation in the investigation or in this criminal proceeding;
- b. Making or directing others to make public statements about (1) counsel in the case other than the District Attorney, (2) members of the court's staff and the District Attorney's staff, or (3) the family members of any counsel, staff member, the Court or the District Attorney, if those statements are made with the intent to materially interfere with, or to cause others to materially interfere with, counsel's or staff's work in this criminal case, or with the knowledge that such interference is likely to result; and
- c. Making or directing others to make public statements about any prospective juror or any juror in this criminal proceeding.

FURTHER, Defendant is hereby warned that any violation of this Order will result in sanctions under Judiciary Law §§ 750(A)(3) and 751.

The foregoing constitutes the Decision and Order of the Court.

Dated: April 1, 2024
New York, New York



Juan M. Merchan
Judge of the Court Claims
Acting Justice of the Supreme Court

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HON. J. MERCHAN