

A206WX

101ycz2eyyx
Scotus-Sirhan 280

WASHINGTON AP - The Supreme Court Monday declined to review the California court restrictions on publicity surrounding the trial of Sirhan B. Sirhan, the accused assassin of Sen. Robert F. Kennedy.

The trial court has forbidden witnesses, attorneys and public officials from making any outside disclosures of evidence, including any statements Sirhan may have made.

Sirhan, charged with the fatal shooting of Kennedy at a moment of triumph in his pursuit of the presidency, is scheduled to go on trial Jan. 7.

Los Angeles Dist. Atty. Evelle J. Younger asked for a Supreme Court hearing on the publicity order. Younger said the order should be lifted to prevent irresponsible rumors in the future that Sirhan was not tried fairly.

The prosecutor said the curbs on information violated both the freedom of the press and the freedom of speech. He suggested the time had come for the Supreme Court to consider the necessity to strike a balance between a free press and fair trial.

Previous decisions on trial publicity have led courts to try to impose as broad a gag rule as possible to avoid reversals of convictions, Younger said. He suggested the California curbs suppressed "the public's only possible sources of information about a matter of the most intense public interest."

Attorneys for the judges involved said the court order was aimed at lawyers and public officials and not at news accounts. They said the freedom of the press is not affected, whereas a fair trial would be impossible if publicity ran rampant.

Sirhan is accused of the shooting of Sen. Kennedy as he celebrated his victory in the California primary at a climax of his campaign for the Democratic nomination for Presidency.

The first order was issued the day after Kennedy's death. The publicity curb was continued in a modified order August 2 by Judge Richard Schnauer.

LL:Opes Dec. 16