

News Roundup

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Jeff is away today, so I will round up the week's legal news on his behalf.

UNC-Chapel Hill professor killed. [This story](#) broke last week, but campus is still reeling from the news that beloved pharmacy professor Feng Liu was killed when he was robbed during a lunchtime walk near campus. He was apparently beaten over the head with a landscaping stone by assailants who stole his wallet. Two suspects, both with felony records, were quickly arrested and charged with armed robbery and murder. One had just finished a term of post-release supervision a few weeks ago and the other was wearing an electronic monitor as a condition of pretrial release for pending charges in Durham. The dynamics of the case obviously call to mind the murder of UNC's Eve Carson in 2008. The case will surely raise questions about pretrial release and risk management ([this local Chapel Hill story](#) already raised some of them), but for now my thoughts are with the family and friends of Professor Liu, who was by all accounts a wonderful man.

Lovette acquitted. One of the men convicted of murdering Eve Carson, Laurence Lovette Jr., [was found not guilty this week](#) of the murder of Duke graduate student Abhijit Mahato. Mr. Mahato was robbed and shot in the head in his Durham apartment in 2008. Though testimony of a purported confession and links to the Carson case were allowed at trial, Lovette's counsel focused on the lack of physical evidence tying him to the crime. [The Herald-Sun](#) thoughtfully praised the judicial system—prosecution, defense, judge, and jury—for its integrity in the handling of the case. Meanwhile Mr. Mahato's family, who had earlier sent a moving [letter to the district attorney's office](#) about their son's case, understandably lamented their inability to find closure after the acquittal. Lovette is serving a sentence of life without parole for Carson's murder.

General Assembly winding down. Let's move on to lighter, but still important, news. With a budget agreement in place the legislative session is quickly coming to an end. The main sticking points in the budget were related to teacher pay, but there is a lot of criminal justice action in the bill ([S 744](#)) too. Among other things, the bill:

- Transfers the SBI from the Department of Justice to the Department of Public Safety;
- Eliminates grant support to the N.C. Victims Assistance Network;
- Removes all misdemeanants, *including impaired drivers*, from the state prison system; expanding on changes made in 2011, all misdemeanor sentences in excess of 90 days and all DWI sentences, regardless of length, will be served through the Statewide Misdemeanant Confinement Program; and
- Creates two "behavior modification facilities," one in Burke County, one in Robeson, for the housing of all probationers ordered to a term of confinement in response to violation (CRV).

The latest money report on the bill is available [here](#).

Chief Judge McGee. Effective today, Chief Justice Parker [has designated](#) Judge Linda McGee as chief judge of the North Carolina Court of Appeals. Chief Judge McGee replaces John Martin, who retired today after a distinguished career. Congratulations and best wishes to Chief Judge Martin in his retirement, and to Chief Judge McGee in her new role! In related news, Chief Judge Martin's retirement leaves a vacancy on the court that will be filled by election this fall. A special one-week filing period for the seat opens today and runs through August 8. Details from the State Board

of Elections are available [here](#). The \$1,331 filing fee seems a small price to pay for a chance to have know-it-all School of Government faculty members comment on your work on a blog!