

News Roundup

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A Raleigh murder made national news this week with reports indicating that the suspect told a 911 dispatcher that taking too much cough medicine may have contributed to the killing. Late last week, Matthew James Phelps was charged with murdering his wife, Lauren Ashley-Nicole Phelps. According to [WRAL](#), Matthew called 911 to report that he had awoken from a dream to discover that Lauren was dead and that he was covered in blood. He also told the dispatcher that he had taken too much cough medicine, which he was using to help him sleep. The News & Observer has a story [here](#) that explores whether an ingredient in cough medicine can cause hallucinations, psychosis, or violent behavior. Keep reading for more news.

NC-CRED on Confederate Monuments. The News & Observer [reports](#) that the North Carolina Commission on Racial and Ethnic Disparities in the Criminal Justice System (NC-CRED) passed a resolution and released a statement this week calling for the removal of Confederate monuments and symbols at North Carolina courthouses. The group also called for the repeal of the Cultural History Artifact Management and Patriotism Act of 2015, part of which enacted the state law that [limits the circumstances](#) under which such monuments can be removed from public property. NC-CRED is comprised of current and former North Carolina judges, prosecutors, defense attorneys, as well as other criminal justice advocates.

Child Pornography Conspiracy. The Charlotte Observer [reports](#) that three men pleaded guilty in federal court in Asheville to participating in a conspiracy to pose online as teenage girls in order to dupe boys into sending the men sexually explicit images of themselves. Using a strategy known as “capping,” the men would create fake online female personas and use those personas to encourage boys to send them sexually explicit Skype videos. The videos were secretly recorded, cataloged, and distributed to other members of the conspiracy. The men will be sentenced later this year.

Menendez. As New Jersey newspaper The Star-Ledger [reports](#), a federal corruption trial began this week in Newark for sitting U.S. Senator Robert Menendez. Menendez is accused of accepting flights, a hotel stay, and financial contributions from Florida ophthalmologist Salomon Melgen, who himself was found guilty of criminal charges related to Medicare fraud earlier this year, in exchange for using his Senate seat for Melgen’s benefit. In opening statements, a prosecutor told the jury that Menendez “sold his Senate office for a life of luxury he couldn’t afford,” while Menendez’s defense attorney characterized the case as involving gifts between longtime friends.

Report on Obama Clemency Initiative. The News Roundup has [previously noted](#) that as part of an effort to lower sentences for certain non-violent offenders, former President Barack Obama made extensive use of his clemency power during his time in office. A [new report](#) from the United States Sentencing Commission takes a close look at Obama’s clemency initiative. Some of the key findings of the report include that Obama granted 1,716 commutations, more than any other President, and that the average sentence was reduced by 39%, or approximately 140 months.

Unsolved Murders. Two unsolved North Carolina murders are in the news this week. WRAL [reports](#) that UNC Native American sorority Alpha Pi Omega held a vigil in memory of Faith Hedgepeth this week, marking the fifth anniversary of her death. Hedgepeth was a UNC student in September 2012 when she was found dead in an off-campus apartment. According to the [Chapel Hill Police Department](#), the investigation remains active.

The Winston-Salem Journal has a [story](#) this week about the unsolved murder of Jack Atkins, a well-liked Winston-Salem man who was killed in his home in July of this year. Anyone with information about Atkins' murder is asked to contact the Winston-Salem Police Department or CrimeStoppers of Winston-Salem/Forsyth County. Contact information is available at the Journal link.