

News Roundup

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Recent stories of interest include the following:

1. The *News and Observer* [reports](#) that the state House just passed its version of the budget. The last version that I saw -- admittedly, not the final -- included significant cuts to the court system, and deep cuts to the UNC system. The House budget must now be reconciled with the very different Senate budget before a final bill can be sent to the governor.
2. On a happier note, the *News and Observer* also has a [story](#) about a 47-year-old woman who has just graduated from law school, after more than a few scrapes with the law herself in her younger years. She hopes to be a criminal defense lawyer, and doubtless will be able to relate to her clients' predicaments in a way that most lawyers cannot.
3. South Carolina recently completed a substantial overhaul of its sentencing laws. The general idea was to reduce prison costs by encouraging alternatives to incarceration for less-serious offenders, while ensuring harsh punishments for the most dangerous defendants. Sentencing Law and Policy covers it [here](#).
4. Farther afield, the *New York Times* [reports](#) as follows:

New York City agreed on Thursday to pay \$9.9 million, the largest personal settlement in its history, to a man who served almost two decades in prison but was released after evidence surfaced that he had been framed for murder by a corrupt detective.
5. As everyone knows, BP has a massive oil spill/leak/disaster on its hands in the Gulf of Mexico. The federal government has opened a criminal investigation of BP, as the *New York Times* notes [here](#). The usually prosecution-oriented folks at Crime and Consequences ask [here](#) whether the presumption of innocence is being respected.
6. I blogged [here](#) about whether the homes of child pornography offenders are subject to forfeiture. The short answer was maybe so, under federal law, but not under state law. For the first time, a federal court of appeals has addressed the issue, upholding the forfeiture of an Iowa man's house and 19-acre tract. A good summary and analysis of the case is available [here](#).
7. Apparently, FindLaw conducted a [poll](#) that reveals that two-thirds of all Americans can't name a single member of the Supreme Court. Can you name all nine? If so, you're in the top 1%! Justice Thomas was the most widely-recognized member of the Court with a full 19% of Americans able to name him. Ilya Somin at the Volokh Conspiracy [argues](#) that for the most part, citizens are rationally ignorant of the membership of the Court.