

News Roundup

Author : Christopher Tyner

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In a dramatic development in an already dramatic case, Jeffrey Epstein was [found dead](#) over the weekend of apparent suicide in the Manhattan jail where he was being detained prior to trial on sex trafficking charges. Epstein's death has generated a tremendous amount of news, ranging from criticism of his supervision to [conspiratorial speculation](#) about whether he was murdered. It is being [reported](#) that two guards at his unit, one of whom wasn't even a fully credentialed correctional officer, fell asleep and didn't check on Epstein for several hours prior to his death. They later falsified records to cover up that lapse. Attorney General William Barr has ordered the Justice Department's inspector general to investigate Epstein death. Keep reading for more news.

Myers Nominated. The News & Observer [reports](#) that this week President Donald Trump announced his intent to nominate UNC law professor Richard E. Myers to be a judge in the U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of North Carolina. Myers is the Henry Brandis Distinguished Professor of Law and Director of Trial Advocacy at the UNC School of Law. He previously served as an Assistant U.S. Attorney in the Eastern District of North Carolina and the Central District of California.

The Eastern District seat has been vacant since January 2006, longer than any other federal judicial seat in the country. President Trump previously nominated Raleigh attorney Thomas Farr for the seat, but his nomination was blocked in the Senate. President Obama made two nominations for the seat, each of which were blocked in the Senate, including former North Carolina Supreme Court Justice Patricia Timmons-Goodson.

Hickman Pleads. WLOS [reports](#) that former Asheville police officer Christopher Hickman pleaded guilty late last week to communicating threats, assault inflicting serious injury, and felony assault by strangulation – charges which arose from [an incident in 2017](#) where Hickman violently arrested Johnnie Rush after stopping him for jaywalking.

Summer Special. The Burlington Times-News [reports](#) that 14 people were charged in Alamance County with solicitation of prostitution this week in a sting called "Operation Summer Special." The sting operation was conducted as a joint effort between Burlington law enforcement agencies, the SBI, and the U.S. Department of Homeland Security.

Arrested on Duty. South Carolina news outlet The State [reports](#) that the Richland County Sheriff's Department recently had to arrest one of its own deputies during a sting operation to catch people soliciting sex from children. Deputy Derek Vandenharm allegedly solicited sex from an undercover officer who was posing online as a 15-year-old girl. He was on duty, in uniform, and driving his patrol car when he showed up to have sex at the house where he had been led to believe the fictitious girl lived.

Religion Suit. A former Lee County Sheriff's Deputy, Manuel Torres, recently [filed a lawsuit](#) in federal court alleging that his firing from the department was a form of religious discrimination. Torres claims that his religious beliefs prohibit him from being alone with a woman who is not his wife for extended periods of time. Because of this belief, he asked to be exempted from training a female deputy because it would require the two to share a patrol car. His request was denied and eventually he was fired.

Domestic Terrorism. In the wake of the recent anti-immigrant mass shooting in El Paso, NBC News published an interesting [article](#) that discusses how the lack of a federal domestic terrorism criminal offense affects investigations into

violence fueled by notions of white nationalism. The article notes that because the U.S. does not have a federal domestic terrorism offense, ideology-based violence often is treated as either a hate crime or simply as a regular criminal offense. Terrorism investigations are the FBI's number one priority, while hate crime investigations are the agency's fifth priority. The term "domestic terrorism" is defined in 18 U.S.C. §2331, but the criminal penalties statute, 18 U.S.C. §2332, only covers acts taking place outside of the country. Politico [reported](#) this week that Arizona Senator Martha McSally has circulated a [draft bill](#) that would create a domestic terrorism offense.

Bare Your Buttocks. Here at the Criminal Law Blog we strive to keep readers apprised of the current state of North Carolina law regarding [beach attire](#) and [ordinance crimes](#). This week [WECT has a story](#) that's squarely in our wheelhouse – the town of Carolina Beach has amended its public nudity ordinance such that exposing one's "buttocks" no longer violates the local law. The change comes after a beachgoer complained to the town that "female lifeguard uniforms were too skimpy and revealing" and, presumably, violated the ordinance. This is a good opportunity to remind folks that while you now may lawfully display your buttocks at Carolina Beach, a second offense of [wearing a thong](#) at Kure Beach remains a misdemeanor – there's even a [song about it](#).