

News Roundup

Author : Jeff Welty

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There wasn't enough news last week to justify a news roundup, but there sure was this week:

1. The SBI lab saga continues. The president of the Conference of District Attorneys has called for a moratorium on executions until the issues with the lab are resolved, as discussed [here](#). The Conference is also asking for an independent audit of every unit within the lab, as discussed [here](#). Members of the defense bar have suggested that the lab should be reconstituted as an independent entity, not under the Department of Justice. I speculate that the General Assembly will jump into this issue next session.
2. The Highway Patrol has also received some negative attention in recent months. The most recent development on that front is described in [this News and Observer](#) article, which begins: "State troopers should live in the counties where they work and should inform dispatchers by radio anytime someone of the opposite sex is in their cruiser, an advisory panel recommended Wednesday." The linked article details some of the panel's other suggestions, too.
3. Governor Perdue has appointed Special Superior Court Judge Cressie Thigpen to fill the court of appeals seat vacated by Judge Jim Wynn's departure for the Fourth Circuit. (A news story so reporting is [here](#).) The seat will be up for election this fall, and *thirteen people* have filed for it, including Judge Thigpen. (Story [here](#), full list of candidates and description of the "instant runoff" voting procedure that will be used [here](#).)
4. A couple of sentencing stories caught my eye recently, both courtesy of Sentencing Law and Policy. [Here](#) is a story about a serial slasher who, though he failed to kill any of his six victims, received 11 consecutive life sentences plus 433 years in prison. As Doug Berman calculates, "barring any reductions for good behavior, [the defendant] will begin serving his first . . . life sentence[] in the year 2444." (And if he were subject to the life-sentences-are-80-years rule of the *Bowden* era inmates, he'd be eligible for release in 3324.) Perhaps more portentous legally is [this](#) story about a California court that has applied *Graham*, the Supreme Court case barring the imposition of LWOP sentences on juveniles for non-homicide offenses, to invalidate a juvenile carjacker's 84-year sentence. It will be interesting to see if other courts -- including our courts -- let the *Graham* genie out of the LWOP bottle.
5. Some stories that are farther afield, but that some folks might nonetheless find interesting: as reported [here](#), a Michigan judge has fined a juror \$250 for posting a Facebook message declaring a defendant guilty while his trial was ongoing. Meanwhile, [this story](#) called my attention to the website [UnemployedJD](#), created by a recent law school graduate who *went on a hunger strike* to express her "disillusion[ment with] law school employment statistics . . . and antiquated career counseling programs." Inadequate career services programs for lawyers: the civil rights battle of our time? Japan has, for the first time, [released](#) pictures of its execution chamber, where hangings are conducted. And in Mexico, the level of drug-related violence appears still to be rising. Over 70 migrants were recently massacred, [apparently for refusing to work as drug "mules."](#) and the prosecutor assigned to investigate the killings has [disappeared](#).

That last story, in particular, makes me feel lucky to live where I do, and to do the work that I do. Happy Labor Day to all.