

John McCroskey Commentary: Our Legal System Can't Find Someone Guilty and Mean It

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In last Saturday's Chronicle, we were reminded about the murder of little 2-year-old Koralynn Fister because the monster who allegedly killed her was back in court claiming he'd been duped. Tricked because he was supposedly misled by his attorney and drowsy from medicine. Anyone who has ever sat through a court proceeding knows that before a plea like that is accepted, there are a number of questions asked and answered by the defendant. Way too many in my opinion, but that is the court process.

There is no way anyone could be confused about what they are doing.

As I read his recanted guilty plea attempt, what the poor baby (Reeder) was really worried about was the poor regard he was held in by other inmates. They referred to him as a "rapist," which I suspect affected his self-esteem and made him feel bad. And it was The Chronicle's fault for writing about this horrible crime.

Yeah, that's the problem, not him or what he did.

But I predict he'll get his new trial on appeal because there is almost always another appeal. We've had three trials and convictions of a murderer (Kenneth Slerf) and two of them (so far) overturned on appeal. One for nothing more than what Judge James Lawler did: acknowledging the suspect wasn't believable, or the witness was more believable. I hope that doesn't happen but nothing surprises me anymore. Our courts too often just can't find someone guilty and mean it.

Then there is the man that allegedly attacked a couple paramedics fueling their ambulance in Centralia. The suspect will be evaluated by mental health and at some point a determination will be made whether he can be held for trial. But what if he can't? This is the part of the gun control debate that isn't being discussed; mental health and what to do with people who are like this guy, or worse. And there are lots of them. Over the years, we have dismantled the mental health system, and many just end up in jail. Jails were never a good place for them, but sadly it's too often it's the only place.

But problems like mental health are hard and expensive. And some people are broken and can't be fixed regardless what you do. So the debate is about taking guns and tracking law-abiding folks, who could find themselves being attacked by someone just like this guy.

Or the guy in Alabama, who killed the bus driver who tried to keep him from taking kids off his school bus. Then, he held a little boy hostage for seven days until rescued by law enforcement. That guy had problems yet there was apparently nothing more that could have been done despite his bizarre behavior. He was arrested for menacing earlier without incident, and was pending a court appearance when this all happened.

Somehow we have to find a way to deal with guys like this. But it will be hard, and there will be court fights and many of the same people who demand guns be taken from people like me, aren't interested in dealing with guys like these. They just want to control guns.

Finally, on last Saturday's front page was John A. Booth, our local triple-killer who's back here on appeal. Of course he is.

So far his trial has cost us in excess of \$141,000 and it will likely only get worse as long as he files appeals in Lewis County.

I understand paying for a trial attorney — one attorney — to be sure a defendant gets a fair trial. And I don't care if they appeal on their dime afterwards.

But once they have their fair trial and are found guilty why do we have to pay for their endless appeals?

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