

Potential jurors hear death penalty questions

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BUNNELL -- Prosecutors here have sought to make the concept of the death penalty more concrete for prospective jurors who might decide whether a man accused of killing his daughter's mother and her boyfriend deserves to pay with his life if convicted of the murders.

And the death penalty will continue being a key question today as jury selection enters its fourth day in the trial of William Gregory, 27, who is accused in the shotgun slayings of Skyler Meekins, 17, and Daniel Dyer, 22, near Flagler Beach on Aug. 21, 2007.

Gregory and Meekins had a daughter, Kyla, who is now 4 years old. Meekins had broken off her relationship with Gregory and started dating Dyer.

Prosecutors Chris France and Jacquelyn Roys told potential jurors that having a philosophical discussion about the death penalty was one thing. But actually supporting it as a juror in a specific case is quite another.

"Do you have a problem recommending to the judge that the death penalty be imposed for William Gregory?" Roys said as she turned and motioned with her arm toward where Gregory sat.

The prospective juror responded that if the circumstances supported it, he would recommend death.

Gregory watched but did not show any emotion or reaction.

Potential jurors can expect more questions about the death penalty and whether they knew the victims or the accused, whether they read about the case in the newspaper or did business with a kennel run by some of Meekins' family. All of those reasons have led to the exclusion of some candidates and prolonged jury selection.

Also, Skyler Meekins participated in sports at Flagler Palm Coast High School, so some potential jurors knew of her through their children or other connections to the school. That led to the elimination of still more potential jurors.

But Circuit Judge Kim C. Hammond was optimistic late Wednesday.

"I think we are heading in the right direction... I think that hopefully by midafternoon (today) we will have a jury if we don't exhaust the panel for some reason."

The court needs 12 jurors plus two alternates to begin deliberations. If jurors find Gregory guilty, the trial moves into the penalty phase, when the panel will recommend either life in prison without parole or death.

Gregory's defense attorney, Garry Wood, questioned potential jurors about whether they would be willing to consider life in prison without parole instead of death. He also asked them whether they would take into account someone's family history and upbringing in reaching their recommendation.

Wood told prospective jurors that it was awkward for him to talk about the penalty phase.

"Our position in this case is that Mr. Gregory is not guilty of anything," Wood said.