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Governor appoints Judge Evelyn Z. Wilson to fill vacancy on the Supreme Court of Kansas

Governor Laura Kelly today appointed Judge Evelyn Z. Wilson to the Kansas Supreme Court. Wilson will fill the vacancy created by the retirement of Justice Lee Johnson.

“Judge Wilson stood out from the field of candidates for her experience, her character and her commitment to Kansas,” Governor Kelly said.

“As Governor, there are few decisions I will make that are as important as appointing a Supreme Court justice,” the Governor said. “Supreme Court justices must be experienced in many areas of the law, they must be talented legal thinkers and they must be ready for the administrative duties justices perform as they oversee the rest of the judicial branch.

“Finding someone with the highest level of integrity and knowledge is difficult enough, but justices on the Kansas Supreme Court also must possess qualities reflecting values that make Kansas unique.

“Judge Wilson brings something quintessentially Kansan to our highest court.

“In a state with a rural tradition and a diversifying economy, she knows the struggles of both the family farmer and the corporate board of directors. And in a time of immense challenges in our criminal justice system, she has spent the last 15 years tackling those issues on the front lines while being a respected leader in the judicial branch.”

Wilson currently is Chief Judge for the 3rd Judicial District, Shawnee County, where she oversees the day-to-day operations of the court in addition to carrying a full caseload. She
served Shawnee County as a District Judge from 2004 until her appointment as Chief Judge in 2014.

Her prior experience includes over a decade of private practice civil litigation experience, including time as a managing partner, and time as an adjunct professor at Washburn University School of Law. Wilson is active in the legal community as a member of the Kansas Bar Foundation, Kansas District Judges Association, Kansas Women Attorneys Association and Topeka Bar Association.

Wilson also is active in the community; she is a member of First Lutheran Church in Topeka, and helped spearhead the development of the Shawnee County Crisis Intervention Team.

A native Kansan, Wilson was born in Smith Center, and graduated as valedictorian of Smith Center High School. She graduated from Bethany College in 1982 with a bachelor’s degree in business and from Washburn University School of Law in 1985.

“I am humbled and honored by the trust Governor Kelly and the Supreme Court Nominating Commission have put in me,” Wilson said. “Our courts must ensure that the law is followed in every case and that we honor and respect the legal rights of each person in our courts. I pledge to work every day to meet that solemn responsibility.

“I look forward to this new challenge and to working with six brilliant and dedicated Supreme Court colleagues to address the difficult and important legal issues that affect our state.”

Kansas Supreme Court Justices are appointed through a merit-based nomination process. When there is a vacancy on the court, the Supreme Court Nominating Commission submits the names of three nominees to the Governor, and the Governor then has 60 days to make the appointment.

To be eligible, a nominee must be at least 30 years old and admitted to practice in Kansas and engaged in the practice of law for at least 10 years, whether as a lawyer, judge or full-time teacher at an accredited law school.

Every justice must stand for a retention vote in the general election following their initial appointment. If retained by voters at that time, they then face retention votes every six years for as long as they serve on the bench.

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