

Opinion

Editorial: Chief justice left mark in years on high court

By The Editorial Advisory Board

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Kansas Supreme Court Chief Justice Lawton Nuss left a mark. Not just in his 17 years on the high court, the 17,000 cases he helped decide and the 300 decisions he wrote. No, Nuss also set an example for Kansans over a time of shifting political winds and extreme rhetoric. He was dedicated, consistent and featured a delightfully shifting array of facial hair.

His words to judicial branch employees last week exemplify the kind of justice he was. “You have asked so little of me as your chief justice,” Nuss told them, “but I have asked so much of you, and you have delivered time and time again and made me look so good in the process. I am grateful, so grateful, for your support.”

Kansas was lucky to have Nuss at the helm, and his plans for the future — helping veterans with post-traumatic stress disorder — exemplifies his dedication to service.

Justice Marla Luckert, who arrived at the Kansas Supreme Court a year after Nuss, will become the next chief justice. She has had ample opportunity to watch him work, and we trust that our state’s residents will be well-served by her wisdom and temperament.

Meanwhile, we welcome to Shawnee County District Judge Evelyn Wilson to the Supreme Court. She was named to the bench by Gov. Laura Kelly on Monday from a list sent to her by a nominating commission.

There are already attempts to draw Wilson into the partisan fray, as she faced stinging criticism from anti-abortion activists. But that’s par for the course in Kansas courts, which regularly have to decide loaded issues and issue decisions that will bitterly disappoint one side or another.

She would be well-advised to follow the example set by Nuss. He worked hard, did his job and explained his reasoning. He led the court through a recurring maze of school finance cases and finally cleared the way for recent spending plans to become law. That's the kind of clear eye and steady hand that Kansas needs.

If every argument is a partisan war, and if every policy difference is an ideological contest, then the courts will be called upon to referee more often than many would like. The stakes are high. But our system cannot function without judges who put the cause of interpreting our state's constitution above all else.

Thank you, Chief Justice Nuss.