

Justice Ann Lamar's investiture celebrated in Senatobia

August 17, 2007

Judges at the investiture ceremony of Supreme Court Justice Ann Hannaford Lamar in Senatobia on Thursday, Aug. 16, called her a smart, strong-willed and hard-working judge whose experience makes her well suited to serve on the state's highest court.

Gov. Haley Barbour, who appointed Justice Lamar to a vacancy on the Supreme Court, said, "That's what we really need, for the best to be willing to serve."

Gov. Barbour, keynote speaker for the investiture, said Justice Lamar far out-shined other candidates vetted by the Judicial Appointments Advisory Committee. She was the only one he interviewed. It's the first time that's happened in his 17 judicial appointments.

Gov. Barbour said good lawyers give up better earning potential in private law practice when they take the bench. "It is a sacrifice....We have some people who I believe are called for this kind of service, and Judge Lamar proved to be one of those kind of people. I'm here to thank her for being willing to do this."

Chief Justice James W. Smith Jr. said, "I couldn't have picked a better one myself in Justice Lamar."

Justice Lamar said, "Gov. Barbour, I thank you for the confidence that you have placed in me and I thank you for the opportunity that you have given me to serve the people of this state. My commitment to you is that I will do the best I can with the talents God has given me."

The investiture is ceremonial. Justice Lamar has worked as a justice of the Supreme Court since May 21, when she took the oath of office. Chief Justice Smith administered the oath again Thursday as part of the ceremony at the Tate County Courthouse in Senatobia.

Gov. Barbour and Justice Lamar thanked her predecessor, retired Presiding Justice Kay Cobb of Oxford, for her service on the court and her previous service as a state senator.

Justice Lamar, who is the third woman to serve on the Supreme Court, said, "Justice Cobb, like Justice Prather before her, served on this court with dignity and grace and left a legacy. Justice Cobb, I thank you for your service to this state and for your tireless efforts on behalf of women in this profession."

Circuit Judge Andrew Baker of Charleston said he felt like Justice Lamar had been one of his students. Judge Baker, who has served the 17th Circuit District since 1978, recalled when Justice Lamar was in law school, and a series of "firsts" she achieved: first woman assistant district attorney in the 17th District, the district's first woman elected district attorney, and the district's first woman circuit judge. He called her a tough judge and a student of the law with a good analytical mind.

"Chief Justice, you got the best of the best," Judge Baker said.

Supreme Court Justice George C. Carlson Jr. of Batesville told Judge Baker, "You just trained them too well. He's sent two to the Supreme Court."

Justice Lamar followed in Justice Carlson's footsteps, taking the circuit judgeship he vacated when he was appointed to the Supreme Court in 2001.

Circuit Judge Henry Lackey of Calhoun City, who serves the neighboring circuit court district, has known Justice Lamar most of her life. He was a close friend of her late father, Chancery Judge Leon Hannaford of Senatobia.

Judge Lackey said, “To you justices of the Supreme Court, you have a brilliant, hard-working, strong-willed justice. She will vote her convictions, I promise you that. She will stand her ground. She will argue with you, but she will be your friend and she will be a lady.”

Justice Lamar said, “I have been so blessed in my lifetime to have known and worked with many honorable judges.”

Recalling her late father, Justice Lamar said, “My father often reminded me that public service is a sacred trust, and those of us who have the privilege to serve must never abuse it.”

Justice Lamar said many people had spoken of her father and said how proud he would be. “There’s not a day that goes past by that I’m not reminded by someone of just how much he meant to people, and how he left his mark on those people whose lives he touched while he was here, and I thank you for keeping his memory alive.”

A standing room only crowd filled the largest courtroom at the Tate County Courthouse. Other guests watched the proceedings on a video screen in another courtroom.

Justice Lamar said, “It is a rare occasion when this Court convenes outside Jackson... It was important to me that we have this ceremony here in my hometown and among all of you in a courtroom where I have spent so many hours that it feels like home...I grew up playing in this courtroom.”

Justice Lamar looked out over a crowd that included family, classmates from grade school to law schools, church friends, fellow judges, lawyers, prosecutors and court staff with whom she served. She introduced family and friends, including her mother, Bobby Jean Hannaford, and her sister and brothers.

She thanked her husband of 35 years, attorney John T. Lamar Jr., and their sons, John T. Lamar III, and Vance Lamar. To her husband, she said, “Thank you for always believing in me when sometimes I didn’t believe in myself.”

She said it would make a good story to say that she had always dreamed of this day. But it wouldn’t be true.

“Not in my wildest dreams did I ever believe that I would sit on the Supreme Court of this state. I have learned, though, that God directs the paths of our lives. I know that this is the Lord’s doings. I don’t know why or how. I simply accept that when God opens doors, there is a purpose. It is not important that I understand why. It is important that I am willing to follow.”

She asked for the prayers of all assembled. “If our country is to remain free and strong, we must lift all of our leaders up in prayer – from our Mayor to our Governor and from our local judges to our Supreme Court.”

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