

At Ohio Supreme Court ceremony, Justice Joe Deters slams 'judicial activism'

By Kevin Grasha
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Ohio Supreme Court Justice Joe Deters was formally sworn in Tuesday as he begins the six-year term he was elected to in November.

In remarks during a public investiture ceremony, Deters, who was the longest-tenured prosecutor in Hamilton County history before being appointed to the high court in December 2022, criticized "judicial activism." He said it's crucial that judges as well as Supreme Court justices "stay in their lane."

Deters said a justice's job is to interpret laws, determine if they're constitutional and protect the rights of individuals. It does not include, he said, "inserting ourselves and our personal beliefs into the process."

"If you don't care for a law, run for the legislature and change it," he said. "Don't ask me, or us, to do that. That is not our job."

The ceremony was held in the Supreme Court's grand courtroom in Columbus. It featured remarks from Deters' close friend, WLW radio host Bill Cunningham, who said he first met Deters in 1985 after Deters lost his first race for political office, for Springfield Township trustee. The winner: John Waksmundksi.

Deters, then in his late-20s, had asked Cunningham if he could appear on the radio show. "I said, 'Not really,'" Cunningham recalled.

He noted that two decades later, Deters was well-known enough that he won a race for county prosecutor as a write-in candidate. The two speak nearly every day, Cunningham said.

"A citizen could not have a better judge," he said, "and a man could not have a better friend than Joe Deters."

Mike and Fran DeWine, Justice Shanahan in attendance

Justice Megan Shanahan, a former Hamilton County judge who was elected to the Supreme Court in November along with Deters, watched the proceedings

with the other justices. Also in attendance were Gov. Mike DeWine, First Lady Fran DeWine and Attorney General Dave Yost.

Chief Justice Sharon Kennedy administered the oath of office.

Deters, 67, served as county prosecutor in two separate tenures – from 1992 to 1998 and 2005 to 2023. He also was elected as Ohio Treasurer in 1998 and 2002.

In 2023, he became the first Ohio Supreme Court justice in 30 years to join the court without prior experience as a judge.

Among those in attendance were his wife, longtime WCPO news anchor Tanya O'Rourke, and his children. Two of his siblings, brother Dennis Deters and sister Nancy Slayton, spoke at the ceremony. Joe Deters is the oldest of eight children.

A graduate of St. Xavier High School, he holds a bachelor's degree and a law degree from the University of Cincinnati. In 1982, the same year he received his law degree, he got a job with the prosecutor's office.