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- Justice Kennedy speaks to Wapak Rotary

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Justice Kennedy speaks to Wapak Rotary

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Bryan Reynolds

Aug. 14--WAPAKONETA -- Ohio Supreme Court Justice Sharon Kennedy spoke to the Wapakoneta Rotary Club Monday on the evolution of Ohio's court system.

When Ohio's constitution was created in 1803, residents did not choose their judges. They were all selected by legislators. As power changed hands in the statehouse, judges from a previous majority would all be removed and new ones put in their places, Kennedy said.

"In 1851, there were grand debates, you took control of the third branch of government and you [now] select the men and women who will serve you in the judiciary," she said.

Ohio municipal and county courts handle traffic cases, misdemeanors and minor civil litigation.

"[A total of] 2.1 million cases will come through the municipal and county court system in the state of Ohio," she said.

Common Pleas courts are the next higher court and include general, domestic relations, juvenile and probate divisions. The general division courts typically cover more expensive civil cases, felony criminal cases and administrative appeals. Domestic relations courts handles divorces, dissolutions and support and custody of children. Juvenile courts handle crimes committed by minors and paternity issues, and probate courts handle cases involving estates, protective services for people deemed incompetent, adoptions and marriage licenses. These courts will hear between 700,000 to 900,000 cases a year.

Only 7,000 to 9,000 lower court cases are heard by the 12 state appellate courts due to increased costs faced by the plaintiffs. Those involved in criminal cases have the right to appeal and in some cases can have the fees paid for, she said.

The Ohio Supreme Court only hears about 2,000 out of nearly 3 million total cases passing through the Ohio judicial system yearly.

"We hear cases that affect all Ohioans and not just one person," Kennedy said.

Kennedy lamented the fact that when Ohioans go to the polls this November, 25 percent, statistically, will not vote for their area judicial representation as it's the right of the people to choose who represents them.

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