

LEAVITT ADDS DRINKER TO LIQUOR PANEL

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Gov. Mike Leavitt made good Tuesday on his promise to end a dry spell on the powerful Utah Alcoholic Beverage Control Commission.

The Republican governor has filled one of two vacancies on the five-member commission with Vickie McCall, a real-estate company co-owner and self-described "social drinker" from Ogden.

McCall becomes the lone drinker, woman and non-Mormon on the quasi-judicial board, which controls all alcohol sales, pricing and liquor-law enforcement in Utah.

"I hope to introduce the commission to a different sentiment in the community," McCall said Tuesday. "Utah must capitalize on its family background and quality of lifestyle, but we also want to make people who come here comfortable."

Also appointed by Leavitt was Provo attorney A. Dean Jeffs. The former state senator is chairman of the Citizens Council on Alcoholic Beverage Control, a state panel reviewing liquor-control policy.

Jeffs said Tuesday his status as a teetotaler is unlikely to direct his actions on the board.

"It hasn't had a bearing on my opinions," he said. "I've always dealt with people who drink alcoholic beverages."

Jeffs and McCall replace outgoing members Dale Browning and S. Chris Johnson, who both are retiring after 12 years.

Remaining on the board are Salt Lake attorney Jerry Fenn; attorney Nicholas Hales; and J. Bonner Ritchie. They and Jeffs are nondrinking members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, which views imbibing as sinful.

Backed by some of the most restrictive liquor laws in the country, the Alcoholic Beverage Control Commission has been criticized by some as close-minded and biased against liquor consumption.

Board members deny the claim and note that state lawmakers are responsible for liquor legislation.

McCall, who has been active in efforts to preserve Hill Air Force Base, said her business dealings with out-of-state residents indicate non-Utahns are fearful and confused about the state's liquor rules. A recent state survey appears to back her up.

The state-commissioned study found that 75% of tourists visiting Utah believed state liquor laws "negatively impacted" their stay. Four of five tourists said they had trouble getting into private clubs and found regulations on liquor service in restaurants "unacceptable."

Utah has some 1,136 liquor-serving restaurants, taverns and private clubs. The number is capped under state law.

Officials with the alcoholic-beverage industry have complained they are not represented on the panel.

Kristen Winder, a wine broker and head of the Utah Wine Coalition, a group of industry and non-industry wine devotees, called McCall's appointment "a step, but just one small step. Both appointments should have been drinkers," Winder said.