

2 NONDRINKERS ARE REAPPOINTED TO LIQUOR BOARD

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The Salt Lake Tribune. Salt Lake City, Utah: June 23, 1995. pg. B.1

Copyright Salt Lake Tribune June 23, 1995

Two members of the Utah Alcoholic Beverage Control Commission have been reappointed to new terms -- despite calls from some quarters that more drinkers be put on the panel.

Incumbents Jerry Fenn and Nicholas Hales, both Salt Lake City attorneys and teetotalers, were notified Thursday of their reappointments by Gov. Mike Leavitt. Their current terms expire July 1.

Hales, currently vice chairman, said late Thursday he was looking forward "to staying the course" on the five-member board, which regulates all alcohol sales, pricing, licensing and liquor-law enforcement in Utah.

First appointed to the board in 1986, Fenn reportedly sought to step down recently, citing the time constraints of the part-time position. Now board chairman, he was dissuaded from leaving by Leavitt.

Fenn could not be reached Thursday for comment.

"He is an excellent chairman," Hales said. "Jerry has done a good job of balancing interests."

Citing the need for "diversity" on the panel, the Republican governor a year ago appointed Vicki McCall, an Ogden real-estate executive and social drinker, to fill one of two vacancies on the quasi-judicial board.

That move broke with the board's recent history as an all-male, all-Mormon panel of members who abstain from alcohol. It also brought praise from many liquor customers and alcohol-industry representatives, some of whom have claimed the commission is insensitive to their interests.

"We definitely need more 'consumers' and people who know something about it," said Col. Jack E. Daniels, president of the Utah Wine Coalition. "There seems to be a little fear of having people {on the board} who know about the products, and it's kind of sad."

Added KALL-AM radio talk-show host Tom Barberi, a regular board critic: "These guys have no clue. It's a missed opportunity."

Fenn and other members have disputed the claim their religious affiliations have any effect on board decisions. "Much ado about nothing," the chairman called such allegations in an interview last summer.

But Daniels and similarly minded advocates are urging a re-evaluation of Utah's alcohol policies in light of the state's choice as host of the 2002 Winter Olympics. They had hoped Leavitt would use the two openings to put that shift in motion.

Leavitt, however, said he is not seeking major changes in Utah's alcohol policy. Both reappointments must be confirmed by the Utah Senate.