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Woman gets chief judge appointment

The Associated Press

TOPEKA — Mary Beck Briscoe, the first woman to serve on the Kansas Court of Appeals, was named its chief judge yesterday by the Supreme Court.

She succeeds Bob Abbott, the chief judge for the past five years. Abbott was elevated to the Supreme Court two weeks ago by Gov. Mike Hayden.

Briscoe, 43, was appointed to the Court of Appeals six years ago by former Gov. John Carlin. She served 10 years as an assistant U.S. attorney for Kansas before being named to the court.

The order elevating Briscoe to chief judge of the Court of Appeals was signed by retiring Chief Justice Robert H. Miller, whose last day on the Supreme Court is today. Abbott will be sworn in as Miller's replacement today.

Briscoe's appointment as chief judge is effective Tuesday.

She will serve at the pleasure of the Supreme Court, which is empowered by law to designate one of the Court of Appeals judges as chief judge.

J. Richard Foth was made the first chief judge when the present Court of Appeals was created in 1977. He died in 1985, and Abbott was named to succeed him.

The first woman named to an appellate court in Kansas was Justice Kay McFarland of the Supreme Court, appointed by former Gov. Robert F. Bennett in 1977. She is in line to become chief justice under the court's seniority system when new Chief Justice Richard Holmes leaves the bench in 1995.

Briscoe is a native of Council Grove and graduated from Dwight Rural High School in 1965. She earned her bachelor's degree in German and political science from the University of Kansas in 1969. She earned her law degree from KU in 1973.

She worked as an advisory attorney for the federal Interstate Commerce Commission in 1973-74, then was assistant U.S. attorney in Kansas from 1974 until Carlin named her to the Court of Appeals in 1984.

She is married to Charles Briscoe, a Topeka attorney and former assistant state attorney general.