

Cowper accepts resignation of Gutierrez; appoints replacement

Gov. Steve Cowper recently accepted the resignation of Transportation Commissioner Fermin "Rocky" Gutierrez of Sitka and announced the appointment of Mark Hickey as the new commissioner.

Hickey, 32, has worked with the department for about 10 years. For the last three months he has been deputy commissioner, and before that he served as special assistant under former Commissioner Dick Knapp. Also, he was head of the state's team during the transfer of the Alaska Railroad from the federal government to the state.

Hickey holds a bachelor's in foreign service from Georgetown University. He is married and has two children.

Gutierrez, 57, submitted his resignation last month. He cited personal reasons and frustration with "interdepartmental politics" for his resignation.

In particular, Gutierrez expressed frustration with criticism leveled at him by an assistant attorney general for a meeting he held with a Fairbanks businessman.

He also said he was displeased with personnel rules which made it impossible for him to decline his state salary and collect retirement. Such an arrangement would have saved the state thousands of dollars annually, but it was prohibited by personnel rules.