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Walker brings back former commissioner to head Transportation Department

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Gov. Bill Walker said Friday that he would bring back a former Department of Transportation commissioner to run the agency again.

Walker announced at a news conference that he was appointing Marc Luiken, who served as commissioner for about two years under Walker's predecessor, Sean Parnell, before being asked to step down in 2012.

Walker said he and Luiken have "somewhat of a shared vision" and are in agreement on several big transportation projects.

Walker [dismissed Parnell's last transportation commissioner](#), Pat Kemp, this month after Kemp issued a memo defending an expensive road project aimed at connecting Juneau to the rest of

the road system. Walker had suspended funding for the road pending a review as the state seeks to close a \$3.5 billion budget deficit.

In a phone interview Friday afternoon, Luiken said he hadn't talked with Walker yet about specific department initiatives. But he said that generally he aims to continue with a pair of ideas he pushed when he was commissioner previously -- grooming "the next set of leaders" in the department, and ensuring the department focuses on performance measures.

He said he led the department's creation of a "[performance dashboard](#)" that tracks its progress toward goals such as cutting traffic deaths, improving on-time ferry departures and reducing seasonal airport closures.

Luiken said he left the department in 2012 after the Parnell administration asked him to resign, though the circumstances had been unclear at the time.

"There were just some differences in the way I believe people should be treated, number one, and number two, some differences between his staff and me personally that weren't working," Luiken said. He added that "there may have been some policy things" that contributed to his departure, but he declined to specify what they were.

Luiken is a pilot and retired Air Force colonel; he worked most recently as a consultant for a firm that works with oil and gas companies in Alaska to improve leadership performance and ability.

He said he drives the state's highways in his Toyota Tundra.

Luiken's appointment drew praise from Kemp, his predecessor, who said Luiken was a "straight-up guy" and "very well-schooled in management."

"He's a known entity, a known quantity," Kemp said in a phone interview. "He'll just be a natural for it."

An opponent of the Juneau road, Mike Korsmo, also said he'd enjoyed sitting with Luiken on a ferry system advisory board when Luiken was commissioner.

"He came to all our meetings," said Korsmo, a tugboat captain from the community of Skagway. "He was genuinely interested in the overall marine highway system as a whole. It was a breath of fresh air to work with him."

Dick Knapp, a member of the Juneau-based advocacy group Citizens Pro-Road, said he didn't know Luiken, and referred questions to another member of the group who couldn't be reached.

Asked about his view on the road, Luiken said: "I work for the governor, and I support the governor's position."

"I believe his position is that we need to study it and we need to make sure that we're going to do the right thing with that project," Luiken said. "And I don't think he's killed it. But he also recognizes that we have some other priorities we need to focus on first."

Luiken said he plans to continue living in Anchorage and referred questions about his residency to Walker. A spokeswoman for Walker didn't respond to requests for comment Friday afternoon.

Kemp lives in Juneau.

Luiken's appointment must be confirmed by the state Legislature.

About this Author

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