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Juneau Empire

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## Walker, Mallott say Tillerson firing will not significantly affect Alaska

Lt. Gov. says change will not affect transboundary mining talks



Secretary of State Rex Tillerson waves goodbye after speaking at the State Department in Washington, Tuesday, March 13, 2018. President Donald Trump fired Tillerson and said he would nominate CIA Director Mike Pompeo to replace him, in a major staff reshuffle just as Trump dives into high-stakes talks with North Korea. (Andrew Harnik | The Associated Press)

Gov. Bill Walker and Lt. Gov. Byron Mallott say they do not expect the firing of Secretary of State Rex Tillerson to interfere with ongoing negotiations between the U.S. and Canada regarding mines along the Alaska-Canada border.

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Walker and Mallott shared their thoughts on the same morning that President Donald Trump fired Tillerson as the Secretary of State returned from a trip to Africa.

Alaska and Florida are the only U.S. states to border two countries.

“I don’t think that it will change anything unless there are fundamental changes in policy throughout the government in this area,” Mallott said.

“EPA and other agencies are also involved, and I don’t think, quite frankly, that this issue got to his level in any event.”

Mallott has been the state's lead figure in negotiations among Alaska, the U.S., British Columbia and the Canadian federal government as Alaska grapples with issues related to new mines being constructed in the watersheds of rivers that flow into Alaska.

Alaskans are concerned that an accident could release acidic mine drainage into those Alaska-flowing rivers, affecting fisheries, drinking water and the environment in general. The Tulsequah Chief Mine has been releasing acidic mine drainage into the Taku River for a significant amount of time, and the state is seeking to force action to clean up that mine.

Mallott and U.S. Sen. Dan Sullivan were **among a delegation that recently traveled to Ottawa (<http://juneauempire.com/state/news/2018-02-05/lt-gov-mallott-sen-sullivan-travel-canada-boundary-talks>)** for talks with the Canadian federal government on the issue. That trip was coordinated by the State Department.

Sullivan, by email, said, "We do not anticipate new and constructive engagement by the State Department on transboundary mining issues to change with the departure of Secretary Tillerson."

Sullivan praised Tillerson and the State Department in general (Sullivan formerly served in the department) and said he looks forward to meeting with Mike Pompeo, whom Trump has named to replace Tillerson.

Asked whether Tillerson's firing will affect Alaska in general, Walker replied, "You know, I don't think so."

"I think it was nice to have a Secretary of State that had Alaska connections. I met with him a number of times and actually once in Fairbanks had lunch with him. So it's always nice to have somebody in the cabinet — as many in the cabinet (should have) Alaska connections as possible — and so I'm sorry to see him step away. So I don't think that there are ramifications necessarily for Alaska. But I just think any connection we have with a cabinet member is good."

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