

Chicago Fire Commissioner Robert Hoff Resigns

Jose Santiago named replacement

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Chicago - Chicago Fire Commissioner Robert Hoff officially announced his resignation Thursday, and Deputy Commissioner Jose Santiago was named his successor.

Hoff is the first major cabinet member to step down since Chicago Mayor Rahm Emanuel took office.

Hoff was appointed to run Chicago's fire department -- the second largest in the country -- by Mayor Richard M. Daley two years ago.

He officially announced his resignation at a press conference Thursday, two days after the 50th anniversary of his father was being killed while fighting a fire.

"All I ever wanted to be when I was young was a firefighter, and that is all I ever had the passion to be," Hoff said. "I could say one thing about the fire service. You can be a chief, you can wear a lot of bugles, but what makes you a good chief or good commissioner is the people that work under you. The firefighters and paramedics of the Chicago Fire Department, I couldn't be more honored to work with them, stand next to them, and that pride will always be in my heart."

FOX Chicago News spoke with firefighters who said that Hoff was a good firefighter and an even better leader, who represented everyone fairly. He was well-liked in the department, and firefighters said they would even see him jump in and fight fires from time to time.

Hoff said at the press conference he is stepping down because he's tired and ready to relax with his family and friends. He said he wasn't "going away" altogether, but there was no greater pleasure in his life than spending time with his family, especially his young grandchildren.

Other sources within the fire department told FOX Chicago News that part of reason for Hoff's resignation is his resistance to Mayor Emanuel's push to reduce fire forces, including houses and firefighters.

Their relationship soured when Hoff publicly opposed Emanuel's plan a few months ago. Sources also said Hoff was very concerned with the city's plan to deal with the NATO and G8 summits in May, including the plan to give each firefighter a radio to use.

Hoff is 55 years old and has been with the Chicago Fire Department since 1976. His father and great-grandfather were also firefighters. His father was killed in the line of duty when Hoff was 5 years old.

Hoff and Emanuel praised Santiago for his long-time service to the fire department and his work as a Marine. Hoff said he was confident Santiago was the right choice to lead the department.

"I believe in the Chicago Fire Department's mission so deeply that I have given well over 30 years of my life to its service to safeguard citizens of the city. Clearly this is not a one-person job. It takes a team to ensure that we remain leaders in the fire industry, and if confirmed, I will work hard to continue expanding upon key relationships with regional partners and business leaders," Santiago said.

Fire Union President Tom Ryan praised the outgoing commissioner as a great chief.

"You could probably count on one hand the amount of firefighters in the country that have the credentials that Bob Hoff has. He will be sorely missed," Ryan said.

Ryan said he was also pleased with Santiago as a replacement.

"Jose is no stranger to situations like this. Firefighter for I believe 33 years, but served as a U.S. Marine for 30 years. He is used to this kind of situation. I think he will be a fine choice."