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# Officials Waste $13.5Bln in 2009, Putin Says

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Prime Minister Vladimir Putin singled out Volgograd City Hall in his criticism of corruption Friday, while blasting regional and local officials for some $13.5 billion in pointless spending last year.

The city handed out most land plots for construction to its officials or their partners and relatives, he said.

Citing a week-old report by the Prosecutor General's Office on Volgograd, Putin said real estate developers competed for only 28 land plots in the past 2 1/2 years, out of the total of 600 plots handed out.

"We need to eradicate this practice. We need to root it out," Putin said, adding that pressure from the federal government would apply throughout all of Russia. "If we keep these types of management techniques, there won't be ... cheap housing in the country."

The attack on the mayor at the regular session of the Presidium, a scaled-down Cabinet, came as the government's program to build affordable housing has effectively stalled. Putin heard multiple complaints about the city at a construction-related meeting in Volgograd last month.

A United Russia member, Volgograd Mayor Roman Grebennikov, did not publicly respond to the criticism over the weekend, but his administration had been taking steps to rectify the situation since prosecutors filed the report. It vowed Thursday to auction off 22 land plots before the end of this month.

Putin also blamed city and regional chief executives across the country for 415 billion rubles ($13.5 billion) of "ineffective, essentially empty spending" last year, particularly in public education and health care.

"The more we spend on these areas, the higher the amount of ineffective outlays," he said.

Regional Development Minister Viktor Basargin said the 415 billion rubles amounted to more than 6 percent of total regional and municipal spending.

The Presidium on Friday handed out a total of 1 billion rubles to 20 regions to encourage their success in managing local affairs.

Putin said regional and municipal authorities reduced their staff by 4 percent last year.

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