

Volodin to Replace Sobyenin as Putin Aide

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The Kremlin on Thursday appointed Vyacheslav Volodin, a senior official from the ruling United Russia party, as Prime Minister Vladimir Putin's chief of staff, one of the most powerful positions in the country.

The appointment of Volodin, a lawyer, appears to be a bid by Putin to tighten cooperation with United Russia ahead of State Duma elections next year and the presidential vote in 2012.

Volodin replaces Sergei Sobyenin, who was confirmed as the new mayor of Moscow on Thursday, as both Putin's chief of staff and deputy prime minister.

"I have known you quite a while. I know your work skills, and I am inclined to agree with the proposal by the government of the Russian Federation," President Dmitry Medvedev told Volodin in a televised meeting.

Volodin, who was reported to be worth \$95 million in 2006 by Russian magazine Finans, is seen as intensely loyal to Putin.

Volodin, 46, was appointed secretary of the presidium of United Russia's general council in 2005, according to United Russia's web site.

He has been a member of the State Duma since 1999, and a member of United Russia since 2003. He is married and has one daughter.

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