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Navalny Rejects Immunity

By Alexander Bratersky

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Whistleblowing blogger Alexei Navalny said Wednesday that he would not cop out of a criminal case against him by seeking parliamentary immunity.

The head of the Youth Public Chamber of the Kirov region, Alexei Ronzhin, called on Navalny in a blog post to run in district elections in October.

But Navalny said in a telephone interview that he would end up "playing by the rules of the system" if he took up the offer instead of proving his innocence.

Besides, he said, he could accomplish more without joining the government. "Name a legislator who is doing more at his post that I am doing at mine," Navalny said.

The Investigative Committee said Tuesday that it had reopened a two-year-old fraud case against Navalny connected to his previous work as an unpaid adviser to Kirov Governor Nikita Belykh. The committee said Navalny is suspected of convincing a state-owned timber company, Kirovles, to sign a disadvantageous contract that cost it 1.3 million rubles

($47,000).

Navalny said Tuesday that it was the fifth attempt to reopen the case, although official records show the case in fact had only been closed twice before reaching the central office of the Investigative Committee. Investigators say Navalny used "corporate raiding tactics" against Kirovles, although not for personal gain, and may be jailed for up to two years if convicted.

Belykh has repeatedly said he has no complaints about Navalny's performance as an adviser. Navalny says the charges were fabricated by companies he targeted with his exposes, including VTB, Transneft and the United Russia party.

Navalny said Wednesday that he has no plans to give up his anti-corruption work, which he added was even supported by members of the ruling elite.

"There are people in power who understand the need for change even better than the man in the street," Navalny said. He did not name any names.

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