

Matviyenko to Run for Councilwoman

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Governor Valentina Matviyenko is preparing to become a councilwoman in one of St. Petersburg's 111 district councils — a step that will pave the way for her to be appointed speaker of the Federation Council.

At least three St. Petersburg districts — Rzhevka, Porokhoviye and Finlyandsky — have publicly voiced their readiness to hold an early election and welcome Matviyenko as councilwoman.

Matviyenko's deputy and possible successor, Mikhail Oseyevsky, said Thursday that most of the city's 111 districts were ready to call an early election for the governor and a final decision would be announced next week, Interfax reported.

Matviyenko, who has not participated in a direct election since first becoming governor in 2003, has to be a lawmaker to be appointed senate speaker. But since St. Petersburg cannot hold an election for its city legislature until December, the authorities have decided to focus on a district.

Matviyenko, who has served eight years as governor, accepted President Dmitry Medvedev's offer to become Federation Council speaker earlier this week.

Politicians and analysts have said the Kremlin wants to replace the increasingly unpopular governor ahead of State Duma elections in December, and the speaker appointment will allow her to save face.

If Matviyenko is elected councilwoman, she will resign from the governor's office in August, Oseyevsky said, RIA-Novosti reported. In mid-July she is going on a planned vacation. Oseyevsky will replace Matviyenko for the 10-day vacation period.

A Just Russia, whose former leader Sergei Mironov was ousted as Federation Council speaker by the St. Petersburg legislature, urged other political parties to join it in campaigning against Matviyenko's election bid.

"She is running the election only to be appointed to the Federation Council," Mironov said, Interfax reported. "It's clear from the beginning that she won't be working for the district where she is elected."

The Communist and Yabloko parties were considering the invitation to join forces with A Just Russia under the slogan "Petersburg Against Matviyenko." The parties said they would hold a general meeting before making a decision.

On Wednesday, Duma Deputy Oksana Dmitriyeva of A Just Russia criticized Matviyenko's work in St. Petersburg during a talk show on Ekho Moskv, prompting the governor to call the radio station and speak out in her own defense. She said hundreds of people have been asking her not to leave in recent days. It was a "very hard" decision to accept the Federation Council post, she said.

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