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Ex-TV Contestant May Challenge Matviyenko

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A former contestant of the kitschy television reality show "Dom-2" may compete against St. Petersburg Governor Valentina Matviyenko in an early election meant to pave the way for Matviyenko to become the speaker of the Federation Council, news reports said Thursday.

Maria Belousova has filed her application with the election committee of the Leningrad region town of Alexandrovskaya, which has a population of 1,100, a source in the town's administration told Interfax. But the committee denied receiving papers from Belousova, Rosbalt.ru said.

Officials did not comment on photos of a Belousova campaign poster published by Saint-petersburg.ru that calls on voters to "practice parachuting, go to the movies with her, and stop smoking."

President Dmitry Medvedev steered Matviyenko toward the Federation Council vacancy after United Russia ousted former Speaker Sergei Mironov, who leads the Just Russia party.

Matviyenko needs to be elected as a legislator to take up the senator's seat. She is expected to run in elections in Alexandrovskaya or the Leningrad region town of Lomonosov, which both have called for early elections on Sept. 4. Matviyenko's silence on where she will run appears to be an attempt to prevent the opposition from fielding a strong rival, Vedomosti reported.

Belousova, 27, a graduate of a legal college in Vladivostok, spent 147 days in 2009 on TNT television's "Dom-2," where contestants work at building a house while engaging in romance along the way. The program, on air since 2004, has made the Guinness Book of Records as the longest-running reality show.

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