

Ex-Yukos Owner Gets Duma Nod

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In a rare public outburst, a senior United Russia deputy offered on Thursday to personally pay an Arkhangelsk region prison for a missing pair of trousers that cost former Yukos co-owner Platon Lebedev his appeal for parole this week.

Lyubov Sliska, who serves as a deputy State Duma speaker, criticized the two-day parole hearing as "irritating performance" that discredits the country's law enforcement system, Interfax reported.

Prison officials told the court in the town of Velsk, where Lebedev has been incarcerated since June, that they opposed his parole appeal because he had allegedly lost his prison-issued trousers, robe and slippers and improperly spoken to a mid-level official on a first-name basis.

"I am a lawyer, and I can't take these arguments seriously," Sliska said, calling the alleged violations "petty harassment."

National ombudsman Vladimir Lukin also dismissed Wednesday's ruling as "laughable," Interfax said.

Lebedev, who has been jailed since 2003, is eligible for parole after serving half of his 13-year sentence on tax and fraud charges that supporters say are punishment from Vladimir Putin's Kremlin for the political and business ambitions of his business partner, former Yukos head Mikhail Khodorkovsky.

Lebedev has never admitted wrongdoing, which is not required for parole but was cited by the judge on Wednesday as a reason to deny him early release.

Lebevev was convicted in two related trials on economic charges along with Khodorkovsky. Amnesty International has declared both "prisoners of conscience" following their second trial, which ended in December.

Sliska said Wednesday that she was only expressing her personal opinion, not the position of United Russia, which is led by Prime Minister Putin. Senior United Russia officials Andrei Vorobyov and Oleg Morozov [told](#) RIA-Novosti that the party would not comment on the court ruling, which Lebedev's lawyers plan to appeal.

Sliska announced earlier this month that she would not run for re-election in Duma elections in December, Gazeta.ru [said](#). She gave no reasons, but news reports say she had a conflict with senior party official Vladimir Volodin.

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