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Governor Accused of Interfering With Duma Vote

By Natalya Krainova

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A senior opposition official has accused the Moscow region governor of ordering a landslide victory for United Russia in State Duma elections and deny publicity to its rivals.

The allegation followed a similar story last week when an Urals businessman claimed that local authorities had told factory directors to pressure or bribe workers into voting for United Russia.

The accusations are standard examples of the "administrative resources" that, critics say, are the main means for the ruling party to maintain its grip on regional and municipal legislatures nationwide.

United Russia dismissed both reports.

Moscow Governor Boris Gromov, who heads United Russia's regional list for the Duma

elections, ordered local mayors to ensure "the party's unconditional victory," Gennady Gudkov, a senior Duma deputy with A Just Russia, said in an interview published Monday in Kommersant.

Gudkov provided the newspaper with what he said was a copy of a speech that Gromov delivered at an Oct. 6 meeting in the village of Novoivanovskoye. Gudkov, whose party fell out of favor with the Kremlin this year amid a conflict with United Russia, did not say where he obtained the speech from.

The speech also urged listeners to "use every opportunity to hinder our opponents' campaign staffs in all kinds of activity."

Other media have not reported about Gromov visiting Novoivanovskoye, and his spokeswoman Tatyana Poret told The Moscow Times that the trip had not taken place.

But the governor's official web site listed the visit in its "events" section Monday afternoon, without identifying the agenda. Poret did not comment on the discrepancy.

A spokesman for United Russia's local branch, Alexander Zavadin, said by telephone that branch officials did not write the speech. He also said he was unaware of the Oct. 6 meeting.

Support for United Russia has slipped from 60 percent in February to 53 percent in June, but it bounced back to 57 percent last month, according to the independent pollster Levada Center.

The Kremlin wants the party to score at least 60 percent of the vote on Dec. 4, compared with 64.3 percent at the previous Duma elections in 2007, Vedomosti reported Oct. 13.

The daily also said regional officials are tasked with ensuring a minimum vote count for United Russia, with figures varying from 50 to 65 percent depending on the region.

Senior party official Sergei Neverov told Itar-Tass earlier this month that United Russia "has long abandoned the practice" of setting vote requirements for regions.

But just last week, businessman Konstantin Korovin from the Urals city of Chelyabinsk said city manager Sergei Davydov had ordered factory directors to convince employees to vote for United Russia.

The instructions were given by an unidentified female City Hall employee at a meeting on Oct. 14, Korovin wrote on his blog. He cited "our representative" at the event as his source, without elaborating.

Davydov's spokesman Vladimir Safronov said by telephone Monday that Korovin's allegations were "fairy tales."

But he acknowledged that Davydov had meet with Chelyabinsk entrepreneurs on Oct. 14 and asked them to "reduce the protest mood of the people ahead of the elections," mainly through raising salaries.

Unspecified "organizational moments" for setting up polling stations at factories were also discussed, Safronov said.

But he insisted that "no one suggested the job" of boosting the number of votes for United Russia.

Alexander Shipilov, deputy head of a United Russia working group that is tracking election violations, said by telephone Monday that Korovin had "no proof" to back up his statement. He did not say whether the statement was, in fact, false.

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