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Party Links Voting To Funding – Again

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A United Russia official in Udmurtia speaking at a televised event threatened funding cutbacks for a local town unless it voted for his party in the upcoming State Duma elections in December.

It is the second documented case of electoral blackmail by United Russia officials in the region within two weeks. Party boss Boris Gryzlov has threatened harsh intra-party crackdowns, but officials in both cases remain unpunished so far.

The latest episode came Friday when party member Alexander Goriyanov, who heads both the Udmurtian government and is the republic head's chief of staff, told the town of Glazov that it would not get any road repair money unless it votes for United Russia.

The place was not picked by accident: Of five local towns to elect local legislatures last year, Glazov was the only one to vote for the Communists, local media reported at the time.

That was why Glazov only got a third of what other towns received from the state, Goriyanov

told a group of local taxi drivers at a meeting that was openly taped and shown on the local broadcast of TNT television on Friday.

The town of "Sarapulu was given 30 million rubles [$980,000] for road works this summer, while Glazov was given 10 [million rubles]," Goryainov said.

"At the previous elections, we just gave away that 20 million," he said. " And it would never change because projects in general around the country ... are controlled by United Russia," Goriyanov said, to glum silence from the taxi drivers.

Goriyanov explicitly denied on Sunday that he was blackmailing the voters or campaigning for United Russia.

"I just sit and reason with them," he told Rusnovosti.ru. "They're going to vote for whomever they want."

He added that he was already reported once before to the Central Elections Commission over alleged violations, but did not elaborate. No details of the previous incident were available, and the electoral watchdog, along with the law enforcement agencies, maintained silence on the issue over the weekend.

Last month, a video popped up on YouTube of Denis Agashin, city manager for Udmurtia's capital, Izhevsk, telling local veterans' organizations that their funding would depend on how their districts vote in the Duma elections.

Other political parties denounced Agashin's speech for abuse of office. But the city manager, a United Russia member, has faced no sanctions so far and refused to step down, denying that his statement amounted to illegal campaigning.

The head of United Russia's Duma faction, Gryzlov, promised "hell to pay" for party officials who pressure or blackmail voters, RIA-Novosti reported on Thursday.

But Gryzlov never commented on either Agashin or Goriyanov in particular, nor did he elaborate on possible repercussions for violators.

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