

Fraud Charge in Signature Drive

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The  Moscow Times

Opposition activists on Sunday posted a video they say shows fraudulent signatures being collected at a Moscow university to get Irkutsk Governor Dmitry Mezentsev on the presidential ballot.

The video appeared on the blog of Igor Drandin, a member of the Democratic Choice opposition movement, and claims to show a group of about 20 people filling out multiple signature forms using other people's personal data at the Moscow State University of Railway Engineering.

As an independent candidate, Mezentsev must gather 2 million signatures in order to run in the March 4 race.

"On the table there lay stacks of signature forms. On the blackboard, in large letters, was a model to follow. ... [Those present] were diligently filling out the signature forms, copying data from special tables," an Ekho Moskvy reporter who witnessed the episode with the Democratic Choice activists said on the radio station's web site.

Mezentsev — a Putin loyalist widely seen as an "insurance" candidate to give an air

of legitimacy to the presidential election — responded Monday by thanking the press for its coverage and promising to investigate the matter.

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