

Volgograd Balks at Medvedev's Pick

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President Dmitry Medvedev has met rare resistance in the appointment of a new governor, with supporters of Prime Minister Vladimir Putin balking at accepting a candidate tainted with vote-rigging allegations.

Medvedev nominated former Astrakhan Mayor Sergei Bozhenov as the new Volgograd governor on Tuesday, the Kremlin's website said.

But lawmakers are being urged to delay confirmation of his candidacy in the hope that an alternative is put forward.

On Monday, speculation about Bozhenov's looming nomination produced a local backlash over his record in Astrakhan, where he was accused by political opponents of rigging elections, said Ivan Novakov, a member of Putin's presidential election campaign team and head of the Volgograd region's rectors union, Kommersant reported Tuesday.

Novakov said an alternative to Bozhenov was General Sergei Kokorin, a staunch Putin

supporter and head of the local branch of the Federal Security Service.

The governor's seat is open after unpopular Governor Anatoly Brovko stepped down last week after serving just two years. Analysts say Brovko was unable to find common ground with the local elite.

A candidate submitted by the president can be rejected by a regional legislature, but Oleg Mikhailov, A Just Russia deputy from the Volgograd region, said this was an unlikely outcome.

He said Bozhenov's nomination was made in the "rush-rush" of the run-up to the presidential election in March and could have been postponed until the introduction of Medvedev-promised legislation to return direct gubernatorial elections.

"They could have waited and conducted gubernatorial elections in the region," Mikhailov said by phone.

It is unclear when the legislation might become law, and Putin has indicated that the draft might be amended to allow the Kremlin to "filter" candidates.

Also on Tuesday, Medvedev nominated Igor Orlov as the governor of the Astrakhan region. Orlov, a career engineer in the military-industrial sector, has ties to defense industry lobbying groups.

Meanwhile, United Russia indicated that Tomsk Governor Viktor Kress would not be appointed to a new term in March.

The party said in a statement that Kress' candidacy was not discussed during a party meeting with Vyacheslav Volodin, a deputy head of the presidential administration.

The party stressed that Kress, appointed during the tenure of President Boris Yeltsin, has led the region for 20 years and said use would be found for his experience "in future," RIA-Novosti reported.

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