

United Russia's Radayev To Lead Saratov Region

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April 05, 2012

The  **Moscow Times**

A close ally of one of the Kremlin's leading administrators will be the next governor of the Saratov region.

Valery Radayev received 30 of 32 votes cast Thursday by members of the regional assembly. Two Communist lawmakers voted against Radayev's nomination, RIA-Novosti reported.

Radayev, 52, a former leader of the local assembly, had been serving as acting governor since March.

He replaced Pavel Ipatov, who was ousted soon after state-controlled NTV aired a report accusing him of causing a car accident in early February.

Nobody was hurt in the accident, but the other driver said the Mercedes Ipatov was driving was going extremely fast.

Experts said Radayev's ascent capped off the power struggle waged by Vyacheslav Volodin, a former United Russia heavyweight who became the Kremlin's deputy chief of staff in December.

Volodin, a native of the Saratov region and Ipatov's rival, sought to install his trusted lieutenant Radayev in the leadership post.

Radayev has already proposed key nominations to the regional government.

Among them is Alexander Solovyov, a former agriculture minister who was also among the United Russia nominees for governor.

Vladimir Pozharov, a lawmaker in the A Just Russia party, was named the official in charge of regional economic development.

As deputy head of the Saratov legislature's tax and budget committee, Pozharov was a harsh critic of Ipatov, blaming him for increasing regional debt.

Local experts said Radayev is not strong in finance, which could be a liability in a region that has attracted major international investors such as tobacco giant British American Tobacco.

He spent most of his career in agriculture before joining the regional legislature, which is controlled by United Russia.

During December elections for the State Duma, United Russia polled very well in the Saratov region. Its tally of 64 percent of the vote was one of its best showings nationwide.

Radayev is the second United Russia politician selected this week as a regional governor.

On Thursday, the Moscow region legislature overwhelmingly chose former Emergency Situations Minister Sergei Shoigu as its new leader.

Shoigu is the most popular minister in the Cabinet. He enjoys a 70 percent approval rating, according to a survey last year by state-run pollster VTsIOM.

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