

Ex-Duma Ethics Chief to Sue Navalny

By [Alexander Winning](#)

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Vladimir Pekhtin, the State Duma's former ethics chief, said Friday that he would file a defamation lawsuit against Alexei Navalny over a blog post in which the opposition leader alleged that Pekhtin failed to declare co-ownership of costly U.S. real estate.

Pekhtin resigned from the Duma in late February over the allegations, denying guilt but saying he did not want to tarnish the reputation of the pro-Kremlin United Russia party that he co-founded. He subsequently traveled to the U.S. to clear his name.

"I will file a lawsuit — it's the only option left open to me to defend my family's name, my honor and my values," Pekhtin said at a news conference, where he was visibly nervous answering questions from reporters.



Vladimir
Pekhtin

"The idea of seeking compensation hadn't occurred to me, but you [reporters] have encouraged me to do so with your questions. Perhaps I will seek the yearly salary of Mr. Navalny," Pekhtin said, adding that he would donate any money he won to orphanages in the far northern Magadan region, where he worked for over 20 years.

Navalny, an anti-corruption campaigner and trained lawyer, said recently that he earned about 9.3 million rubles (\$297,000) last year, mostly from legal work. He is currently standing trial on embezzlement charges in the provincial city of Kirov in a case his defense calls "political revenge" for his strident criticism of the Kremlin.

Pekhtin said it had taken more than two months of consulting with U.S. and Russian lawyers to prepare his defense against Navalny, who says publicly available U.S. documents prove that Pekhtin co-owned properties worth over \$2 million in Miami and Ormond Beach, Florida, that don't feature in his income declarations.

By law, State Duma deputies must declare all their property and sources of income.

Pekhtin maintains that his son bought the U.S. properties single-handedly and that he was registered as a co-owner for inheritance purposes. "Its entirely natural to want to keep the properties in the family," he said, accusing Navalny and associates of "pouring dirt over my family."

Lawyer Alexander Minakov, whom Pekhtin asked to study the allegations and whom he described as an "independent expert," told a similar story, saying U.S. real estate contracts show that it was the lawmaker's son, Alexei Pekhtin, who bought the properties and paid taxes on them.

The former
Duma deputy
announces a
defamation suit
against anti-
corruption
campaigner
Alexei Navalny.

Pekhtin said he had relinquished his co-ownership of the Florida real estate to put

the allegations to rest, while Minakov said any mistakes Pekhtin made could be attributed to the intricacies of U.S. property law.

Writing on his LiveJournal blog during a break between court sessions in Kirov, Navalny seemed unfazed by Pekhtin's threat of legal action, saying he would gladly square off with the former lawmaker in court.

"Although I don't know whether the case will be heard in Moscow or Miami, where Pekhtin is domiciled, I will take part in this wonderful court case with pleasure," Navalny joked. On top of the pending defamation suit, the opposition leader has a total of five criminal cases open against him.

Despite being heckled in opposition circles since the publication of Navalny's exposé, Pekhtin has consistently enjoyed the backing of United Russia colleagues, who applauded him for his "correct and honest" behavior in tendering his resignation.

Hours after addressing reporters, Pekhtin accepted an offer to advise Sergei Naryshkin, speaker of the lower house and a party heavyweight, on state hydroelectric policy.

Pekhtin was elected to the board of state hydropower company RusHydro earlier this month and has more than two decades of experience in the hydropower sector.

"That answers the question of whether I'll be returning to the State Duma," Pekhtin said on receiving the offer, according to a statement on the United Russia website.

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