The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Opposition Candidates Woo Municipal Deputies in Mayoral Race

By Oleg Sukhov

June 16, 2013



In a preview of what to expect in the fight for post as Moscow mayor, several opposition candidates presented their campaign platforms to municipal deputies on Saturday in an effort to gather the required amount of deputies' signatures to run in the election set for Sept. 8.

At the Forum of Municipal Deputies, many deputies and most candidates called for preventing infighting within the opposition and for coordinating the collection of municipal deputies' signatures between the candidates. Moscow is divided into 146 municipal districts, each of which has an elected council.

Those nominated by political parties are obliged to collect 6 percent of the signatures of municipal deputies or municipal district heads in at least three-fourths of all municipal districts, or 110 signatures in total.

Independent candidates must collect signatures of support from at least 1 percent of

Moscow's voters, or 73,021 people.

Mayoral hopeful Alexei Navalny, an anti-corruption activist who is currently standing trial in Kirov on charges of large-scale theft, said his program would focus on decentralizing power.

In what may be seen as an attempt to flatter the deputies at the forum, he told them they did not recognize their own significance, saying, in more colorful terms, that they were "butterflies that didn't realize they could be eagles."

But they are the "only legitimate authority" in the city, he said.

"You are the only people who were actually elected in Moscow," he said. "All other elections have always been fake. ... You lack the authority that is rightfully yours."

If they supported him as a mayoral candidate, he said, they would reclaim that authority and no longer have to complain about having no power.

At the forum, many municipal deputies proposed liquidating prefectures and district boards — executive authorities appointed by the mayor and responsible for larger and smaller districts within the city — and redistributing their functions to municipal councils.

Irina Galkina, a deputy for the Golovinskoye district, jokingly proposed the slogan "All power to the Soviets [municipal councils]" — an allusion to the motto used in the 1917 Revolution.

Navalny also commented on how he would interact with the federal authorities if elected. "I'm not going to launch a holy war [with the Kremlin] that would bring down Muscovites' standard of living. But I won't betray my principles either," he said.

As for the issue of immigration, Navalny said companies hiring illegal migrants should be banned from participating in government tenders.

"There are more illegal immigrants than necessary in Moscow," he said.

Navalny also said Sergei Guriev, former head of the New Economic School, had agreed to help him draft the economic part of his mayoral program. Guriev quit as rector of the university and emigrated to France in May, citing pressure from authorities.

Navalny was nominated as a mayoral candidate on Friday by the liberal RPR-Parnas party.

At a meeting of the party's Moscow branch that day, he said, "United Russia has clung to Moscow like grim death," adding that he chose to run in the election "to rip our city out from the tentacles of [President Vladimir] Putin and United Russia," RPR-Parnas said on its website.

If elected, he would draft a plan to develop the city's infrastructure for the next 50 years, offer a "quality solution" to the traffic problem and improve state healthcare services, he said.

Meanwhile, the opposition's Coordination Council on Saturday failed to come to a consensus over choosing Navalny as its single mayoral candidate, Interfax reported.

Another key opposition candidate, Yabloko party leader Sergei Mitrokhin, also proposed

decentralizing power in Moscow at the Forum of Municipal Deputies.

He also said that, if elected, he'd dissolve the City Duma, which the opposition considers illegitimate due to claims of widespread voting fraud.

Natalya Chernyshova, a contender for the mayoral post and a deputy for the Zyuzino district, said municipal deputies should sign a petition against the requirement for candidates to gather signatures — a mechanism seen by the opposition as a way to prevent independent candidates from running.

"Let's show them that the municipal filter doesn't pass the municipal filter," she joked.

Chernyshova also said she had rejected "dirty offers" to smear Navalny in exchange for Kremlin support, prompting quips that he should marry her.

Others who announced mayoral programs at the forum included a representative of candidate Ivan Melnikov, of the Communist Party; Alexander Tarnavsky, a member of A Just Russia, which has yet to choose a candidate; civil activist Alyona Popova; and a representative of Left Front candidate Sergei Udaltsov, who is currently under house arrest.

Maxim Kats, a municipal deputy for the Shchyukino district, told The Moscow Times that he would give his signature to Navalny because he was the only independent candidate running. He expressed confidence that Navalny would be able to get the necessary number of municipal deputies' signatures.

Unlike Navalny, Mitrokhin is unlikely to "shake up" the city, Kats said.

Konstantin Yankauskas, a municipal deputy for the Zyuzino district, also voiced support for Navalny.

"I respect Mitrokhin and the Communist Party, but these are parties included in the [Kremlin-dominated] system," he said.

The chances of Navalny getting the necessary number of municipal deputies' signatures were small, he said, but they still existed. A great deal will depend on whether Communist Party deputies support him, Yankauskas added.

But even if Navalny passes the "municipal filter," the authorities might push him out of the race by convicting him in the KirovLes trial or setting him up in some way, Yankauskas said. They could distribute fake campaign materials and then say they were not financed by his official campaign fund, which is illegal, he said.

Regardless of the outcome, however, Navalny's participation is vital to mobilize opposition-minded Muscovites and prevent a state of apathy, low turnout and a victory by Sobyanin in the first round, Yankauskas said.

Vyacheslav Vaneyev, a municipal deputy for the Cheryomushki district, told The Moscow Times that he would likely support acting Mayor Sergei Sobyanin. Earlier at the forum, he baffled the audience by announcing that he was "an opposition United Russia deputy." He later explained that remark by saying he often voted against United Russia initiatives at his

municipal assembly.

Eight mayoral contenders had submitted registration papers to the Moscow city elections committee as of Saturday morning, Interfax reported. These include Navalny, Mitrokhin, Sobyanin, and a State Duma deputy from the Liberal Democratic Party, Mikhail Degtyaryov, among others.

Contact the authors at o.sukhov@imedia.ru and n.krainova@imedai.ru

Related articles:

- Prokhorov Doubts Navalny's Credentials for Mayor
- Sobyanin's Early Election Stunt
- Prokhorov to Skip Mayoral Election

Original url:
https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2013/06/16/opposition-candidates-woo-municipal-deputies-in-mayoral-race-a24979