

Q&A: Governor Vorobyov Feels the Power of Fatherhood

By [Alexander Panin](#)

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Vorobyov is now experiencing the pros and cons of constituents e-mails.

Andrei Vorobyov has more experience at fatherhood than most 43 year olds.

In addition to the four children he calls his own, all 7 million residents of the Moscow region, where he serves as acting governor, can now pop out of his pocket and demand advice on how to solve their problems, thanks to a recent promotional campaign that plastered his personal e-mail on billboards along major highways.

"I initially thought that I would receive messages from investors who were having trouble doing business in the region, had cases of government abuse and so on," Vorobyov said in an interview with The Moscow Times. "And I would come in as an Iron Man or Batman to save them and get those taxes to fill the regional budget. But the truth is that the messages are coming in from ordinary people," he said, smiling.

Andrei Vorobyov

Education

1998 — Russian Foreign Trade Academy,
degree in international economics

2006 — State University Higher School
of Economics, Communication Management
Institute, MBA in political and business
communication

Work experience

2012-present — acting governor of the
Moscow region

2011-2012 — deputy chairman of the State
Duma, head of United Russia party faction

2005-2012 — head of the Central Executive
Committee of United Russia party

2003-2011 — member of the State Duma,
deputy head of United Russia party

2002-2003 — member of the Council
of Federation representing the Republic
of Adygeya

2000-2012 — president of the Interregional
Support Fund for United Russia party

2000 — assistant of Deputy Prime Minister
Sergei Shoigu

1998-2000 — Russian Fish Company,
general director

Favorite book: "Cicero" (2006) by Robert
Harris; "When Nietzsche Wept" (1992)
by Irvin D. Yalom

Reading now: "Russian Management Model"
(2011) by Alexander Prokhorov

Movie pick: "The Great Gatsby" (2013)
directed by Baz Luhrmann

Favorite Moscow restaurant: Genatsvale
on Stary Arbat.

Weekend getaway destination: Alexander
Pushkin park and museum in Zakharovo-
Vyazyomy, the Moscow region; Pyotr
Tchaikovsky park and museum in Klin.

Iron Man was what he was called when asked for help during one of his first live question

and answer sessions on regional television.

Despite the fortress-like feeling of the regional government headquarters, where Vorobyov sits overlooking the Moscow river and the tall, densely packed apartment houses of Pavshinskaya Poima district, the governor is accessible.

Every 10 minutes or so his smart phone gives off a beep as a message comes in.

"I am really a very kind and trusting man," Vorobyov said. "My e-mail is listed everywhere, and the messages are coming directly to me."

He gets 60 to 80 such messages a day and tries to answer them all or at least have someone on his staff respond.

Having been almost unanimously elected as the candidate from the United Russia party for the gubernatorial race in the Moscow region scheduled for September 8, Vorobyov doubts that he would face any real competition. All the same, in addition to his daily tasks, he is busy giving interviews.

One of the most recent was with Vladimir Pozner for Channel One TV, where he said an elected governor was more legitimate than an appointed one, although what really mattered was to achieve results.

Among the results of his eight months on the job, he said, was to assemble a team of professionals, come up with an action plan and begin to see it bear fruit.

One of Vorobyov's first initiatives when he took the position offered to him by President Vladimir Putin last November was to considerably reduce the region's debt, which began accumulating under former Governor Boris Gromov, who was in power from 2000 to 2012.

"Since the beginning of the year, we have decreased the debt from almost 100 billion rubles (\$3 billion) to a little over 45 billion," Vorobyov said.

He is also proud of introducing a transparent system for managing government expenditures, which made it possible to save a billion rubles in just a few months.

One more widely discussed initiative of the acting governor was a ban on issuing new building permits without the prior approval of the Construction Committee — a watchdog set up by Vorobyov to get oversight of the residential construction industry, which is notoriously famous for overly dense land usage that has led residents of some districts to call their neighborhoods "concrete jungles."

Another beep from the phone. Pleas for help are coming in from various places around the region. Someone from Khimki is complaining about construction again.

There are problems with getting Russian citizenship, and even a divorce. People turn to the governor with their personal issues the same way Russians have turned to their supreme leader for centuries — though mobile broadband has replaced court audiences and Soviet-era letter writing.

"It's the nature of things, and there is nothing that can be done about it," Vorobyov said with a sigh.

The son of Deputy Emergency Situations Minister Yury Vorobyov, who is a close ally of Sergei Shoigu, former head of the ministry and the previous Moscow region governor, the younger Vorobyov is very much influenced by his father and his older peers.

"I have to work to earn people's respect, so I can live in peace as an ordinary man afterward," he says, adding that this is the behavior his father taught him.

But he admits that his generation's approach is different than his father's. Having established a successful business, Vorobyov passed the management over to his brother so he could enter politics. His goal is to serve the people, he says, without looking back at the necessity to make money.

And he has proven his desire to serve. At the end of the 1980s, Vorobyov was in the army in a mechanized infantry division that took part in military operations in the restive Caucasus. Though in all likelihood he could have used his father's connections to get a desk job in the military, he refused to consider that option.

He is inspired by the burden of responsibility that is now on his shoulders and by the understanding that power is not an end in itself.

"Any public office is just another stage of one's life, and one needs to work so that he will be worthy of respect and then able to move on to new challenges," Vorobyov said.

This interview has been edited for length and clarity.

Q: How does your previous experience in business help you in your new job?

A: Each job can be fruitful in its own way and can shape an individual if one is honest, persistent and engaged in what he does. It was fun being a businessman and then working for United Russia. I am sure I grew professionally as well.

Business has its own nuances, and managing has its difficulties, the reason being that there is competition and demand has to be sought. I find management to be a complicated but interesting art.

Public management is more difficult because while a business owner is an ultimate authority, the power in state and municipal management is dispersed — there are different views and decisions are made collectively. This is a different system that requires its own rhetoric.

I have had many job promotions in my life for which I have been congratulated. But when I took this position, I received expressions of sympathy as well. I want to do this job so that there will be no need for any sympathy for me.

I am a young man, possibly with excessive motivation and energy. But that is necessary to accomplish all the changes everyone wants to see in the region. This includes the economy in general, improved public utilities, roads, job creation, schools and kindergartens. People want to move out of skyscrapers into low-rise housing.

Q: Who has influenced you?

A: I do not have idols, but I do not hesitate to take powerful and successful people as models, including contemporary and historical figures. The last person who influenced me was Governor-General Golytsin, an 1812 war hero. He was in charge of the Moscow municipality for 24 years. He was known for absolute devotion to serving the people, hearing out their needs and solving their problems. He brought on a lot of positive changes. I am trying to be like him. And time will show what the outcome of my efforts is.

Q: Is there anything that keeps you up at night?

A: Not my conscience, that's for sure! But the public utility services sector does. This is a tangled mess: managing companies, power suppliers and power generation, old infrastructure... how to make order of it?

Also, some of the messages I get from the public ... when someone is in serious trouble, that keeps me awake.

Q: What joyful moments do you have in your work?

A: They come when you can really help someone, see the results of your work. Each success that comes with newly created jobs, with every apartment that is given out to a war veteran or a teacher — they all bring satisfaction.

But everyone wants radical changes — and they want them tomorrow. That is the way we are.

If after talking to me you go out on the street and ask the first passerby: "I've just seen Vorobyov, now tell me, do you think he accomplished anything over these last eight months in office?" The answer would probably be "no." And that person would be correct, in his own way.

I've been telling you about my work, but this is just the beginning of a long journey. Take the bridge across the Moscow River to Pavshino that the people asked for years to be built. It will appear, but in a year to year and a half, it is impossible to build it earlier. It is unreal to build a prenatal center in a year, it takes two. And there is the project planning stage that adds to the timeline. But these unseen complexities are of no interest to anyone, people want results and I aim to provide exactly that.

Q: What message do you have for foreign investors?

A: I say, welcome to the Moscow region! These words reflect the idea behind the program that we launched: "Moscow region — an open territory." We also established an investors club.

The region as a whole and municipalities in particular are awaiting investors with open arms — you can take my word for it. They can contact me directly or turn to the head of our investment and innovation department.

We can provide the land, help with getting connected to the electricity and gas grids, will give general support.

Q: The Kaluga Region, besides offering easy access to infrastructure and energy sources, also offers tax benefits. Are there any plans to have something similar in the Moscow region?

A: We already made changes in the regional laws and introduced a "strategic investor" status, for those who bring in no less than 5 billion rubles (\$156 million) over 5 years; "priority investor" designation for those who invest 2 billion rubles over 3 years; and "important investor" — for those who spend 300 million rubles over 3 years.

Depending on the amount invested in the regional economy, in return the business will be granted a lower income and property tax. For example, large investors will pay 4.5 percent less and get property tax benefits.

Q: How do you fight corruption?

A: Corruption exists at different levels and is everywhere in the world. The question is to what extent the system has been infiltrated by it.

To keep things from falling apart, decisions should be made openly. It's one thing when an individual has the authority to sign a permit for the construction of 300,000 square meters of housing and a totally different approach when a public construction committee like the one we established in the region considers all pros and cons of a project.

Take the government purchasing program. As I said, we made it transparent and quickly saw the result. From this we got an 11 percent savings — that's tangible. Before, usually only two companies participated in a given tender, but now the average is five.

When the authorities are exposed to the public, it increases the quality of the government, and I am a protagonist of this style of management. When you are open, the decisions you make are honest.

Q: What relationship do you have with Moscow Mayor Sergei Sobyenin and what do you think of the idea to merge the regions?

A: I am asked this question frequently. I wonder if he is asked the same question about me?

Well, our relationship is a mutually beneficial partnership aimed to make both regions — and the people who live there — prosperous.

As for a merger, the two regions are only formally separate. In reality, they share the same infrastructure and energy system, and our residents have the same interests.

It is possible to combine the administration for the territories, but larger systems are more difficult to control. As the saying goes, one head is good but two are better.

Q: You and Sobyenin are starting the electoral race at virtually the same time. How about combining your platforms?

A: We already have a common platform. Our teams meet on a regular basis to discuss various questions. This includes development of public transportation, roads, quality of water and many other things.

Q: Probably the most important and costly joint program that you have with Moscow is road construction. How much money is needed in total to improve the roads?

A: The experts say that each year the region gets an additional 150,000 cars.

In order to be properly prepared for that, 150 billion rubles have to be invested in infrastructure annually until 2020.

Besides building up the road network it is also very important to create an alternative: a well developed and comfortable public transportation system, which we are working on together with the Moscow authorities.

Q: You are fond of sports — hockey in particular. Has that helped you in your career?

A: Yes, it did help. In life in general, in business and in politics. It even helped to form family ties. I met my future wife when I was playing at the Luzhniki stadium against the Italian parliament. She was in the stands.

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