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Putin Appoints Belykh Acting Kirov Governor

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President Vladimir Putin on Tuesday appointed Nikita Belykh acting governor of the Kirov region until the next elections in September, thereby renewing his powers after they officially expired.

Appointed by then-President Dmitry Medvedev as Kirov region governor in 2008, Belykh took office in January 2009 and is one of the few openly liberal regional heads who does not have ties with the ruling United Russia party.

Belykh, 38, said he planned to run for the next five years in office and promised to make elections fair, transparent and competitive.

"I have the energy and desire to continue my work. Our previous work gave us results that we can show and we have plans for the future. I will participate in the elections and I hope Kirov region residents will vote for me," he wrote on LiveJournal on Tuesday.

Once a member of the Union of Right Forces, a now-defunct liberal-leaning party, Belykh has been at odds with United Russia's branch in the Kirov region. He is also known to have good relations with opposition leader Alexei Navalny, who has been outspoken in his criticism of Putin.

Despite Belykh's apparent affiliation with the opposition, Sergei Neverov, the State Duma's deputy speaker, said Tuesday that United Russia might support Belykh's bid for governor in September's election.

"When creating a program for the Kirov region's development, United Russia will propose its priorities to the acting governor. If our priorities are taken into account, I do not exclude that we will support Belykh's candidature," Neverov told Interfax.

Vedomosti reported in December that Belykh had received approval to be acting governor from the Kremlin "at the last possible moment" and that the delay was caused by his conflict with United Russia and a criminal case against his former adviser Navalny.

Navalny received a suspended sentence in October after he was charged with embezzling 16 million rubles ($500,000) worth of timber from KirovLes. Belykh's office and apartment were searched in connection with the case and Belykh was interrogated as a witness.

Belykh does not represent any political party but news reports said earlier that the Civil Platform might back him in the elections.

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