

Putin Poster in Ural Town Leads to Investigation

By [Anna Dolgov](#)

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A photograph of President Vladimir Putin displayed at a housing utilities office, along with the caption "All questions should be addressed to him."

A photograph of President Vladimir Putin displayed at a housing utilities office, along with the caption "All questions should be addressed to him," prompted indignation from an elderly resident who demanded an investigation into the "offensive" poster, officials said.

Employees at a utilities department in the town of Krasnoufimsk, in the Ural Mountains, printed out Putin's photograph from the Internet and attached it to one of their office doors, outfitting the portrait with a caption that instructed visitors to address all questions to "him," followed by an arrow pointing at the president.

A dialogue balloon coming out of Putin's mouth said: "It will be so!"

The Sverdlovsk regional prosecutor's office was looking into a complaint filed by a local

retiree who found the poster offensive, a spokesperson said, Ura.ru reported on Wednesday.

The incident prompted a flurry of jokes on Russian social networks.

"The pensioner should have also complained that his religious feelings were offended," a reader on the Ekho Moskvyy radio website said.

Utilities workers may have a reason to regard the president as their patron: Last fall, Putin created a new ministry for construction, housing and utilities to address what he called a sore point in the country.

But a police spokesperson said that utilities office employees appeared to have intended the poster merely as a joke "to make people smile."

News website Krasnoufimsk Online suggested that the joke was on the visitors, saying that the poster was meant "to let visitors understand that they have no business coming to the utilities office and asking questions, but should address their issues directly to the president."

When unable to resolve their grievances with local bureaucrats, Russians have a long history of taking their complaints directly to the country's leader — a practice that the Kremlin sometimes treats favorably, intervening in minor local issues.

Contact the author at newsreporter@imedia.ru

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