

New Bill Makes Moscow Duma Lawmakers Unpaid Part-Timers

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Nearly half of all Moscow residents have either nothing or nothing good to say about the work of the local government, a recent poll shows, even as the legislature pronounced much of its mission accomplished and reduced most of its deputies to unpaid, part-time work.

About a quarter of Moscow residents think the municipal council is doing a "bad" or "very bad" job, while another 19 percent said they have no idea what it does, a survey released by the Levada Center pollster Wednesday indicated. Another 34 percent judged the work of the city's Duma to be "average," the pollster said in a report.

The next poll, however, might show even fewer Muscovites being aware of what their local representatives do.

A new bill grants full-time "professional" lawmaking status to only a handful of Duma politicians — such as the speaker, deputy speakers and heads of legislative departments —

who would continue to draw paychecks for their legislative work.

Most of its deputies, however, will become unpaid part-timers, taking no more than six days off per month from their main job for their stint at running the city.

Adopted by a majority vote in the City Duma on Wednesday, opinions on the bill are nonetheless divided.

City Duma deputy Alexander Krutov from the ruling United Russia party said the city needed less lawmakers because "the volume of legislative work has objectively declined."

"More than 90 percent of the legislative base for the capital had been created during the past 20 years," he said in comments published on the Duma website.

Another United Russia deputy, Nikolai Gonchar, said the purpose of the change was "to have both professional deputies and also people who live like everybody else," Interfax reported.

Part-time lawmaking would open up the way for getting into the Duma "for those who work in a polyclinic or those who teach at a school," Gonchar was quoted as saying.

But head of the liberal opposition Yabloko party Sergei Mitrokhin denounced the statute as an "attempt to destroy the last vestiges of self-sufficiency" of the council, according to a statement published on the party's website.

"Leaders of commissions and factions will be able to get the 'independent pay rate' only through a specific decision by the authorities," the statement said.

The number of legislative sessions will also be limited to once per month, from the current weekly frequency, the statement said.

The Levada Center poll was conducted this spring among 1,004 people in Moscow and gave a margin of error of no more than 4.3 percentage points.

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