The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Russian Elderly to Receive Firewood Via Crowdfunding, Not Government Subsidies

By Anna Dolgov

October 19, 2015



Activists in Russia are collecting money to buy firewood to heat the homes of impoverished villagers who may otherwise struggle to get though the upcoming winter — a plight that has brought criticism of the government from anti-corruption figures.

An online campaign titled "Give a gift of firewood" had collected slightly more than 224,000 rubles ($3,625) by Monday morning, out of the 588,000 rubles activists seek to heat 116 homes in the western Tver and Smolensk regions.

"Hundreds of rural residents are living in poverty, while the meager pensions or subsidies are not even enough to heat a home in winter," the campaign said on its website, adding that buying firewood and having it delivered can set a household back 5,000-6,000 rubles.

The campaign received coverage from Russia's leading television network, state-run Channel One, which aired a report about the crowdfunding efforts last week, and added via Twitter: “Everyone can help lonely old people.”

“The most terrifying time for old people is winter,” Channel One said in its report, adding that more than 10 of Russia's regions have joined the “Give the gift of firewood” campaign.

The disparity between state-run television's daily reports, praising the country's achievements and its leaders, and the network's concession that scores of Russians risk freezing to death has prompted derision from opposition figures.

Channel One mentioned the firewood campaign “somewhere in between the reports about the grandness of the country under the leadership of its wise leader, and about how the population, in a joint outburst, demands dispatching troops first to Ukraine, then to Syria,” anti-corruption blogger and opposition activist Alexei Navalny said in a post on his website Sunday.

The activist, who has exposed pricey possessions flaunted by government officials, said the Channel One report was “badly missing” a calculation to show that scores of homes could be heated if Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov were to sell one of his watches, allegedly worth 37 million rubles. Peskov has said the watch, which he was pictured wearing at his recent wedding, was a present from his bride, figure skating champion Tatyana Navka.

At the estimated cost of 5,000 rubles for a truck of firewood, “one could add that during his honeymoon, Dmitry Peskov was sailing a yacht at a rate of 5,200 trucks of firewood per week,” Navalny added in his blog Sunday.

Navalny noted that shutting down Channel One would save enough state subsidies to buy 800,000 trucks of firewood each year.

“Perhaps in that case, winter would not be such as 'terrifying season' for retirees,” Navalny said.

Original url:
https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2015/10/19/russian-elderly-to-receive-firewood-via-crowdfunding-not-government-subsidies-a50333