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Medvedev Gaffe Outrage 'Engineered Smear Campaign,' Says Kremlin

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Russian Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev **Kremlin Press Service**

The Kremlin has accused opposition groups of engineering a smear campaign against Russian Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev,to "distort" comments he made advising teachers to work second jobs, the RBC newspaper reported Wednesday.

Medvedev's remarks caused a public outcry last week, when he suggested that teachers unsatisfied with their low wages should enter business or pick up extra work "on the side."

"If you want to make money, then there are many wonderful places where you can do that," he told one educator when asked why the salary of a junior teacher was a fraction of that received by police officers.

The comments drew considerable public disapproval, with one petition calling for Medvedev's dismissal gathering over 250,000 signatures. The ⊠petition, posted on social activism site change.org, states that the Cabinet of Ministers should be headed by "a ⊠competent and

educated person, who cares about his country."

"Medvedev said that teaching is a calling," history teacher Alexei Kuznetsov wrote in The Moscow Times. "Perhaps it is, just like any ⊠other challenging activity. But why did he argue that anyone following ⊠that calling must necessarily live in poverty? ⊠⊠The teaching profession demands special qualities. The task before any ⊠civilized government is to support people who pursue such callings."

The Kremlin now claims that any backlash surrounding the remarks has arisen because " especially trained people analyzed his comments, looking for certain words which could be shown in a negative light," a government source told RBC. "They took his message, distorted it, put it in a different context and people bought it," the source claimed. "It's a hatchet job."

The "campaign" against Medvedev could have originated from a political rival within government, or those "hoping that the United Russia Party gain as few votes as possible," the source said, suggesting that anyone from "opposition politicians to financial interests" could be involved.

A column published in Britain's Financial Times newspaper the day after Medvedev made the comments suggested that former finance minister Alexei Kudrin could be set to replace Medvedev as prime minister after September's elections.

Medvedev, who heads United Russia's party list for State Duma elections next month, has made several public gaffes in recent months. He recently faced a widespread public backlash after telling a Crimean pensioner unhappy with her benefits that: "there's no money, but you hang in there."

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