

NTV Gives Airtime to Magnitsky's Fraud Claims

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State-controlled NTV television has aired a lengthy report on the luxury lifestyles of officials implicated in the case of Hermitage Capital lawyer Sergei Magnitsky — two months after the story was first broken by Magnitsky's supporters.

The 14-minute [documentary](#), whose title roughly translates as "Fat Cats," voices charges by Magnitsky's supporters that Moscow police and tax service officials were involved in a 2007 scheme to embezzle \$230 million in tax refunds originally intended for Hermitage.

"Fat Cats," which aired late Monday, is based on series of exposés by Hermitage that claimed officials implicated in the case own assets worth millions of dollars that they could not afford on their salaries.

Magnitsky was jailed in 2008 after accusing officials in the \$230 million fraud and died in pretrial detention of health problems 11 months later. His supporters say the case was fabricated as punishment for whistleblowing and that he was denied medical help.

While the allegations are not new, their appearance on national television is.

NTV in recent months has aired critical reports on now-ousted Mayor Yury Luzhkov and Belarussian leader Alexander Lukashenko that reflected what later became the government's stance. In May, it aired a strikingly unbiased report on jailed former Yukos CEO Mikhail Khodorkovsky.

But Magnitsky's former boss, Jamison Firestone, suggested that NTV's report on Magnitsky was part of a turf war at the tax service, not a signal of a looming crackdown on government officials linked to the case. Hermitage's exposés were simply used by enemies of the officials involved in the case, he said Tuesday in an e-mailed statement.

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