

# Irkutsk Governor Will Run For Kremlin

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A governor whose biggest claim to fame is perhaps his decision to delay an Aeroflot flight because he was running late will run for president against Vladimir Putin.

Irkutsk Governor Dmitry Mezentsev, who made headlines in June for delaying the flight, angering passengers and a public weary of coddled politicians, accepted on Wednesday a presidential nomination forwarded by a trade union affiliated with state-run Russian Railways, RIA-Novosti [reported](#), citing Alexander Startsev, trade union leader for the railway's east Siberian branch.

Mezentsev did not comment Wednesday on his motivation for running, telling reporters only that the nomination was "unexpected."

Locals described Mezentsev as an experienced if lackluster bureaucrat.

"You might think that he is a freewheeler, agreeing to run for president at the drop of a hat, like going to the supermarket, but he is a very experienced bureaucrat," Sergei Levchenko,

a State Duma deputy from the Irkutsk region, said by telephone.

Levchenko, a Communist, also said Mezentsev took an active part in Putin's 2000 presidential campaign and seemed to be on good terms with Putin and Medvedev. "I have never heard him say a critical word about Putin or Medvedev," he said.

Mezentsev, 52, a former Federation Council senator and journalist who has governed Irkutsk since being appointed by President Dmitry Medvedev in 2009, is among the few regional governors who is not a member of United Russia. But he is a senior member of the organizing body of the United Russia Supporters Union, a group that backs the ruling party.

Mezentsev also hit the campaign trail in support of the United Russia candidate who lost heavily to Communist-backed Viktor Kondrashov in the 2010 Irkutsk mayoral election.

Prime Minister Putin is widely expected to win election in the March 2012 election. Kremlin bids have also been announced by billionaire Mikhail Prokhorov, Communist leader Gennady Zuganov, Liberal Democratic Party leader Vladimir Zhirinovskiy, A Just Russia leader Sergei Mirnov and writer and radical political activist Eduard Limonov.

Levchenko predicted that Mezentsev would have difficulty collecting the 2 million signatures needed for the presidential bid on his own and would likely need to rely on administrative support.

A source close to the east Siberian branch of the railways said the manpower of railway workers across the country might be used to collect signatures for Mezentsev.

Russian Railways is a monopoly headed by Vladimir Yakunin, a powerful political figure and a member of Putin's inner circle.

Mezentsev's popularity in Irkutsk is low, according to St. Petersburg Politics, a think tank. Part of the reason might be linked to the June incident when Mezentsev's aides ordered a regularly scheduled Aeroflot plane to remain on the ground until the tardy governor arrived. Mezentsev publicly apologized after the incident surfaced in the media.

Maxim Vorontsov, a young activist with the Irkutsk-based Baikal Wave environmental group, said he views Mezentsev's presidential bid with a "sense of humor."

"Not much has changed since he became a governor, and maybe things have not become worse," he said by phone. "We are riding in the same direction as the rest of the country."

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