

Confusion Shrouds Perm Governor's Future

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Perm Governor Oleg Chirkunov **Denis Grishkin**

Perm Governor Oleg Chirkunov has confirmed that he plans to step down early, but some of his team seem to think otherwise.

Chirkunov, who is midway through his second term, said he would resign after President Dmitry Medvedev signs a law returning direct elections for governors.

"I have already held this post for seven years," Chirkunov told Izvestia in comments published Tuesday. "This is more than enough."

But his spokesman denied any early resignation. "The option of leaving his post early was discussed at a meeting with the president in March," the spokesman told Interfax. "Chirkunov does not intend to leave office in the near future."

Chirkunov is one of the country's most unpopular governors and would likely not win a direct election. He announced in December that he would not seek a third term.

His decision is based on his own career plans and national protests after the disputed State Duma elections in December, said Oleg Podvintsev, a Perm political analyst, RIA-Novosti reported.

"Apparently, he was influenced by the events in December, and he realized that the situation in the country is changing completely," Podvintsev said.

Chirkunov's second term as governor ends in 2015. He became governor in 2005 and was reappointed by Medvedev in 2010.

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