

Roizman to Be Questioned in Cathedral Damage Case

By [Delphine d'Amora](#)

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Roizman was recently elected mayor of Yekaterinburg after he beat United Russia candidate Yakov Silin in September. **Maxim Stulov**

Investigators have called Yekaterinburg Mayor Yevgeny Roizman in for questioning this Saturday concerning damage supposedly inflicted on a cathedral during amateur restoration work that he helped to fund, the Sverdlovsk region's police department said in a statement on its website.

Law enforcement officials said that 31 million rubles (\$1 million) in government funds were lost through a botched repair job on the cathedral in Byngi, 100 kilometers north of Yekaterinburg, Father Viktor, the cathedral's father superior, told information portal Znak.ru last week.

On Oct. 22, the investigators informed Father Viktor of the conclusions they had drawn from their inquiries and said that they thought he and Roizman were mutually responsible

for the damage to the Cathedral of Nicholas the Wonder-Worker.

"Everywhere father superiors rebuild cathedrals, as much as they can, with their own efforts," Roizman said. "In Byngi the government didn't give a damn about the church for many years. They took an interest only now. All of this creates a precedent for Russia — any priest who repairs a cathedral can be put in prison."

In an open letter published on Znak.ru last week, Father Viktor described the accusations against him as "a pack of lies and a dirty political tactic directed against Yekaterinburg Mayor Yevgeny Roizman."

In fact, by contributing his own money for the renovation Roizman was providing assistance that the government had repeatedly failed to render despite multiple visits from officials who "promised and promised" to do something, Father Viktor wrote.

An official statement published last week on the website of the Nizhnetagil'skaya diocese, which encompasses the cathedral in Byngi, seconded Father Viktor's account.

Although the cathedral was declared an architectural monument of federal significance in 1995 and has been in the operational control of the federal monument protection agency since 2000, the agency has never inspected the monument, the statement said.

Furthermore, no federal funds have been granted for its protection, although the Yekaterinburg diocese sent requests for support to the Culture Ministry in 2001.

In such instances, the church traditionally reaches out to organizations and businesses for financial assistance, which was how the director of the Sverdlovsk diocese came to contact Roizman, then a State Duma deputy, in 2004.

With Roizman's help the northern and southern iconostases were repaired and work on the central iconostasis was begun. "These works can only be judged positively, for which there is testimony by expert restorationists from Moscow," the statement said.

Roizman faced several inquiries before and after his unprecedented win in the Sept. 8 mayoral election in what he has repeatedly described as a smear campaign against him. In one instance, a workshop run by the anti-drug foundation Roizman set up was raided by police in connection with the disappearance of more than 50 icons from a church in Byngi.

Several of Roizman's close colleagues are currently facing charges. Aksana Panova, Roizman's campaign head and reported love interest, was called in for questioning by the Investigative Committee on Thursday regarding one of the four charges of blackmail, fraud and embezzlement that she is facing, Itar-Tass reported.

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