

Showtime Spins 'Yeltsin Project'

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Showtime is taking a behind-the-scenes look at the orchestration of Russian President Boris Yeltsin's remarkable 1996 political comeback by a trio of U.S. "spin doctors."

Jeff Goldblum, Anthony LaPaglia and Liev Schreiber have been tapped to star in the telefilm, tentatively titled "The Yeltsin Project," which Roger Spottiswoode ("Tomorrow Never Dies") has signed on to direct.

They will play elite American political consultants George Gorton, Dick Dresner and Joe Shumate, respectively, who were hired by a group of Russian businessmen to surreptitiously manage Yeltsin's bid for re-election at a time when he was plagued by dismal approval ratings as a result of the hardship caused by economic reforms, the proliferation of organized crime and the ongoing war in Chechnya (news - web sites), as well as shaky health after had suffered two heart attacks.

With help from Yeltsin's daughter and unofficial political adviser Tatyana Dyachenko, the consultants used U.S.-style political polls and marketing techniques to influence the Russian voting public. Yeltsin ultimately won the lead over his main rival, Communist Gennady Zyuganov, in the June election and defeated him in a runoff in July.

Yeltsin's worsening heart condition, combined with a bout of pneumonia in 1997, sidelined him through a substantial part of his second term, which he cut short by resigning on Dec. 31, 1999. Amid increasing rumblings about alleged wrongdoings by him and his entourage, Yeltsin stepped down, appointing Prime Minister Vladimir Putin (news - web sites) as acting president. Dyachenko is said to have once again played an important role in that maneuver.

Spottiswoode will direct "The Yeltsin Project" from a script by Yuri Zeltser and Cary Bickley.

Andrew Licht, Jeffrey Mueller and John Morris are executive producing for the Licht/Mueller Film Corp., while Vicki Letizia is shepherding the telefilm at Showtime.