

Klein's flight to leadership vote OK: premier's spokesman

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A spokesman for Alberta's new premier says Ralph Klein was within his rights to use a government plane on the day of the Tory leadership vote and charge it to taxpayers.

Tom Olsen said Thursday that Klein was still premier and MLA for Calgary-Elbow and was finishing up government business when he flew between Calgary and Edmonton with his wife and others on Dec. 2.

"He had a pile of correspondence that he needed to sign off on and meet with some government officials, sort of finalizing his farewell," Olsen said.

"What he did was co-ordinate his return to Edmonton to finish up some business here at the same time as the leadership review so he could be in Edmonton and wish whoever was going to win that night best wishes."

A charter company contacted by CBC News estimated it would have cost \$5,200 to charter the same plane for the flight.

Liberal Leader Kevin Taft said the bill for the flights should be sent to the Alberta Conservative party and not to taxpayers.

"I don't know whether to laugh at that or get ticked off. The idea that Ralph Klein suddenly had to fly to Edmonton on a Saturday night to sign some sort of government document that couldn't wait until Monday morning or couldn't be faxed to him in Calgary — give me a break."



Ralph Klein shakes hands with supporters after his short speech on Dec. 2 to Tories gathered to hear the results of the party's leadership vote. (CBC News)

Klein gave 11-word thank-you speech

On Dec. 2, the plane flew without any passengers from Edmonton to Calgary just after 4 p.m., picked up Klein, his wife Colleen, and Klein's top staffer in Calgary, Rich Jones, as well as a government security officer. It then returned to Edmonton.

The Kleins appeared on stage after the leadership vote results were announced and he gave his 11-word thank-you speech: "Thank you all for your support over the years. Thank you."

The four then boarded the same plane in Edmonton at 1:22 a.m., arriving in Calgary at 2:03 a.m. The plane returned to Edmonton, again carrying no passengers.

On the passenger manifest, the reason for the flights that day is listed as: "Attend meeting(s) with government officials."