

## Klein's Tories headed for 10th straight victory



**Ralph Klein on Saturday's campaign trail**

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Alberta's provincial election campaign wrapped up Sunday, with the burning question not focused on who will win, but on how long Ralph Klein will stay on after he racks up another victory.

The Progressive Conservative Premier appears to be on track to win a fourth consecutive election Monday night, voter surveys predict. That would be a 10th straight victory for the party, which has been in power since 1971.

Voting will take place across the province on Monday, with polls open from 9 a.m. to 8 p.m.

Heading into the election, Klein's Conservatives held 73 seats in the 83-seat legislature. The Liberals had five seats and the NDP two, with one independent and a pair of vacant seats.

According to the results of an exclusive Ipsos-Reid CTV poll last week, 44 per cent of decided voters are set to cast their ballots for the Conservatives.

The opposition Liberals appear poised to retain their second-place status with the support of 29 per cent of voters.

The NDP has 12 per cent of the decided vote, while both the Alberta Alliance and Alberta Greens are trailing with nine and four per cent of the decided vote, respectively.

Also running in this election are the Alberta Party, the Reform Party of Alberta, the Separation Party of Alberta, The Equity Party, the Communist Party and the Alberta Social Credit.

### **More seats each election**

In each election outing, Klein has usually done better than the last time. He won 51 seats in 1993, 63 in 1997, and 74 three years ago in 2001.

The question this time around is how much will he win, and how long will he remain in office afterwards?

As for the issue of how long, Klein has already said he will stay for another three years and eight months. But, if anyone is thinking of openly running for his job, he's made it clear it won't be tolerated.

On Saturday in his last day of campaigning, Klein said there would be retribution for would-be successors who publicly jockey for his job.

"I'll take very strong and firm action if I see people becoming disruptive in their campaigning," Klein told reporters after a rally for supporters and candidates at his campaign headquarters.

He said cabinet members who break the rules could find themselves on the backbench.

He said he didn't mind if would-be challengers run a covert campaign to succeed him, but said he wants nothing that will "disrupt the day-to-day operations of government.

"It's going to make it difficult if I'm faced with overt activities," he said.

"It will make it difficult for me to govern and I would hope they have the courtesy and common sense not to openly challenge me."

Speculation over who will succeed the 62-year-old Klein has been a key part of the election campaign.

Klein has no events scheduled Sunday as the campaign winds down.

### **The final stretch**

Meanwhile, NDP leader Brian Mason and Liberal Leader Kevin Taft have scaled back their campaigns, focusing on Edmonton for the final day.

Klein has been harshly criticized throughout the 28-day campaign for providing few details on major health-care reforms planned for next year.

The Conservatives have also offered little discussion about how the government will spend a growing windfall of energy revenues now that Alberta is virtually debt-free.

The campaign has been dubbed "Kleinfeld", a reference to an episode of the popular TV sitcom Seinfeld in which the characters prepared a TV pilot about nothing in particular.

But Klein dismissed the Seinfeld comparison.

"I think it's a campaign about a lot, but it's how you interpret it," said the premier. "The way I interpret it, is that the campaign is all about Alberta's future."

The Conservatives have been in power in Alberta for 33 years, starting with Peter Lougheed in 1971, followed by Don Getty, and then Klein since 1992.

As part of Monday's election, Albertans will be voting on candidates for the province's "senators in waiting." Voters are to choose candidates to fill this province's vacancies in the Senate. A list of four winners will be presented to the federal government for consideration.

There are currently three vacant Alberta seats in the upper house, but Prime Minister Paul Martin has suggested he doesn't plan to fill them with the winners of the Alberta election.

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