



Leah Hennel/Calgary Herald

Rod Love was Ralph Klein's campaign manager during his mayoral run in 1980 and chief of staff throughout much of his four majority governments. He is pictured at McDougall Centre in Calgary on Saturday.

# The communicator and the strategist ...

'Together they were unbeatable'

BRYAN WEISMILLER  
CALGARY HERALD

One was the dreamer. The other was the driver.

Ralph Klein and Rod Love were the dynamic duo of prairie politics.

Klein handled the business upfront, while Love did the requisite dirty work behind the scenes. Together, they never lost an election and scored the type of towering majorities that make dictators jealous.

"Ralph was as much a genius communicator as Rod was a genius strategist," said Alan Hallman, the organizing maestro behind Klein's success in the Calgary-Elbow provincial riding.

"Together they were unbeatable."

The Klein-Love tag-team got off to a colourful beginning.

In his book, *King Ralph*, former Herald columnist Don Martin recounted an early day of the 1980 mayoral campaign when Klein and his new volunteer were running late for a meeting with real estate mogul Jack Singer.

Love was plunked behind the steering wheel of a rick-

ety motorhome as Klein ske-daddled to change into finer duds in the back.

It ended up being a rough ride after the rookie chauffeur turned to ask his boss for directions — and, consequently, steered the RV off the road.

"Klein was standing at the back of the swaying motorhome with a cigarette in one hand, a rum and Coke in the other, a grin and not a stitch of clothes on his body," Martin wrote. "What, Love wondered to himself, had he got himself into?"

However, the television personality and steak house waiter were on their way to climbing Alberta's political ladder.

Klein went on to a surprise victory in the municipal election victory that year, before securing two more terms in the mayor's chair.

After moving to provincial politics, Klein was handed the environment portfolio with Love as executive assistant.

It gave the former big-city mayor and his sidekick carte blanche to tour the province and glad-hand the rural electorate along the way.

Murray Smith, a future Klein cabinet minister, recalled how Love talked about those trips across the Alberta prairies.

They got carbonated in Carbon, Vulcanized in Vulcan and pinched in Pincher Creek.

And then Love would say,

"Thank God they didn't go to Castor."

The rural support came in handy during the Conservative leadership race in 1992 in which Klein won and became Alberta's 12th premier.

Love, to few people's surprise, was named chief of staff in the premier's office.

In Ralph's world, Love penned speeches, handled reporters, and quashed public blunders, inner-party squabbles and policy U-turns.

"Rod had that public policy acuity that would allow him to find solutions and then drive them home," Smith said.

"The premier was always the final arbiter, he had the final say, he batted cleanup," he added.

Those part of Klein's inner circle throughout his four majority governments rejected the characterization that there were puppet masters acting as the "brains behind Ralph," as one TV reporter put it.

"Honestly, there's no truth behind it," said Peter Elzinga, who served as executive director of the Progressive Conservative Party and Klein's chief of staff.

"As far as Rod Love is concerned, I've got great admiration and respect for him. He did a marvellous job."

Love moved to the private-sector to start a lucrative consulting business in 1998, which

opened the door for Elzinga to take the premier's top aide position. However, Love returned in 2004 to help Klein finish off his final spin through the legislature.

Many of the Klein gang, including Conservative organizer Hal Danchilla, admired their long-standing devotion.

"You never questioned their loyal to one another," Danchilla said.

That loyalty was occasionally put to the test. "Ralph and I had hellacious arguments," Love recalled in an interview. "We had furniture-throwing, screaming matches.

"I don't know how many times he fired me and I don't know how many times I quit.

"The next morning we'd go back to work."

Klein, 70, died last week from complications related to chronic obstructive pulmonary disease.

Love was at the southwest palliative care centre and looked back fondly on a 33-year journey as his best friend went to sleep for the final time.

"I had a front-row seat to the most incredible ride in Canadian politics," he said. "So the last thing I said to him was 'Thanks for the ride.'"

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