



Capitol Network News

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GOVERNOR'S FLIGHTS BECOME HOT TOPIC

By Shawn Ashley
Staff Writer

■(GIT) "Wrong. Dead wrong."

Those were the words used Friday by Governor Keating's communications director Dan Mahoney to describe criticisms from two lawmakers and the head of the state Democratic Party of his boss' use of a state airplane for campaign trips.

"Of the 50 political events the governor has attended this year," said Mahoney, "he has driven to 27 of them. Of those remaining, he flew to 12 and they were trips that also involved state business and the other 11 were strictly political trips. We will be asking the candidates involved for reimbursement for those trips at the end of the campaign."

In some other instances, too, Mahoney added, candidates will be asked to reimburse the state even though the governor was on a trip for state business. That, he explained, is because the political event resulted in what might be considered additional cost for the trip.

Governor Keating admitted during a Thursday news conference that he sometimes

mixes business and politics and that sometimes the state airplane is the mode of travel to such out-of-town events. However, the governor said, those trips made strictly for political reasons will be reimbursed by the campaigns involved. In those instances where the trip also involved state business, he said, no reimbursement will be sought. That's because, he explained, it's impossible to calculate how much flight time was dedicated to the campaign portion of the trip and how much flight time was dedicated to the business part of the trip.

Rep. Russ Roach, D-Tulsa and a critic of state air travel, fired Friday's first shot, saying "Apparently the governor is using what he considers to be his private airplane as a shuttle service."

Roach pointed to six of Keating's trips and alleged the governor "has abused his privilege of traveling at state expense."

In several of the instances cited by Roach, the governor's airplane appears to leave Wiley Post Airport in Oklahoma City more than once for what is often the same destination.

That, Mahoney said, is a problem with the records used by Roach to draw his conclusions, as well as with Roach, who Mahoney said was launching a purely po-

litical attack. The records used by Roach, Mahoney explained, do not accurately reflect the flight logs maintained by the Department of Public Safety. In some instances, he said, the plane was brought back to Oklahoma City for maintenance, training or some other reason deemed appropriate by the department. In other instances, he added, the governor did make two trips to the same city, but only because his schedule required it.

As an example, Mahoney pointed to an April 17 entry that shows the governor flew from Oklahoma City to Tulsa, back to Oklahoma City and then to Tulsa again, before ultimately returning to Oklahoma City again. That, he said, was true, but only because the made a speech in Tulsa in the morning, held a cabinet meeting in Oklahoma City later that day and returned to Tulsa for another state event that evening, before ultimately returning to the state capital.

Also critical of the governor and his trips was Sen. Kevin Easley, D-Broken Arrow. "I hate to say, 'I told you so,' but these are the same concerns I raised when Governor Keating started trying to finagle his own airplane," said Easley. "I figured he was going to turn the state plane into his own little campaign shuttle to take him from one partisan

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AG TO FILE RESPONSE IN OG&E RATE CASE

From Office of Attorney General

■(OKLAHOMA CITY) Attorney General Drew Edmondson said Friday he agrees with OG&E that the company's rates should be reduced, but by at least double the amount OG&E has proposed.

OG&E asked the Oklahoma Corporation Commission to reduce their rates by approximately \$14.2 million per year beginning March 1, 1997.

"We will file testimony in the OG&E case Monday," Edmondson said. "Our expert consultants are still working on a final number, but based on preliminary estimates I expect it to be at least double and as much as four times larger than the reduction OG&E has requested. That would translate to a rate reduction from \$28 million to \$56 million per year."

Edmondson's experts will finalize their testimony over the weekend. Monday is the deadline for parties wishing to file responses to OG&E's request.

"Our responsibility is to make sure Oklahoma ratepayers are paying not one penny more than they should for electrical service," Edmondson said. "We intend to push for as great a rate reduction as the evidence will support."