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Political Shake-Up in Jeff City

JEFFERSON CITY — By the time you read this column, the news of Gov. Blunt's decision not to run for reelection in November has spread through the state like wildfire. As you can imagine, the Capitol is abuzz with speculation about the future of the governor's office.

In the last three years, we've accomplished a great deal, from cutting taxes to substantially increasing funding for education. We've protected Missouri's businesses by revising workers' compensation laws in an effort to lower insurance premiums. And we've tackled and passed tort reform. More remains to be done but the next person who grabs the torch will be able to carry on the work that we've started.

A sign of a healthy democracy is when the transition from one head of state to another happens smoothly and routinely. One of the founding principles of democracy is the inevitable "changing of the guard" on a regular basis. This allows new blood to enter the political process, which helps to bring about new ideas and a fresh perspective. A democracy's strength is rooted in its election process.

This is an interesting time to be in the Senate and the governor's decision not to run again is one of the biggest political stories to happen during my time in Jefferson City. The repercussions of the governor's decision will be felt for weeks, if not months. Here in the Capitol, we will begin to experience a kind of trickle-down effect. As others in public office take the opportunity to run for governor, this will leave vacancies all across the political landscape. Many of these vacated higher offices will be attractive to legislators, leaving empty legislative seats — and a whole lot of uncertainty.

Still, no matter how preoccupied we may be with thinking about what will happen in November, it is up to lawmakers to make 2008 a successful session. Important bills are pending in both chambers of the legislature and it is important that we not let political speculation and maneuvering stand in the way of getting our priorities passed.

If you have any comments or questions about this week's column or any other matter involving state government, please do not hesitate to contact me. You can reach my office by e-mail at matt_bartle@senate.mo.gov or by phone at (888) 711-9278. My web address is <http://www.senate.mo.gov/bartle>.