

Senator calls 40 years long enough

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Senator Barry Stout

Harking back to his days at the family homestead in Good Intent, West Finley Township, Barry Stout likes to call himself "the oldest rat in the barn."

As the senior member of the Washington County legislative delegation, and the third most senior member of the state Senate, Barry Stout invoked the folksy phrase Thursday, explaining that you can pick out the oldest rat in the barn because it has the longest tail.

Stout, 73, of Bentleyville, was talking rats, barns and longevity because, after 40 years in state government, he's wrapping up his political career.

Stout announced via an e-mailed news release Thursday afternoon that he does not intend to seek a ninth, four-year term.

"I've labored long and hard over that decision," Stout said in a phone interview a few minutes later. "I did feel I can continue to contribute, but physically, it became more challenging."

Stout suffered a broken pelvis in 2007 and has walked with a cane. In December at Washington Hospital, he had a pacemaker implanted.

"It has become increasingly difficult for me to keep up with the schedule," he said. "In the best interest of the 46th District, it's time for me to move on with my career."

Comings and goings, as related to roads and transportation, have long been associated with Stout, who was assigned to the House Transportation Committee as a freshman in 1971. He has been Democratic chairman of the Senate Transportation Committee since the mid-1980s.

"You use the roads every day to get to work. You do not have an economy unless you have a transportation system," Stout said.

One of his early transportation pet projects was the Mon-Fayette Expressway, and recalls Gov. Milton Shapp pressing a button for an initial blasting in Malden in 1972. The toll road languished, with some calling it locally "the expressway to Low Hill," a hamlet near Route 40.

Thirty years later, the road stretched across Washington County, linking the Mon Valley with Route 51 in Allegheny County and a portion of it was christened the J. Barry Stout Expressway. When completed, the road will link Cheat Lake, W.Va., to Pittsburgh's South Hills by way of Uniontown and a Brownsville bypass.

When Southpointe was still the fallow fields of the Western State School and Hospital in Cecil Township, Stout said he volunteered to pick up a visiting state Transportation Secretary Tom Larson so he could show him the tract to drive home the need for an interchange between Bridgeville and Canonsburg at Southpointe.

Direct access to Interstate 79 was key to developing Southpointe, workplace for thousands of people today.

"You raise your kids and you educate your kids and if they can't find jobs here, they leave," Stout said. "We need our young people to stay here and be volunteer firemen and Girl Scout leaders."

Stout is the second most senior member of the powerful State Transportation Commission, which chooses the Transportation Improvement Plan before forwarding it to the governor.

He takes credit for securing money to build the Southern Beltway, linking the Route 22 corridor with Pittsburgh International Airport, and replacing the Charleroi-Monessen Bridge and a bridge that collapsed on Interstate 70 in South Strabane Township on Dec. 27, 2005.

Stout considered a run for Congress in 1993 against incumbent Austin J. Murphy, whom Stout succeeded in the state Senate.

It is, perhaps, a career Stout never envisioned while a student at Washington & Jefferson College or the Pittsburgh Institute of Mortuary Science. He worked in the family funeral home before running for office.

"There's a time to come. There's a time to go," he said.