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[By Lionel Green](#)

One of Alabama's most venerable senators is not seeking re-election in 2010, opting to spend more time with his family.

Ninth District Sen. Hinton Mitchem, 72, announced the news to The Reporter in an exclusive interview Monday.

During a political career spanning 32 years in the Senate and five governors, including a recent two-year stint as the powerful president pro tempore, Mitchem is retiring and leaving a huge void for Democrats to fill.

Mitchem's Senate tenure, combined with his one term in the House, makes him the longest serving legislator in the Senate.

"I'm just sort of burned out after all these years," the Union Grove Democrat said. "It's so hard now. I served as pro tem, and that's third in succession to the governor, and it was the hardest job I ever had.

"I got so frustrated in not being able to do what was right for the Senate by not being able to get the Republicans and Democrats together. I just couldn't do it, and I don't believe Jesus Christ could do it.

"I have carefully weighed the choice before me: to continue to work and provide senior leadership to a district that has come to count on that, or to devote time to my family who has always supported my public service, but who have made numerous sacrifices as they yielded to the constraints and endless schedules of an elected official.

"I have decided that I will not run for re-election this year. I have had a long and productive career, and I am satisfied that I have served the citizens of my district well."

Mitchem is married to the former Judy Corley, of Cullman. They have four children, Todd, Tanya, Dee and Brittnie, and three grandchildren.

"I'm 72 years old, and Judy and I both love to travel," he said. "I love to play golf, but I haven't played golf but one time in over a year, and I live on a golf course."

A Georgia-born veteran of the U.S. Coast Guard, Mitchem earned a bachelor's degree in education from the University of Georgia in 1961 before moving to Marshall County in 1962. He was president of Hinton Mitchem Tractor Company in Albertville from 1965 until he sold the business in 2005.

"For more than 35 years now, I have served the people of this district, and it has been an honor and a privilege to be instrumental in the progress and growth of our area," he said. "The people have chosen to send me to Montgomery nine times, three of which times I had no opposition. The confidence my constituents have placed in me has been very humbling, and I have never taken my position or my duties as their elected representative lightly.

"As I struggled this year with the decision of whether to run for another term, I have thought back over my years of public service and the many, many positive achievements that have impacted not only this district, but our state as well. There are still many issues to be tackled, some of which will shape our future for decades to come.

"I am proud of many major accomplishments, but I am also proud of the many times I have been able to assist people and families on individual, personal levels, too. I have made many lifetime friends, and I want to take this opportunity to thank the people who have supported me over the years in Marshall County and the portions of Blount, Madison and formerly DeKalb County that I have been allowed to serve."

Mitchem started his political career in 1968 when he was elected to the Albertville City Council. In 1974, he was elected to the Alabama House of Representatives. After serving one term in the House, Mitchem was elected to the Senate in 1978, where he established himself quickly as a savvy political leader. He was selected as one of five outstanding senators in 1983 and 1984, and his colleagues chose him as the outstanding senator in Alabama in 1985.

Mitchem served as president pro tem from 2007 to 2009. He also chaired a number of key committees, including the Finance, Taxation Education and General Fund.

Mitchem's list of accomplishments is long. He was a champion of the state's parks, especially Cathedral Caverns in nearby Woodville. He was inducted into the Alabama Senior Citizens Hall of Fame in 2006 for his support of programs and services for the elderly.

He strongly supported education, business, law enforcement and the sanctity of marriage, and sponsored laws to protect children from sexual predators and women from stalking and domestic violence.
