

Senate job opportunities

IS THIS a great country or what?

In America, you can turn down a fabulous job without losing the opportunity forever. Of course, it helps if you're a state senator. All you need are well-placed friends and a little patience, and voilà: a second chance at the proverbial inside work, no heavy lifting. Salary: \$200,000. It doesn't even matter if someone else is in the job.

That's about what's happening for state Sen. Thomas L. Bromwell of Baltimore County, chairman of the Senate Finance Committee, who announced his retirement from the Senate last week to become head of the Injured Workers Insurance Fund.

With friends on the IWIF board, the Democratic senator apparently had the job anytime he wanted it. His departure comes shortly after the man he's replacing was forced to resign by the board filled with Bromwell allies.

What a spectacle. The connection between the board and the well-placed senator invites the charge of cronyism and rank political self-dealing. Mr. Bromwell impressed many with his work as chairman of the finance panel, but his decision to take the money and run looks even worse because he has scant professional qualifications. He'll be running an agency that provides worker's compensation insurance for 23,000 Maryland businesses.

His departure could be only the first in a watershed year of change in the Senate.

A private sector giant in Baltimore —

Johns Hopkins Hospital — apparently will claim one of two influential members of the Senate Budget and Taxation Committee. Senators Robert R. Neall of Anne Arundel County and Barbara A. Hoffman of Baltimore are candidates for a job paying more than \$200,000 with the hospital. The job description fits either senator: The winner "will have broad experience with federal, state and local public policy issues, preferably those affecting higher education and/or health care." Both senators have worked passionately on behalf of education and health matters and both are already employees of the hospital.

Mr. Neall has been regarded as the front-runner because he's a close friend of H. Furlong Baldwin, former head of Mercantile Bank and a Hopkins board member. But Ms. Hoffman, too, is regarded as a strong candidate.

Both senators could be winners whatever the outcome of the job search.

If Ms. Hoffman lands the job, Mr. Neall could become chairman of budget and tax. Or the post could go to Sen. Thomas "Mac" Middleton of Charles County — or Mr. Middleton could succeed Mr. Bromwell as chairman of the finance panel.

At least one other committee chairman, Sen. Clarence W. Blount of Baltimore, could decide not to run for re-election. No word on job opportunities for him. At 80, he may be content to walk off into the glow of retirement.