Baton Rouge is the capital of Louisiana

By Capitol News Bureau

Louisiana government, one of the most colorful political spectacles in the nation, operates out of a 34-story State Capitol that dominates the Baton Rouge skyline.

The Capitol, the nation's tallest, was built in 1932 by legendary governor and U.S. senator Huey Long, who is buried on its grounds.

No tour of the ornate Art Deco building would be complete without a visit to the main floor hallway, outside the present House speaker's office, where Long was fatally shot in 1935. The site is marked by a plaque.

State government is administered by nine statewide elected officials — the governor, lieutenant governor, secretary of state, attorney general, treasurer, agriculture commissioner, insurance commissioner, elections commissioner and education superintendent. The education post will become an appointive position when the incumbent's term expires in 1988.

The governor has broad powers and is directly responsible for 11 of the state's 20 departments. Gov. Edwin Edwards, a popular Democratic governor from 1972-80, was re-elected in 1983, defeating his one-term incumbent, Republican David C. Treen, the state's first Republican governor, who served two terms before his defeat.

The Louisiana constitution prohibits a governor from serving more than two consecutive terms. Edwards announced he would seek a third term after sitting out the four years required by the constitution.

Louisiana's lieutenant governor is Robert L. "Bobby" Freeman, a Democrat serving his second term.

The Constitution makes the lieutenant governor the successor should the governor die in office. Freeman also serves as the acting chief executive when the governor is out of state.

The secretary of state is Jim Brown. He is the state's chief elections officer.

Brown administers the state corporation and trademark laws, is custodian of state documents and archives, promulgates and publishes laws enacted by the Legislature and administers oaths of office.

The attorney general is the state's chief legal officer and is charged with serving as legal counsel to state agencies. Attorney General William Guste Jr. won a fourth term in 1983 without any opposition.

State Treasurer Mary Evelyn Parker also went back into office without opposition. She is responsible for keeping, investing and disbursing the state's funds.

Agriculture Commissioner Bob Odom is the chief executive officer of the Department of Agriculture.

Insurance Commissioner Sherman A. Board is the chief executive of the Department of Insurance. His duties include regulating insurance companies in attempts to make sure they remain solvent. By virtue of his elected office, he also serves as chairman of the Insurance Rating Commission, which is part of the Department of Commerce and regulates insurance rates.

Voting machines and voter registration are administered by the commissioner of elections, Jerry Fowler.

The education superintendent, Thomas Clausen, is in charge of administering state education standards in the 56 local school systems. State government pays most of the cost of operating local schools.

Louisiana's public universities are administered by three management boards, with the Board of Regents having final authority over financial and academic matters.

The three administrative boards include the boards of supervisors over schools in the LSU and Southern University systems and the Board of Trustees for State Colleges and Universities, which has authority over nine other higher education institutions.

Members of the Louisiana Senate and House of Representatives serve four-year terms.

There are 105 House members and 39 members of the Senate.

The Legislature convenes on the third Monday in April every year.

Lawmakers can remain in session for 60 working days within an 85-day period. They usually adjourn in early July.

The Legislature can be called into special session by order of the governor or by written consent of a majority of members of both houses.

Louisiana has a three-tier state courts system: district courts, appeals courts and the Supreme Court. Judges at all levels are elected. Some municipalities in Louisiana, such as Baton Rouge, have municipal and family courts. These handle city ordinances and juvenile problems.

The Constitution limits the executive branch of government to 20 departments. Eight departments are run by elected officials; the rest are managed by appointees of the governor, although the Civil Service Department is largely autonomous.

The governor's cabinet officers are called Secretaries, just as on the federal level. The departments under his direct control are commerce, corrections and public safety; culture, recreation and tourism; health and human resources; labor, natural resources, revenue and taxation; transportation and development; urban and community affairs; wildlife and fisheries; and environmental quality.