



Beebe likes payday bill; still mum on candidacy

IN SHORT

Attorney General Mike Beebe, presumptive candidate for governor, couldn't be pinned down on his future when he spoke at a luncheon.

By JOHN HOFHEIMER
Leader staff writer

Atty. Gen. Mike Beebe could not be cajoled Monday into announcing what most pundits know or suspect—that he'll run as the Democratic candidate for governor next time around.

"I just want to concentrate on my job as attorney general," said Beebe, speaking to about 100 people at the Jack Evans Senior Center monthly luncheon in Sherwood. "I'll cross that bridge when I come to it."

Beebe did say, following the meeting, that he favors a pair of Senate bills aimed at curbing small, high-interest loans made by payday lenders, some check cashers and similar businesses.

"I'm for anything that further restricts these businesses' ability to overcharge borrowers," Beebe said.

Beebe and Rep. Mike Ross were the lone votes in the Arkansas Senate opposing the 1999 bill that allowed payday lenders to skirt state usury laws.

Beebe said Monday that state Sen. Tracy Steele's bill, modeled upon a Georgia law, could stop such loans in this state.

Regarding his presumptive gubernatorial bid, Beebe said he didn't know when he would make a decision or possible announcement.

Told that Lt. Gov. Winthrop Rockefeller III probably wanted to continue to be the best lieutenant governor he could be, but had still announced his candidacy for the Republican nomination, Beebe responded that Rockefeller has competition for the nomination.

Gov. Mike Huckabee can't run again because of term limits. Rockefeller, son of a former governor, has announced his intentions, and it's believed Asa Hutchison,

a former member of Congress, will oppose him. Jim Holt, who ran a failed campaign against Sen. Blanche Lincoln last November, has said he may also seek the Republican nomination. Hutchison resigned last month as deputy director of Homeland Security.

Among Democrats, only Ross has been mentioned as competition for Beebe, and early this year, he said he was happy with his job as a congressman.

After the pot-luck luncheon, Beebe told an audience of appreciative and satiated seniors first that they had a fine mayor in his lunch partner Bill Harmon.

He warned them of several scams making the rounds and told them that methamphetamine was "one of the worst drugs to come down the pike"—extra addictive and quick to destroy lives and brain cells. His office has promoted a bill to put all pseudoephedrine cold medication behind the pharmacy counter and require purchasers to sign for it and show identification. It will be a schedule 5 narcotic, treated like codeine, he said, apologizing for the inconvenience to both pharmacists and customers.

"We got the idea from Oklahoma, where a similar law resulted in an 81 percent reduction in meth busts," he said.

"They ran them out of the state and into Arkansas," said Beebe. "We're going to run them to Mississippi."

He said that wouldn't stop the "NAFTA Meth" that comes from Mexico, but it would greatly curtail local manufacture and supply.

He warned of scams, particularly stock pump and dump schemes where criminals buy up cheap stocks on the stock market. He said frequently they have "actresses" call and leave messages pretending that a company's patent had been approved and the stock was going to soar. The caller hangs up if a person answers, but if they get a machine, they pretend that they think they are leaving a message on the phone of a friend.

When people who think they've lucked into an insider stock tip buy the stock, run the price up, and then the criminals sell—or dump—the stock for a great profit.

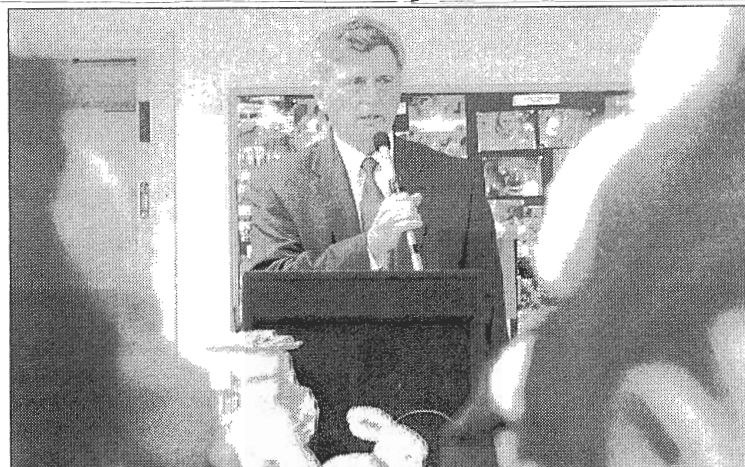
He warned also against charity scams—criminals seizing on a disaster like the 911 attacks or tsunami relief to get money they keep for themselves.

Beebe told them to never give their important information—such as bank account numbers or Social Security numbers to people who contact them over the telephone or internet, pretending to be a bank, a credit company, law enforcement agency or other. His office also supports the new "passport" for victims of identity theft, so they don't get continually victimized.

He said seniors are targeted for scams because "You are the most trusting and perceived to have disposable income."



Beebe



JOHN HOFHEIMER/Leader photo

Attorney General Mike Beebe spoke Monday at the Jack Evans Senior Citizens Center in Sherwood about issues facing the state.