

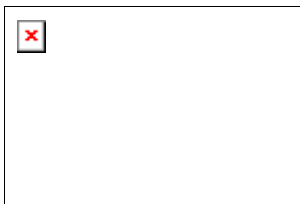
Fri, Sep. 22, 2006

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## Candidates for governor squabble over payday lenders

Friday, Sep 22, 2006

**By Rob Moritz**
**Arkansas News Bureau**

LITTLE ROCK - The Democrat and Republican running for governor sparred over payday lenders Thursday with one accusing the other of not being as sincere in his opposition to the much-maligned business.

Republican Asa Hutchinson asked Democratic opponent Mike Beebe to return a \$200 donation given to him by Cash Advance of Hot Springs.

"If Mike Beebe really wants to stand up for the 'little guy,' as he says in his TV ads, he could start by not accepting money from those who exploit the vulnerable, our senior citizens and our military personnel," Hutchinson said.

He said Beebe claimed last week that his campaign had not accepted any donations from payday lenders, but the donation from Cash Advance was listed on Beebe's Sept. 15 campaign finance report.

Hutchinson also said Beebe has taken donations from payday lending lobbyists and that the Democratic Party of Arkansas has taken "thousands of dollars" from payday lenders and their lobbyists.

Beebe campaign spokesman Zac Wright said Thursday afternoon Beebe returned the money to Cash Advance after it was discovered that the donation was made to purchase two tickets, \$100 each, to a Beebe fundraiser hosted by former President Bill Clinton this month at Alltel Arena in North Little Rock.

Wright said there were 150 sponsors of the event and they sold the tickets.

"As soon as it was realized, the cost of the tickets was returned," he said, adding that Beebe "tries not to take money from payday lenders."

"This is one more Washington-style attack from what is shaping up to be the most negative candidate in Arkansas history - Asa Hutchinson," Wright said. "Asa Hutchinson just doesn't know his facts."

Asked about the Democratic Party's decision to take donations, Wright said he could not speak for the party and that Beebe has not commented on the issue.

The Democratic Party declined comment Thursday.

Hutchinson, a former congressman and undersecretary of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, faces Beebe, a former state senator and the current state attorney general, in the Nov. 7 general election, along with Green Party of Arkansas candidate Jim Lendall and independent candidate Rod Bryan.

Both Beebe and Hutchinson have said previously that they oppose the 1999 Check Cashers Act and that they would work to repeal it if elected governor.

The act allows some out-of-state banks affiliated with check cashers not licensed in Arkansas to hand out small loans above the state-mandated interest rate limit of 17 percent annually. Some payday lenders charge rates as high as 520 percent.

Wright said that in 1999, Beebe was one of only two state senators to oppose the Check Cashers Act, and in 2001, Beebe voted to repeal it.

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