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Beebe Nominates Todd Turner For Arkansas Democratic Party Chief

By The Associated Press

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LITTLE ROCK, Ark. (AP) -

Todd Turner, an Arkadelphia attorney who successfully challenged the state's payday lending law, was tapped by Gov. Mike Beebe on Wednesday to be the new chairman of the Arkansas Democratic Party.

During a luncheon with the Political Animals Club at the Governor's Mansion, Beebe announced Turner was his choice to lead the party. The Arkadelphia attorney must still be approved by the party's state committee when it meets Feb. 7 in Little Rock.

"I think it's a great opportunity for a country lawyer like me," Turner said Wednesday afternoon.

Turner will lead the party as it prepares for next year's elections, when Beebe and U.S. Sen. Blanche Lincoln will both be running for re-election. Democrats hold all of the statewide offices, five of the state's six seats in Congress, and a majority of the legislative seats in Arkansas.

"I see him as someone who can respond to questions or to the normal rhetoric that you see in a partisan campaign,

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whether it's a local legislative race or U.S. senate race or any other race for that matter," Beebe told reporters after the announcement. "I also think he's got experience in party building, in recruiting good candidates and helping them and educating them."

The position became vacant when former legislator Bill Gwatney was fatally shot at the party office in downtown Little Rock in August. Former U.S. Sen. David Pryor has been acting as party chairman since then. Beebe said he was grateful to Pryor for his leadership.



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Beebe would not say if he had offered the post to anyone else before approaching Turner.

Turner has more than 15 years' experience as a member of the Clark County Democratic Party Executive Committee, and has been county chairman since 2007.

A native of De Queen, he graduated from Ouachita Baptist University and received his law degree from the University of Arkansas at Little Rock School of Law. He served as an officer in the Arkansas Army National Guard and has served as a deputy prosecutor.

He currently is on the board and executive committee of the Arkansas Better Business Bureau, and has written several articles on consumer law issues.

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Turner's name was the only one submitted for the post by the deadline late Tuesday afternoon, said Mariah Hattah, the state Democratic Party's executive director.

Turner represented plaintiffs in a lawsuit that challenged the 1999 Check Cashers Act. The state Supreme Court last year tossed out that law, ruling that it allowed payday lenders to charge triple and maybe even quadruple-digit interest rates in violation of the state constitution.

Beebe said Turner's work on the case did not factor into his decision to back the attorney for the party post.

Turner is being nominated for the post shortly after Republicans elected a new leader. The Arkansas GOP's state committee in December elected Doyle Webb, a former state senator from Benton, to be its new chairman.

Turner said he didn't want to get into specifics on his plans for the party until he's approved by the state's committee. Turner said he hoped to live up to the legacy Gwatney left as chairman.

"If I can do half as good a job as he did, I'll be happy," Turner said.

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