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## **Beebe picks Arkadelphia lawyer to head state Democratic Party**

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Todd Turner, Courtesy  
of the Democratic Party  
of Arkansas

By Doug Thompson  
Stephens Media

LITTLE ROCK — Gov. Mike Beebe on Wednesday recommended Arkadelphia lawyer Todd Turner to be chairman of the Democratic Party of Arkansas.

The governor's recommendation is tantamount to naming the party chief, though he said he understood if the party's state committee wanted to ask questions of Turner, 42, before its formal vote Feb. 7 for state party officers.

Former U.S. Sen. David Pryor led the state Democratic Party through the 2008 election cycle as interim party chief after chairman Bill Gwatney was gunned down at party headquarters in August.

Democrats held their five seats in Congress without GOP opposition and the party held its firm grip on the Legislature, though Republicans gained three seats in the state House.

Beebe said he was grateful to Pryor for accepting the role at a difficult time.

The new Democratic chairman will lead the party in the 2010 election cycle, when all statewide offices, including governor, will be up for election and U.S. Sen. Blanche Lincoln, D-Ark., is expected to receive a strong Republican challenge.

"The thing I wanted most in a chairman was the ability to communicate. I wanted someone who could answer charges of a partisan nature and answer questions from the news media," Beebe said Wednesday said after speaking at a meeting of the Political Animals Club of Little Rock

“Todd’s commitment to the growth and expansion of our party includes more than 15 years’ experience as a member of the Clark County Democratic Party Executive Committee, which includes a decade as county chairman. His dedication to the party and to the people of Arkansas will make him an able chairman,” the governor said later in a statement released through the party.

Turner said he was pleased to be recommended for the post by the governor, but said he “can’t offer anything specific until I get my marching orders.”

“If I’m voted in, we’re going to do everything we can to help those elected officials stay in office,” he said.

Doyle Webb of Benton, new chairman of the state Republican Party, said Wednesday he looked forward to getting to know Turner.

“There will be times we will have partisan dialogue, but as long as it’s constructive that will benefit Arkansas,” Webb said.

A De Queen native, Turner graduated from Ouachita Baptist University and received his law degree from the University of Arkansas at Little Rock School of Law. He is a former Arkansas National Guard officer and a former deputy prosecutor.

He received the Arkansas Trial Lawyers Association’s Consumer Advocate Award in 2000 and is currently on the board of directors and executive committee of the Arkansas Better Business Bureau. Turner has written several articles on consumer law issues and was attorney for plaintiffs who successfully challenged Arkansas check casher’s law.

The state Supreme Court declared the Arkansas Check Cashers Act unconstitutional in November, saying the 1999 law allows companies to make consumer loans at interest rates that exceed the state’s 17 percent usury limit. Webb sponsored the legislation.

The ruling added legal teeth to Attorney General Dustin McDaniel’s drive to shut down the payday lending industry in Arkansas.

Turner and his wife, Becca, have two children, Harper, 9, and Cannon, 7.

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Arkansas News Bureau reporter Zack Stovall contributed to this report.

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