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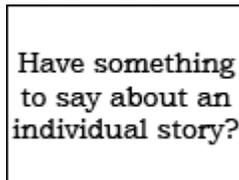
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Sep 21, 7:10 PM EDT

Beebe returns \$200 donation from payday lender

LITTLE ROCK (AP) -- The campaign of Democratic gubernatorial nominee Mike Beebe said Thursday he returned a \$200 contribution from a payday lender.

Republican rival Asa Hutchinson criticized Beebe, who has investigated payday lending firms as the state's attorney general, for accepting \$200 from Cash Advance of Hot Springs in August.

"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.

Beebe campaign spokesman Zac Wright said the contribution was from two tickets sold to a Sept. 7 fundraiser for Beebe headlined by former President Clinton. The tickets were sold by one of 150 sponsors for the event, and said the campaign was notified of the contribution and decided to return the money Monday.

Wright said the check was delivered Thursday to Cash Advance.

Hutchinson earlier Thursday called on Beebe to return the contribution and continued a criticism he launched last week that Beebe has done little to protect consumers from predatory lending.

Hutchinson has said he supports revoking the 1999 Check Cashers Act, which allows payday lenders to charge fees and interest rates in excess of the state's usury limit of 17 percent. Hutchinson said the provision leads to borrowers paying triple-digit interest rates on short-term loans.

Beebe's campaign noted that in the Legislature, Beebe voted against the Check Cashers Act in 1999 and voted for its repeal in 2001.

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