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McDaniel paints hopeful picture

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David Nichol, T-H Staff Writer

In spite of challenges, there are good things happening in Arkansas, and people need to realize it, state Attorney General Dustin McDaniel said last night.

McDaniel was the guest speaker at the Forrest City Area Chamber of Commerce banquet, held at the civic center.

"All of my life, all I've heard, over and over again, is 'Thank God for Mississippi.' And the long and short of it is, we've got to get past that," said McDaniel. "We have to reach a time to say there is going to be a new day in Arkansas. We've got to invest in our future.

"Even though there are some things that have happened in this country that concern me, there are things happening right here in Arkansas that give me great optimism. And if you haven't sat down with that lately, with how proud you ought to be as an Arkansan, now's a good time to do it."

One positive thing, according to McDaniel, is the quality of the people who work in state government.

"Right now there is a really good team of people, Republicans and Democrats, in Little Rock, in the House, the Senate, the governor's office," he said. "We have a renewed dedication to see Arkansas grow...We want to hand over an Arkansas that is better than the one which was given to us, which was in fact better than the generation before."

He said one of the biggest surprises he has had since taking office was the quality of the people who work there. "Your law firm (the AG's office) has 170 people in it. That's a pretty big law firm.

"It's easy to think about people who work in government, to call them bureaucrats and nine-to-fivers, who are there to draw a check and wait for the privilege to retire. And until you finally get in there and see the level of dedication and hard work, You don't appreciate them."

McDaniel also said has had the opportunity to work with the



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attorneys general of other states. He said he recently had the opportunity to go with a group of AG's to Israel. Their intent was to learn how to give security and protect freedom at the same time, which he said is a delicate balance.

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He also mentioned the lawsuit over the Lakeview school district. He said no one wanted to be in it, but "That case pushed us further and faster than we ever would have gone without it."

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On another matter, he said the Attorneys General of the country are aware of the mortgage crisis.

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"The AG's recognize that the sub-prime lending market didn't just create itself," he said. "It was easy money, to prey on folks who didn't have any idea what they were getting into...targeting people they knew could not afford what they were selling them."

He said he and other attorney's general are working in a multi-state effort, "not just to get money back, but it's about changing business practices."

He said payday lenders are another problem, seeming to skirt by the state's constitutional usury limit. He said the state Supreme Court has given "marching orders" in that regard. "It's time for this to stop. We've been building our case. The truth is, you're going to see some very aggressive action from your attorney general's office, because it's time to look out for those who cannot look out for themselves."

During the program, Chamber Executive Director David Dunn presented plaques to outgoing board members, and to past president Kirk Billingsley, and welcomed incoming president, Pierre Evans.

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