

Democrats are urged to fight final 15 weeks

400 gather in LR for party's convention

SARAH D. WIRE ARKANSAS DEMOCRAT-GAZETTE

Arkansas Democratic Party officials said Saturday that they've bucked national trends before by electing Democrats in years when Republicans were favored to win.

But they still urged the nearly 400 delegates at the party's convention in Little Rock to make a strong effort in the final 15 weeks before the Nov. 2 elections.

"It would be easy to get complacent this year, it would be easy to say we're not as hungry this year as we were four years ago and that would be a mistake," said Gov. Mike Beebe, who seeks a second four-year term this election.

Democrats hold every statewide elected position in the executive branch and five of the state's six seats in Congress.

Beebe has been challenged for the governor's seat by Little Rock restaurant owner Jim Keet, a Republican.

The retirement of 1st District Rep. Marion Berry and 2nd District Rep. Vic Snyder, and the vacancy caused by 3rd District Rep. John Boozman's Senate race, leave three open seats in Arkansas' U.S. House delegation. Republicans could take control of the House of Representatives if they win 39 seats in November.

Beebe, U.S. Sen. Blanche Lincoln and other officials repeated the message that they think letting Republicans capture elected positions would damage the country.

"We have got to be loud in this election," Lincoln said. "The other side thrives on voter anger. That's not who we are. We don't solve our differences with anger or hatred."

She said Democrats are more interested in working to solve problems.

Lincoln said she understands people's frustration with Washington. She said that is why it is important to keep a senator who already holds the chairmanship of the Senate Agriculture Committee. Lincoln has been chairman since September.

Boozman, a Republican, has challenged Lincoln in the general election. He was endorsed by Senate Republican Leader Mitch McConnell of Kentucky, who said earlier this month that he would help Boozman get a seat on the committee.

"This is our Senate seat, this is not Mitch McConnell's Senate seat. He came down here to Arkansas to tell us all what he would do for my opponent if he was elected, and all he could think of was a seat on the agriculture committee, which we already got, not just the seat but the chairmanship," Lincoln said.

The speakers emphasized unity in the party. Several races involved difficult primaries, most notably the contest between Lincoln and Lt. Gov. Bill Halter. Halter lost the runoff against Lincoln by 4 percent. Halter said he would support every Democrat on the ticket.

When asked after his speech whether he was officially endorsing Lincoln, Halter said yes.

The Democrats' budget committee reported that the party has \$1.1 million.



Arkansas Democrat-Gazette/STATON BREIDENTHAL Delegates sing the national anthem Saturday at the Democratic Party of Arkansas 2010 state convention.



Arkansas Democrat-Gazette/STATON BREIDENTHAL U.S. Sens. Blanche Lincoln (from left) and Mark Pryor talk Saturday morning with Reps. Mike Ross and Marion Berry at the Democratic Party of Arkansas convention.