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## Hutchinson sets goal of cutting drug abuse in half in four years

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**By Doug Thompson**  
**Arkansas News Bureau**

SPRINGDALE - Republican gubernatorial candidate Asa Hutchinson said Thursday that, if elected, he would set a goal of cutting drug use by 50 percent during his first term.

Treatment for addicts and support of the state's drug courts would be a major part of that reduction, Hutchinson said. He pledged to earmark \$5 million in new funding from the state's expected budget surplus to fund drug courts.

Hutchinson, a former director of the federal Drug Enforcement Administration, said he'd also work to raise private donations for drug education.

"We cannot solve this with enforcement alone," Hutchinson said at a news conference and meeting with officials from Decision Point, a drug treatment program in Springdale, and the Washington County Drug Court.

Effective treatment programs are a key factor in drug court success, Hutchinson said. With many counties in Arkansas lacking a local treatment program, the drug court system would probably emphasize expanding existing, successful courts initially rather than immediately creating new ones, he said.

Another key factor is finding judges who are willing and able to take time from their existing caseload to run drug courts, he said.

Drug courts, or drug treatment courts as they are sometimes known, administer a strict regimen of drug tests, treatment and counseling to those facing prison for nonviolent drug-related charges. The court also demands that the accused hold a job and meet other responsibilities once intensive treatment is complete.

Hutchinson's Democratic opponent, Mike Beebe, is a longtime supporter of drug courts and other treatment programs, along with other drug abuse countermeasures, said campaign spokesman Zac Wright.

"We've announced our drug policy and have the support of the law enforcement community to carry it out," Wright said. He cited the recent endorsement of Beebe by 68 of the state's 75 county sheriffs.

Earlier in the campaign, Hutchinson proposed creating a Bureau of Drug Enforcement at the Arkansas State Police, increasing information-sharing between law enforcement agencies and strengthening partnerships between state, local and federal law enforcement.

Thursday's announcement was in addition those earlier proposals, he said.

"For nonviolent drug offenders, education and treatment play a key role in helping them to get off

drugs and return to the workforce," Hutchinson said in a statement released after Thursday's meeting in Springdale. "With the right investment in these kind of programs, we can not only reduce drug abuse ? we can save lives. But to do that, we have to create a sense of responsibility on the part of drug abusers, as they're doing right here at Decision Point with outstanding results."

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