

POLITICO

TPaw vague on Medicare

By: **Kendra Marr**

May 25, 2011 04:01 PM EDT



With Medicare emerging as perhaps the defining issue of the 2012 campaign, Tim Pawlenty previewed his proposal for overhauling the system: more choices.

"My plan will include a series of options that people can choose from, one of which will be to stay in the current program," the former Minnesota governor told reporters after a speech at the Cato Institute on Wednesday. "We're going to have some other attractive options that I think are going to make a big difference."

Pawlenty ducked specifics, and refused to answer questions about House Budget Chairman Paul Ryan's proposal to give seniors vouchers to help them purchase private health insurance. His campaign would roll out a "series of proposals on policy in the coming weeks and months."

"It'll be different from Congressman Ryan's proposal," Pawlenty said.

Former House Speaker Newt Gingrich came under fire last week for calling Ryan's plan "radical" and "right-wing social engineering." He has since said the comments were misconstrued and apologized to Ryan.

Carefully choosing his words in his speech at the Cato Institute on Wednesday, Pawlenty frequently praised Ryan's "leadership and courage."

"In general," he said, "I think the direction of it is positive, but I'm going to have my own plan."

Pawlenty also sidestepped a question about New York's special election, which Democrats have cast as a referendum of the Ryan Medicare plan, saying he'd leave the analysis to

the pundits.

Pawlenty has been on a hard truth tour since formally announcing on Monday in Iowa with a critique of ethanol subsidies. On Tuesday, he was tackling Social Security in Florida and he arrived in Washington to take on government spending.

He called for shrinking the federal workforce, then replacing only one employee for every two employees that retire. And he proposed freezing the pay of federal workers – except members of the military — until the benefits are the same or no greater than that of private sector workers.

“That’s just not fair,” he said. “We can’t have the people who are getting paid by the taxpayers getting a better deal than the taxpayers themselves. These things have to be reconciled.”

After the speech, Pawlenty went on the attack against the Obama administration’s bailout of General Motors and Chrysler for favoring unions at the expense of other equity holders.

“They would have restructured anyhow through the existing process of bankruptcy,” he said. “And what they got was a President Obama-guided, sweetheart, pre-arranged bankruptcy.”

Pawlenty added, “It is another example of crony capitalism.”