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Pawlenty touts surplus, but claims questioned

By

David S Morgan

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(CBS News)

Former Minnesota Governor and Republican presidential candidate Tim Pawlenty today touted his fiscal policies as a chief executive of his state, but was also criticized for leaving behind a budget deficit of approximately \$6 billion.

On CBS' "The Early Show," Pawlenty said that the GOP - regardless of interparty differences - is united to defeat President Barack Obama, and said his fiscal management as governor of Minnesota set him apart from other candidates.

"[Obama's] had his chance; his policies aren't working," Pawlenty told co-anchor Erica Hill. "We've got crushing levels of unemployment. We've got \$4 a gallon gas. We got a federal government that's out of control.

"And I had an opportunity last night to present my vision for America, which is to reduce taxes and regulation and get investment and jobs growing again in this country. And a big part of the debate was focused on my plan to do that, and I was grateful for that opportunity. But we're united in trying to defeat Barack Obama. There will be some differences amongst Republicans as well. But last night the focus was on the president. "

[Pawlenty calls Obama "declinist," backs off "Obamneycare" line](#)

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Pawlenty said as a candidate he brings to the table "a blue collar upbringing that's, I think, a lot of people appreciate in terms of connecting at the heart, given some life experiences of facing life's challenges.

"But also I've functioned as an executive, and have led a state, large enterprise, growing jobs, cutting taxes, reducing spending, appointing conservative judges to the court, and many other things like that."

Given Americans concern over the economy and jobs (the latest CBS News poll shows 48 percent say that's the most important issue to them), Hill asked Pawlenty about his fiscal record as governor, leaving office with a deficit that represents 13 percent of the state's budget.

"Well, that's not accurate, Erica," Pawlenty replied. "The last budget when I left office doesn't even end yet; it ends this summer, and it's going to end with a surplus, and the deficit relates to the upcoming two years after that. But that's based on 20-plus percent spending projected increases that I would have never allowed as Governor of Minnesota."

"So you say that was on the person who took over after you?" asked Hill.

"The budget that is in effect now is the one that I last left and it's going to end with a surplus," Pawlenty said. "In

fact, I've got one of the best financial records in the country. [The Cato Institute gave only four governors an 'A' grade for financial management](#) [in September 2010], and the other three aren't running for president. "

Minnesota's budget is created on a biennium calendar, with Pawlenty's last budget - which he signed in May 2010 (eight months before leaving office) - extending through June 2012.

Last December, [Minnesota Public Radio](#) reported that Pawlenty and the then-DFL-controlled legislature used federal stimulus money and delayed payments of nearly \$2 billion to school districts to fill a deficit hole, resulting in a \$399 million surplus. Now the projected budget deficit facing Minnesotans has gone up from \$5.8 billion to \$6.2 billion.

Taking office in January, Democratic Gov. Mark Dayton said he inherited a "horrendous fiscal mess" and poorly managed state agencies.

He and the GOP leaders of the legislature are currently in talks to avoid a government shutdown.

Pawlenty's predecessor as governor, Arne Carlson - who has accused Pawlenty of dismantling the state government's budgetary reform structure, including the very department whose report is cited as a means to get state spending under control - told the [Minnesota Post](#) that Pawlenty's fiscal management practices amount to "shifts and gimmicks."

Also appearing on "The Early Show" Tuesday, former White House press secretary Robert Gibbs said that, despite claims made by Pawlenty, he has a record of leaving Minnesota with a budget deficit.

"I can understand why these guys would want to attack somebody else," Gibbs told Hill, "and not talk about their own records."

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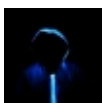
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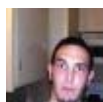
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