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Target Field And Tim Pawlenty's Questionable Fiscal Conservatism

DOUG MATACONIS · THURSDAY, JUNE 16, 2011 · 9 COMMENTS

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Scott Conroy at RealClearPolitics writes today about **a sports stadium deal** that calls into question the fiscally conservative image that Tim Pawlenty has built for his campaign:

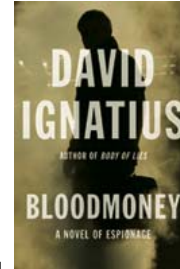
As the Minnesota Twins prepared to square off against the Seattle Mariners on May 27, 2006, Gov. Tim Pawlenty donned a Twins jersey with his last name plastered across the back and strutted out onto the artificial turf of the Metrodome where he "delivered a speech like an athlete who'd just won his first championship," according to the Star Tribune.

In the presence of team owner Carl Pohlad and former Twins greats such as Harmon Killebrew and Kent Hrbek, Pawlenty took a seat at an infield table and signed into law a bill authorizing construction of a \$522 million outdoor stadium in downtown Minneapolis. The new law would guarantee that the team would remain in the Twin Cities after some ominous talk of relocation — and even contraction — had for years caused consternation among Minnesota's baseball fans and business leaders with interests tied to the team.

More than a decade in the making, the stadium deal moved the Twins out of the stale, football-centric Metrodome, built in 1982, and into the more aesthetically pleasing and baseball-friendly Target Field, which opened to rave reviews in 2010.

Though the Twins agreed to pay approximately one-third of the cost, the rest of the bill was to be footed by a 0.15 percent sales tax hike in Hennepin County — a relatively small encumbrance on the state's largest county, but an increased tax burden nonetheless. The bill was controversial, since the state legislature and Pawlenty took advantage of a 1997 law to grant the county board permission to enact the new tax without a voter referendum.

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On the 2012 presidential campaign trail, Pawlenty has frequently touted his "A" grade from the libertarian-leaning Cato Institute and record of vetoing tax-hike packages, but the stadium deal could serve as an opportunity for his GOP rivals to make the case that Pawlenty's fiscally conservative record is far from unblemished.

"Opponents can use this against him in a couple of ways," Minnesota political analyst and Hamline University Professor David Schultz said. "How do we know that you're not going to do the same thing as president of the United States and push unfunded mandates down to the states? And then secondly, you actually in the process wound up creating greater tax burdens on local governments."

Even as Pawlenty wielded his veto pen to keep statewide taxes down during his eight years in office, critics frequently highlight his 75-cents-a-pack "health impact fee" on cigarettes and the massive projected deficit that he left his successor as proof that his record on fiscal issues was not as stellar as he has claimed.

The Twins stadium deal has thus far received scant attention in the national context, but the details of it could open Pawlenty up to further scrutiny over his peripheral role in seeing local taxes rise during his tenure.

Pawlenty is far from being the only politician who has agreed to a **boondoggle sports stadium deal** in order to placate the demands of a franchise threatening to leave town, but this story does tend to undercut his argument that he governed Minnesota in a scally responsible manner. Even his CATO Institute "A" rating is deceiving since, **two years earlier, he had received a C on the same scorecard**. Fiscal conservatives looking at Tim Pawlenty as their standard bearer would be wise to look behind the rhetoric to the reality, which seems to be far less than meets the eye.

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About Doug Mataconis

Doug is an attorney in private practice in Northern Virginia. He holds a B.A. in Political Science from Rutgers University and J.D. from George Mason University School of Law. He joined the staff of

OTB in May, 2010 and also writes at **Below The Beltway**. Follow Doug on

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Comments

PD Shaw says:

Thursday, June 16, 2011 at 16:34

Also, concerns about his stance on **free trade**.



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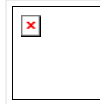
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hey norm says:

Thursday, June 16, 2011 at 16:51

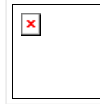
just another fiscal fraud with an R after his name. yawn.



llama says:

Thursday, June 16, 2011 at 17:15

Not sure how anyone proposing adding 11 trillion dollars to our debt for tax cuts targeting the rich can be considered fiscally conservative. Sounds more like fiscal recklessness, but then again I don't live in Washington.



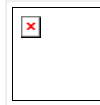
OzarkHillbilly (used to be tom p) says:

Thursday, June 16, 2011 at 18:42

Though the Twins agreed to pay approximately one-third of the cost, the rest of the bill was to be footed by a 0.15 percent sales tax hike in Hennepin County — a relatively small encumbrance on the state's largest county, but an increased tax burden nonetheless.

He does something, and then he finds a way to pay for it. To me, that is fiscally conservative. Maybe if you live in Hennepin Co, you don't agree with the payment method... but then a Hennepin Co. voter could always vote out the a**holes who allowed it. But that would be democracy....

Of course, I am not a member of AfaPD (Americans for a Permanent Deficit)



Doug Mataconis says:

Thursday, June 16, 2011 at 18:54

OH,

The very idea of publicly funded sports stadiums is idiotic, and a money loser for the public. If a team wants a new stadium, let them pay for it.



OzarkHillbilly (used to be tom p) says:

Thursday, June 16, 2011 at 19:37

The very idea of publicly funded sports stadiums is idiotic, and a money loser for the public. If a team wants a new stadium, let them pay for it.

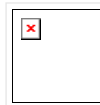
Doug, I totally agree. My point was only that to be "fiscally conservative" in this day and age, requires one to believe in the Tooth Fairy.... "I don't have to pay for it."

To me however, "fiscally conservative" means proposing something AND proposing a way to pay for it. I may not agree with it. I may think it is WRONG, WRONG, wrong wrong... BUUUUTTTT....

If it is paid for, it is fiscally conservative.

Maybe I am wrong. Maybe "fiscally conservative" in the general vernacular means "FREE RIDE"

I know you do not believe this Doug, but I eagerly await your explanation of the flaws in my reasoning.



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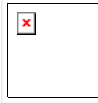
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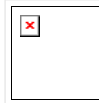
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anjin-san says:**Friday, June 17, 2011 at 01:43**

Out here in the Peoples Republic of San Francisco, the Giants built the best park in baseball entirely with private funding. It cost about what Citibank paid for the rights to hang up signs at the Mets stadium.

Interesting that Pawlenty and Bush paid for their ballparks with tax increases. The expedience of the moment, I suppose...

J. Michael Neal says:**Friday, June 17, 2011 at 02:15**

Maybe if you ive in Hennepin Co, you don't agree with the payment method... but then a Hennepin Co. voter could always vote out the a**holes who allowed it. But that would be democracy....

As a resident of Hennepin County, let me explain the actual history of this. First, we didn't have a chance to vote anyone out between the time that this proposal was raised and when it was finished. County commissioners who had never run on the issue decided to do this.

Second, the residents of Minneapolis, of which I am one, twice voted down public financing for the stadium in public referenda. Minneapolis makes up a large chunk of the tax base of Hennepin County, and we had already expressed our opposition in every manner available to us.

Third, Pawlenty gave a waiver to the county commissioners so that they did not have to submit their proposal to a referendum. That was necessary, because it was obvious that it would be voted down a third time. Democracy was exercised: the requirement for a referendum was passed after one of the previous rounds of the Twins threatening to leave if they didn't get their toy. The fiscal irresponsibility comes from Pawlenty finding a loophole that allowed him to circumvent the expressed will of the voters. For what it's worth, Hennepin County never gave anything close to a majority of its votes for Pawlenty, so we even did our best not to elect him in the first place.

I will say, though, that while I still resent paying my taxes for it (I'm a Tigers' fan, dammit), at least we got a really nice stadium out of the deal. They didn't screw that part up.

A voice from another precinct says:**Friday, June 17, 2011 at 07:06**

Doug, Doug, Doug.

I wish that you would realize that these are not swindles or boondogles, they are valuable infrastructure emendments. Think of the jobs that are created by building stadia—hot dog, beer, popcorn, peanut, program, and scorecard vendors would all be added to our already burgeoning unemployment figures without these new stadia. And that's only the tip of the iceberg, there are also the parking lot valets and attendants, luxury box cocktail and food servers and entrepenurial opportunities for ticket scalpers and other services. The value to the city of this investment can scarcely be calculated.

Additionally, there is the absolutely immense value to the city of being recognized as a "Major League" city. Again, the worth of the designation is immeasurable. Seattle

voters ignored the value of the designation when the Sonics owners pleaded for relief from the shabby surroundings they were playing in and were forced—forced I tell you—to seek relief from the limitations of Seattle's small mindedness in open, entrepreneurial, visionary Oklahoma City. And look what has happened since—high unemployment, sagging housing prices, a genuinely grim future because Seattle is no longer a "Major League" basketball city.

And it is not as though those owners are not needful of the assistance. They may look like billionaires, but everyone knows that a billion dollars is not what it used to be. These men are the struggling entrepreneurs who are providing the engine that drives our economy! They are the same middle class heroes that the Bush tax cuts rescued from oblivion and whose success Obama wants to punish and throttle. Also there is the factor of the loss of capital value these men would face if they were forced to build their own stadia and arenas—as if they could even afford it. You've got to stop beating up guys like Paw-paw, he may be the only person in the GOP who actually understands fiscal conservatism and can rescue the country.

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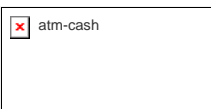
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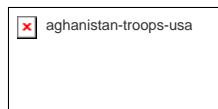
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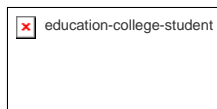
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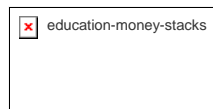
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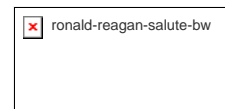
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