

[Former Minn. Gov. Pawlenty: Just the Ticket for Hopeful GOP?](#)

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Written by Dave Bohon

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Who are the Republican hopefuls jockeying for position in the presidential sweepstakes that will be heating up over the next several months? Most Americans have had plenty of media exposure to former Arkansas Governor Mike Huckabee, former Massachusetts Governor Mitt Romney, and, of course, former Alaska Governor Sarah Palin.

Few, however, have heard much about former Minnesota Governor Tim Pawlenty (left), whose soft-spoken, humble style and easygoing manner made him a popular figure among conservatives in his home state, and even made him hard to hate among the liberal politicians who fought him tooth-and-nail on his fiscally and socially conservative policies. With a new book out and some key presidential primaries and caucuses on the horizon, Pawlenty has been making preliminary media appearances in select locales, sounding off on topics such as government spending, the economy, ObamaCare, and other key issues — and sounding, well, quite presidential.

During a recent swing through Illinois, Pawlenty had an opportunity to react to news that the state legislature had voted their constituents a 66-percent tax increase — all with the blessing of Illinois Governor Pat Quinn.

On Chicago's conservative talk radio station WLS, Pawlenty observed,

We don't have a problem of being under-taxed in this country. We spend too darn much. And so this notion that progress will be defined by the left as "what more can government do that it's not currently doing," is the wrong starting point.

Pawlenty recalled a time during his tenure as Minnesota's governor when he had to stand tough against the state's Democratic-Farmer-Labor party (DFL), which like the Dems in Illinois has a well-earned tax-and-spend reputation:

I had government shutdowns, I had special sessions, I had lawsuits, I personally un-allotted money out of the budget at a historic level. I set a record for vetoes. But one thing I stood firm on — and standing up to this in Minnesota is not easy because it's the land of McCarthy, Humphrey, Mondale, Wellstone and now U.S. Senator Al Franken: you've got to be willing to make sure you know what you're about and what you believe in and stand up and draw those lines in the sand....

Indeed, Pawlenty's two terms as governor included regular high-profile battles with the legislature's DFL leadership, and he was famous for keeping his veto pen ready when a

budget passed by the legislature didn't meet his fiscal criteria. In fact, his record made him just one of four governors to receive an "A" from the Cato Institute for fiscally conservative policies.

Pawlenty's reputation would follow him to the White House if he were elected in 2012, with one of his campaign platforms certain to be dismantling President Obama's healthcare monstrosity. He told the [Christian Broadcasting Network](#) (CBN),

I think it's one of the worst pieces of legislation in the modern history of the country. It was a bait-and-switch tactic. They said they're going to make healthcare more affordable. In fact, they're going to make it more expensive.

In addition to his penchant for trimmed-down government, Pawlenty has cultivated a "regular guy" persona in his home state that resonates with rank-and-file voters. Raised in middle-class South St. Paul, Pawlenty was just 16 years old when his mother died suddenly of cancer. He recalls that when his father lost his job a short time later, he found himself praying fervently "for help and for some confidence and strength and to try and help get through that."

Make it through he did, becoming the first in his family to graduate from college. Pawlenty then moved on to law school and later put in a stint as a Minnesota state representative before being elected governor in 2002.

His wife Mary, who is also an attorney and former state district judge, told CBN that her husband's humble roots have served him well in his political career.

He's someone who connects with people who are blue collar, people who are really looking for someone whose life experience connects a bit more with theirs. So I think he reaches a cross-section of people that perhaps sometimes other candidates may not.

Like Huckabee and Palin, Pawlenty has been open and uncompromising about his Christian faith, once declaring, "If the nation turns its back on God or pushes Him out of the equation, we're going to be a much poorer nation for it." However, unlike the tendency of other candidates, Pawlenty has been much less inclined to make political hay of his faith. One friend, former Minnesota Governor Vin Weber, called Pawlenty a typical Minnesota evangelical, explaining to CBN, "In the south, people are a little more expressive about their faith in politics. In the upper Midwest, we're a little bit more reserved."

Pawlenty's Midwest reserve is on full display in his new book, *Courage to Stand*, which Scott Conroy and Erin McPike, writing on [realclearpolitics.com](#), describe as "notable for its overt humility and avoidance of sweeping statements" that can paint candidates into a political corner.

Like most biographies penned by presidential hopefuls, Pawlenty's book is heavy on

positive highlights of his political career, and includes his own prescription for getting America back on track. But unlike the bombastic styles of other high-profile candidates, Pawlenty prefers a more humble approach, explaining in his book, “Because of human frailty, it’s important that leaders avoid the temptation to be self-righteous. Confidence and strength are one thing; a false notion of personal perfection is another.”

And while as governor Pawlenty was uncompromising in his support of both life and traditional marriage — in a state known as a hot-bed of abortion-rights and homosexual activism — he allowed neither issue to overpower his reputation. It is an approach he would continue if he were President. He writes:

Today, two lightning-rod issues associated with social policy are abortion and gay marriage. I’m pro-life and in favor of traditional marriage, but when I talk about these issues, I watch my tone.

Comparing Pawlenty’s often self-effacing tone in *Courage to Stand* with Palin’s “look at me” approach in her own bio *Going Rogue*, Conroy and McPike note, for example, that while the former Alaska governor “writes about her triumphant exploits as a starting guard on her state championship high school basketball team, Pawlenty seems unashamed to note that he never made it past the junior varsity level in hockey — yet he still exudes passion for the sport.”

And while Palin’s book “portrays a take-no-prisoners approach to politics” and is “replete with rampant score settling with former staff members and political adversaries,” in his own book Pawlenty “has scarcely a negative word about anyone and praises Democrats ranging from Bill Clinton to John Mellencamp.”

But his gracious demeanor hardly means Pawlenty would be a pushover in the bare-knuckle arena of DC politics. “People shouldn’t confuse being nice or thoughtful or civil [for not] being strong,” Pawlenty said recently during an appearance on ABC’s *The View*. Pointing to a GOP icon of an earlier era, Pawlenty noted that President Ronald Reagan “had strong views, but he presented himself in a civil, thoughtful, decent, kind manner. There were almost no instances where Ronald Reagan yelled, screamed, judged, condemned.”

Although Pawlenty trails current GOP favorite Huckabee in the polls, the [Weekly Standard](#) has said that he may be “the most underestimated Republican presidential candidate — one who could appeal to the Tea Party and the Republican establishment.”

In the aftermath of the tragic shootings in Tucson, Pawlenty demonstrated that he may, indeed, have the deftness to traverse politically dangerous waters and to position himself as a voice of reason among the GOP herd. Asked about Palin’s unfortunate use of a crosshairs image in a marketing campaign targeting potentially vulnerable congressional seats such as that of critically wounded Representative Gabrielle Giffords, Pawlenty told the [New York Times](#),

It's not a device I would have chosen to do. Everybody has got their own style or different approaches. But I don't want to have anyone infer that there's evidence in this case that it caused or was a contributing factor [in the attack]. We don't know that.

Asked if he thought the Presidency is something within his skill level, Pawlenty was uncharacteristically bold in his response, telling ABC's *Nightline* that there is "no doubt in my mind I'd be prepared to be President."

Nonetheless, in light of the intensity of a presidential run and how it impacts every corner of a candidate's life, Pawlenty said that he is still weighing some important issues, such as what his presence in the campaign would mean to his party, as well as the personal concerns of "the impact on my family and my other life obligations."