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Republican Pawlenty Sets Up Committee to Explore 2012 Presidency Candidacy

By John McCormick - Mar 22, 2011

Former Minnesota Governor [Tim Pawlenty](#) announced yesterday he's forming a committee to explore a bid for the 2012 Republican presidential nomination, becoming the first major prospective candidate to do so.

"The two challenges for him are name identification and campaign money," said Steven Schier, a political science professor at [Carleton College](#) in Northfield, Minnesota, who has followed Pawlenty's career. "He can run an executive branch well, but he's not very charismatic and he doesn't really stand out in a crowd. That's going to be a problem."

In a video [announcing](#) his committee that featured patriotic images and Minnesota scenes, Pawlenty, 50, said Americans need to "take back our government."

He called for more jobs, limited government and reforms for entitlement programs such as Medicare.

"There is a brighter future for America," he said in the announcement. "We need to encourage the dreamers and innovators, the small business owners, the hard workers."

The Minneapolis-based committee allows Pawlenty to raise money for a presidential candidacy and also requires him to file paperwork with the [Federal Election Commission](#). His committee created a [website](#) to organize supporters ahead of a more formal potential announcement of candidacy.

Democratic Criticism

The former governor's declaration drew criticism from Democrats in his home state.

"Unfortunately for the people of Minnesota, while Governor Pawlenty was out exploring states near and far, he failed those he was supposed to represent," Ken Martin, the state's Democratic chairman, said in a statement. "Tim Pawlenty left our state facing the largest deficit in Minnesota's 152-year history, drove up property taxes and fees on middle-class families and small businesses alike, all while making draconian cuts to education that forced some schools into four-day weeks."

Minnesota faces a forecast budget deficit of \$5 billion for its next two-year budget cycle, down from \$6.2 billion when Pawlenty left office in January after two terms.

The former governor added some user fees while avoiding any “broad-based tax increases,” Schier said.

Pawlenty was given an “A” for his fiscal record in a 2010 [analysis](#) of National Association of State Budget Officers data by the Washington-based [Cato Institute](#), a policy research organization that advocates limited government and lower taxes.

Minnesota’s [population](#) grew 7.8 percent between 2000 and 2010, more than anywhere else in the Midwest except [South Dakota](#), according to 2010 census data.

Jobless Rate

During the worst recession since the Great Depression, the state’s unemployment never was as high as the national average. It peaked at 8.4 percent in May and June 2009 and has been on the decline since. By January, the most recent month available, it was down to 6.7 percent, below the U.S. average of 8.9 percent in February.

Pawlenty has already made several trips to Iowa, [New Hampshire](#) and [South Carolina](#), states with early contests in the nomination contest and places where he would need a strong showing to gain momentum. The lead-off [Iowa](#) caucuses are tentatively scheduled for Feb. 6, 2012.

[National polls](#) of Republicans have shown him barely registering as a presidential candidate, typically receiving about 3 percentage points of support.

Pawlenty has recruited an experienced team of political strategists, especially in Iowa, where he has the support of consultant Eric Woolson and Chuck Larson, a former state party chairman.

Gingrich Website

No well-known Republicans have yet formally declared plans to challenge President Barack Obama’s 2012 re-election bid, although former House Speaker Newt Gingrich said on March 3 that he was starting a [website](#) to explore a run.

Four years ago, when no incumbent was in the presidential contest, a total of 17 Republicans and Democrats had signaled their candidacies or set up exploratory committees by the end of January 2007, including Obama and then-Senator [Hillary Clinton](#) of [New York](#), who now serves as secretary of state.

Obama has already started raising money and rallying supporters for Democratic races in 2012, including his own. The headquarters for his re-election bid will be based in [Chicago](#), his adopted hometown.

Other Republicans

Some of 2012's other prospective Republican candidates include former Arkansas Governor Mike Huckabee, who won the Iowa caucuses in 2008, former Massachusetts Governor Mitt Romney, former Alaska Governor Sarah Palin, Governor Mitch Daniels of Indiana, and former Utah Governor Jon Huntsman, who is stepping down as ambassador to [China](#) in April.

Mississippi Governor Haley Barbour has also expressed interest in the race and has begun traveling to states that hold early primaries and caucuses, as has former U.S. Senator Rick Santorum of [Pennsylvania](#). Barbour is scheduled to visit [Nevada](#), another early primary state, today.

The lack of a clear Republican frontrunner has encouraged others, including Representative [Michele Bachmann](#) of [Minnesota](#), a Tea Party favorite, to position themselves for potential runs.

"She has already generated more enthusiasm than Pawlenty," Schier said of Bachmann.

Pawlenty can make a case for himself to Tea Party activists, who support limited government and lower taxes, because he defended against tax increases in a state that Democrats have dominated, Schier said.

"He was a goalie for Tea Party values," he said. "He was basically playing goalie and defense."

To contact the reporter on this story: John McCormick in Chicago at jmccormick16@bloomberg.net.

To contact the editor responsible for this story: [Mark Silva](#) in [Washington](#) at msilva34@bloomberg.net.