



The raw truth about power and ambition in Florida

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### Tim Pawlenty press-palooza. Prez candidate barnstorms FL, explains record

From gay marriage to global warming to immigration and taxes, Republican presidential candidate Tim Pawlenty doesn't flinch from a chance to sit down and answer questions about his record and his candidacy (unlike many candidates). Pawlenty sat down yesterday afternoon with the St. Petersburg Times on camera and then after a day of fundraising, did the same with the Miami Herald. Here's a partial transcript:

Q: You're racking up endorsements from top Florida legislators, but stuck at the bottom of the polls. Why?

Pawlenty: "The early days of campaigning in a state like Florida are retail....Early polls don't predict anything, ultimately. If they did, Hillary Clinton or Rudy Giuliani would be president today. National polls basically always misinterpret the final outcome or mis-predict the final outcome."

Q: Explain Florida's role in your campaign and the election?

Pawlenty: "Florida plays a pivotal role not just in the general election, but more often than not in the primary. This can be kind of the state where the putative nominee is selected. So we take that very seriously."

Q: What do you think of the debt ceiling?

Pawlenty: "The debt ceiling agreement was really disappointing. This is an agreement that doesn't really fix the problem....But they didn't really fix the underlying structural problem of the country."

Q: Are you letting the perfect become the enemy of the good? Why not accept something mediocre?

Pawlenty: "I don't think underwhelming or disappointing or mediocre or below average or flat-out pathetic is good enough for America anymore. We are in deep trouble. And the standard shouldn't be: What are those things that we can do that are mediocre, disappointing, underwhelming, uninspiring or lacking in courage? The standard should be: What can we do to continue this country to be the greatest country on the face of the earth. We should have a president who's leading the debate on these issues? And instead he's hiding, he's ducking, he's bobbing, he's weaving. You can't even find him on the major financial issues of our day. How he would reform Social Security. How he would reform Medicare. How he would reform Medicaid and so on.

"Most of the things that they've now promised are in the future. They're

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contingent upon future action. And guess what? A future president and a future Congress could undo or duck all of those as well...."

Q: What would you do with Social Security?

Pawlenty: "If you're on the program now or anywhere near eligibility, you shouldn't have your benefits impacted. But if you're in the next generation, we're telling you now with several decades of warning, we're going to gradually raise the retirement age over time. If you're lower income or middle income, you should still get your cost-of-living adjustment. But in the future, if you're real wealthy, we're going to have to slow that down or take it away. That's the way it is. This thing is drowning. And what people don't realize, if we don't make these kinds of changes, in current law, Social Security gets automatic cuts for everybody. So anybody who's in favor of doing nothing is in favor of cutting Social Security. And there are similar answers for Medicaid and Medicare."

Q: Some of the increased spending happened in the Bush years, when two wars, a new Medicare prescription drug entitlement program and tax cuts were approved. Why not scale back all of that, including the tax cuts?

Pawlenty: "You have to look back at what got us into the mess. And, again, revenues kept up with the private economy. It's the government spending that went way beyond that..."

"While it's fair to say that parties in Congress and both parties in the White House contributed to this problem, it's also absolutely true that President Obama has made it exponentially worse. When President Bush left office, the deficit was approximately \$500 billion. It is now approximately now \$1.5 trillion. In other words, president Obama has essentially tripled the deficit. To make matters worse, he promised in the first few months of his presidency, that he would cut the deficit in half during his first term, which has turned out to be a broken promise."

Q: Part of the Obama deficit was the stimulus, but a number of Republican governors such as yourself both bashed it and took the money at the same time. How do you explain that?

Pawlenty: "There's a lot of reasons for it. If the federal government is dumb enough to give it to us, we'll be smart enough to take it. In Minnesota's case, we are not a net taker of money from the federal government. According to the Tax Foundation, for every dollar Minnesota sends to the federal government, we get approximately 73 cents back.... We more than pay for our share of federal spending."

Q: The Club for Growth gave you credit for stopping more than \$7 billion in proposed tax increases and for holding down spending from a liberal legislature, but it expressed concern about what it called your "nanny-state" solution to cut down on smoking and fund public healthcare by hiking taxes on cigarettes. Can you explain?

Pawlenty: "That's something I wouldn't have done if I had to do over again. We were in a government shutdown – the first in 150 years. We were having an epic battle over taxes and funding issues. That was part of a compromise which I won overall. But it was one of the concessions that we made. It's not really a big difference, but for your information the issue of whether that was a tax or a user fee was litigated in court and it was determined by the court as a matter of law to be a fee...."

"If you look at my record in Minnesota, compared to the other candidates in this race, it's the best record by far.... Cato Institute gave only four governors in the country an A-grade for fiscal leadership and management. I'm one of the four. The other three aren't running for

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president...

"If you look at my record on spending, we took it from historic highs to historic lows. I set a record for vetoes. I had the first government shut down in 150 years. I took more out of the budget using executive authority in Minnesota in my eight years as governor than all the 142 years of governors combined. I was called the most conservative governor in the history of the state... You do what I did, and it was a Battle Royale and I won most of them."

Q: You also no longer favor a cap-and-trade global-warming solution, right?

Pawlenty: "Like most of the major candidates on the Republican side to varying degrees, everybody studied it, looked at it. We did the same. But I concluded, in the end some years ago, that it was a bad idea... We never actually implemented it. I concluded ultimately it was a bad idea. It would be harmful to the economy. The science was I think based on unreliable conclusions."

Q: Do you think there's man-made climate change?

Pawlenty: "Well, there's definitely climate change. The more interesting question is how much is a result of natural causes and how much, if any, is attributable to human behavior. And that's what the scientific dispute is about."

Q: Were do you fall on the spectrum?

Pawlenty: "It's something we have to look to the science on. The weight of the evidence is that most of it, maybe all of it, is because of natural causes. But to the extent there is some element of human behavior causing some of it – that's what the scientific debate is about. That's why we've seen all this back and forth between some of those prominent scientists in the world arguing about that very point."

Q: There is a strong case for man-made climate change, according to a University of Miami climate researcher I've spoken to. You don't agree with him?

Pawlenty: "There's lots of layers to it. But at least as to any potential man-made contribution to it, it's fair to say the science is in dispute. There's a lot of people who say the majority of the scientists think this way. And there's a minority that way. And you count the number of scientists versus the quality of scientists and the like. But I think it's fair to say that, as to whether and how much – if any – is attributable to human behavior, there's dispute and controversy over it..... Cap and trade I thought is a ham-fisted, expensive, job-ruing economy-stifling approach."

Q: What about immigration?

Pawlenty: "The first thing we need to do is enforce the border.. I was one of the first governors in the country to dispatch the Minnesota National Guard to the Arizona border as part of Operation Jump Start."

Q How about requiring private-employers to use the E-Verify system. Should there be that mandate.

Pawlenty: "The system we have now is a 1950s paper-based system that is susceptible to fraud. So in the year 2011, in the world of iPads and instant everything, it's reasonable to have a more modern, more accurate, less burdensome verification system. And E-Verify isn't perfect. It's getting better. In Minnesota it's a system that we used with pretty good success."

Q: Would you favor a national mandate for private employers to use

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## E-Verify?

Pawlenty: "The system we have now is untenable.... And it's incumbent on the federal government to have a system that employers can use that is quick, fair, accurate, non-burdensome that verifies somebody's eligibility for employment or public benefits..."

"I issued several executive orders in Minnesota directing folks that if you want to seek employment with the state of Minnesota, or be a contractor with the state of Minnesota or a subcontractor, you had to use E-Verify."

Q: How about private employers?

Pawlenty: "We should say to private employers, if you knowingly hire illegal immigrants, there's going to be a consequence. I underline the word 'knowingly.' And you make available a system like E-Verify. I don't know that you need to require them to use it. But if they refuse to use it, or don't use it and then knowingly engage in illegal behavior, there should be a consequence for that."

Q: A gay conservative group (GOProud) won't be allowed to participate in the CPAC conference. What do you think of that?

Pawlenty: "I'm not familiar with that particular controversy. But I don't think Republicans or conservatives should be afraid of debating the issues. We can agree or disagree on the merits of it. I'm for more debate, not less debate."

Q: So you'd be in favor of the group being included?

Pawlenty: "I don't know what the details are of the rules in the convention -- what they're expecting or demanding in terms of booth space or whatever. There's always more to these stories. I'd like to know what the other side of the story is. It's hard for me to address without knowing the details of the dispute."

Q: How about gay marriage?

Pawlenty: "I'm a strong supporter of defining marriage as between man and woman. It's a cornerstone of our culture and our society for obvious reasons. I don't think all domestic relationships should be deemed legally or otherwise the same as traditional marriage. I think that needs to remain elevated. When I was in the Minnesota Legislature, I was a co-author of the Defense of Marriage Act defining marriage as between a man and a woman. I support a state and federal amendment to the constitutions defining amendments as such."

Q: How do you support being a small-government conservative, yet favor this government limitation on private individuals?

Pawlenty: "The Constitution and our statutes and laws more broadly grant or prohibit all kinds of behaviors or rights. So I don't think it's out of bounds in that regard. And number 2, we have courts who have demonstrated they think they know better than the people on our statutes. And they feel that they should insert their personal or political views into these matters. And the only way to limit courts excesses in that regard is to put it in our statutes and our Constitution."

Q: Can you describe Obama in one word?

Inept.

Q: Mitt Romney?

Pawlenty: "Well, I'm not going to play the word game with the Republican opponents... (It's) interesting fodder for you guys, but not so interesting for me."

Q: Name a regret in the campaign?

Pawlenty: "In one of the debates I had recently, I was asked a direct point about Massachusetts' healthcare and I stayed focused on Obama, didn't answer the question about Mitt's role in healthcare in Massachusetts. That was viewed by some as a missed opportunity. I think I was. It's something I would have done differently.... The Massachusetts healthcare plan was the blueprint or the forerunner of ObamaCare."

Q: Name a regret as governor?

Pawlenty: "I took on the teacher unions hard. We made some big changes. But the future of my state and the future of our country in significant measure depends on getting as many of our children educated and skilled. And the teacher union stands in the way of that. I took them on hard. But as I look back on that, I should have taken it even further."

Why is Rick Perry such a topic right now and, before him, Michele Bachmann?

"The early polls aren't good predictors of how it ends. If they were, Hillary Clinton or Rudy Giuliani would be president today There's always these ups and downs. Donald Trump was going to be the next big thing.... This is a long road."


"The race is unsettled. It's getting more and more settled. I think Rick Perry will run. He's a friend of mine. I know him well. He'll bring a lot to the debate. But we all have different strengths and weaknesses. After the initial buzz.... You've gotta go answer the questions. You've gotta go talk to the press. You gotta have all your record reviewed and explored."

"What looks like a certainty in the summer before the summer before the election is almost never certainly when the election comes."

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Posted by Marc Caputo on August 3, 2011 | [Permalink](#)

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Tim Pawlenty will say anything to get elected, it seems.



It's bad enough that his mismanagement left Minnesota's budget billions in the red. Now he wants to deny gay Americans an equal right to marriage -- even the ones who are in the military, putting themselves on the line for love of God and country.

Gay people have been getting married for years, and it hasn't hurt straight marriages one bit. It's 2011. Dick Cheney and Laura Bush support gay marriage, for cryin' out loud. You really have to wonder about people who are so concerned with showing they're anti-gay in this day and age. Time and time again, we find out that many of them have skeletons in their own closet (remember Larry "Wide Stance" Craig)!

Posted by: softshoe | [August 04, 2011 at 12:42 AM](#)

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