

Gubernatorial Toss Up in Bread and Butter Campaign

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September 20, 2006

Governor Tim Pawlenty and Attorney General Mike Hatch are tied in what is shaping up as a classic bread and butter campaign, according to a survey of 1,023 Minnesota voters in the week following the primary. Why the Governor is not in the lead is the big question. He enjoys a number of advantages including high approval ratings and voter satisfaction with the state's direction and the respect of voters for his handling of the economy. What was expected to be his big liability – the unpopularity of President George Bush – is surprisingly not a factor. Instead, the Governor finds himself locked in a draw because voters are preoccupied with education and health care and Hatch enjoys a commanding advantage on these issues. The survey was conducted between September 13 and 18, 2006. (Primary elections were held on September 12th.)

Toss Up: Forty-four percent of likely voters indicated they would vote for Hatch, 42 supported Pawlenty, 9 percent favored Independence Party candidate Peter Hutchinson and 5 percent did not respond. The difference between Hatch and Pawlenty is within the 3.9 percent margin of error and should be considered a toss up.

Horse Race Among Likely Voters

	Pawlenty	Hatch	Hutchinson	Don't Know/ Other/ Refused
Total	42%	44%	9%	5%
Republican	90%	4%	4%	3%
Independent	38%	35%	21%	6%
Democrat	6%	85%	5%	5%

Hutchinson may end up being the spoiler but so far he is not hurting either candidate. His support is coming equally from Democrats and Republicans. **One surprise is that Pawlenty and Hatch are both scoring substantially better than Hutchinson among independent voters** that are not aligned with the 2 other major parties.

Although Hutchinson's support is notable, it appears to be unstable. 59% of Minnesotans who prefer him said that they might change their minds; this is 2 to 3 times higher than the case with

his two major contenders. The Governor’s support is a bit more stable than Hatch’s -- 86 percent of Pawlenty’s supporters indicate that their decision is “definite” as compared to 79 percent among Hatch supporters.

The Big Puzzle: Why isn’t Governor Pawlenty leading his Democratic opponent? He is well liked, benefiting from generally good evaluations of the state’s direction and economy, and is *not* being pulled down by President George Bush, as the Governor himself feared.

An impressive 56 percent approve of Pawlenty’s job performance as Governor.

Strong Approval of Pawlenty’s Job Performance

Pawlenty’s Job as Governor	
Approve	56%
Disapprove	41%
Don't Know / Refused	3%

A plurality of 48 percent of likely Minnesota voters report that the state is heading in the right direction as compared to 43 percent who indicate that it is on the wrong track. Seven out of 10 voters who like the state’s direction plan to vote for Pawlenty. (Numbers may not total exactly 100, due to rounding.)

Pawlenty Benefits from Good Feeling About the State’s Direction

	Total	Plan to vote for Pawlenty	Plan to vote for Hatch	Plan to vote for Hutchinson	Don't Know/ Other/ Refused
Direction of Minnesota					
Right Direction	48%	70%	19%	7%	4%
Wrong Track	43%	12%	71%	12%	5%
Don't Know / Refused	9%	37%	44%	5%	14%

“It’s the Economy, stupid” has been a common refrain since the Clinton campaign made it famous in 1992 and offers another positive sign for Pawlenty. A plurality of 46% who identify the economy as Minnesota’s most important issue plan to vote for the Governor rather than Hatch (39 percent). By an even wider 44-34 margin, voters concerned about the economy are convinced that the Governor will do a better job handling it.

Pawlenty Favored Among Voters Identifying Economy as State’s Top Issue

	Plan to vote for Pawlenty	Plan to vote for Hatch	Plan to vote for Hutchinson	Don't Know/ Other/ Refused
The economy is Minnesota’s most important issue	46%	39%	8%	6%
	Pawlenty will do better job handling issue	Hatch will do better job handling issue	Hutchinson will do better job handling issue	Don't Know/ Other/ Refused
The economy is Minnesota’s most important issue	44%	34%	9%	12%

In most elections, the incumbent would be leading if a balance of voters liked him, believed the state is heading in the right direction, and are persuaded that the incumbent will do a better job on the all-important issue of the economy.

President Bush is not to blame for the Governor’s struggles. Although the President’s approval numbers are quite low (38 percent), 16 percent of voters who dislike Bush are still supporting Pawlenty and 24 percent of the supermajority of Minnesotans who believe the nation is off on the wrong track plan to vote for the Governor. This pattern of sustained support for the Governor in the face of harsh evaluations of Bush holds across a range of specific policy areas from the economy to the Iraq War. Pawlenty is not being engulfed by a backlash against Bush and the country’s direction.

No Significant Bush Backlash

	Total	Plan to vote for Pawlenty	Plan to vote for Hatch	Plan to vote for Hutchinson	Don't Know/ Other/ Refused
Bush Job as President					
Approve	38%	84%	7%	6%	3%
Disapprove	60%	16%	68%	11%	6%
Don't Know / Refused	2%	23%	39%	15%	23%
Direction of the United States					
Right Direction	26%	89%	6%	3%	2%
Wrong Track	70%	24%	59%	12%	6%
Don't Know / Refused	5%	47%	33%	3%	17%

We conducted an indepth analysis of Bush’s impact on Pawlenty but failed to find significant damage. We ran an experiment that randomly assigned half the respondents to report whether they approved or disapproved of the Governor’s job performance *before* they were asked a series of questions about the President’s performance on a range of issues. The other half of respondents were asked to report whether they approved or disapproved of the Governor’s job performance *after* they were asked the questions about the President’s performance. If the President’s unpopularity was hurting the Governor, the Governor’s approval ratings should have been lower among voters who first evaluated Bush. We found no significant impact; the Governor’s ratings remained statistically unchanged.

The Quality of Life Backlash: The major drag on the Governor appears to be domestic issues that define Minnesotans’ quality of life – education and health care. **Voters rate education and health care as the state’s single most important issues and Hatch enjoys a strong advantage on them; the economy lags behind them as an important problem and Pawlenty’s advantage is comparatively smaller on it.**

In terms of the issues that voters rank as most important in Minnesota, twenty-three percent identify education, 23% identify health care, and 15% identify the economy. National security policies – the Iraq War and terrorism – are not prominent state issues five years after the 9/11 terrorist attacks. One of the biggest surprises is that social issues associated with the Governor – illegal immigration and gay marriage – only weakly register as concerns of voters.

Education and Health Care Dominate as the State's Single Most Important Issues

Education	Health Care	The economy	The war in Iraq	Illegal Immigration	Gas Prices	Terrorism	Gay marriage	Don't Know/ Other/ Refused
23%	23%	15%	12%	7%	5%	5%	4%	6%

On the two issues that most concern Minnesotans, Hatch holds a commanding advantage over Pawlenty. Among voters identifying education and health care as the state's single most important issue, approximately 55 percent support Hatch compared to about a third for the Governor. By contrast, the Governor holds a 7 point advantage on the less salient issue of the economy. An even larger gulf opens up when voters are asked about which candidate will do a better job handling the top problems facing the state. On health care, Hatch boosts a gaping 33 point advantage, 57 percent to 24 percent. Even among Minnesotans who plan to vote for the Governor, 14 percent concede that the Attorney General will do a better job on health care (data not presented).

Hatch Holds Commanding Advantage on the State's Top Two Issues

	Plan to vote for Pawlenty	Plan to vote for Hatch	Plan to vote for Hutchinson	Don't Know/ Other/ Refused
Minnesota's most important issues				
Education	32%	55%	9%	5%
Health Care	33%	54%	10%	3%
The economy	46%	39%	8%	6%
	Pawlenty will do better job handling issue	Hatch will do better job handling issue	Hutchinson will do better job handling issue	Don't Know/ Other/ Refused
Education	30%	51%	6%	13%
Health Care	24%	57%	6%	14%
The economy	44%	34%	9%	12%

Modest Gender Gap: Women favor Hatch over Pawlenty by 11 points while men tilt toward the Governor by 7 points.

Hatch holds Advantage Among Women, Pawlenty Among Men

	Pawlenty	Hatch	Hutchinson	Don't Know/ Other/ Refused
Gender				
Male	46%	39%	11%	4%
Female	38%	49%	6%	7%

About the Survey

The Center for the Study of Politics and Governance at the University of Minnesota's Humphrey Institute of Public Affairs designed the survey. The Center and Humphrey Institute are non-partisan academic institutions that are committed to rigorous research that contributes to informed discussions of elections and public affairs more generally.

The research team was Lawrence R. Jacobs (director) and Joanne M. Miller. Melanie Burns provided superior research assistance. Jacobs and Miller are responsible for designing and analyzing the survey. No statements of fact, interpretations, or conclusions should be attributed to the Humphrey Institute.

The survey was fielded by the Center for Survey Research and Analysis (CSRA) at the University of Connecticut, which has extensive national and state experience conducting non-partisan surveys on politics and government policy. CSRA called a sample of telephone exchanges that was randomly selected by a computer from a list of active residential exchanges within the State of Minnesota. Within each exchange, random digits were added to form a complete telephone number, thus permitting access to both listed and unlisted numbers. The sample was designed to represent different regions of the state in proportion to the number of adults living in each region. Within each household, one adult was selected to be the respondent for the survey.

1,023 residents of Minnesota were interviewed by telephone between September 13 and 18, 2006. Results are based on a model that adjusts responses according to the likelihood of a respondent voting. Likelihood to vote is based on the following factors: the likelihood of voting as reported by the respondent, voter registration, past voting behavior, and interest in the election. In addition, the results have been weighted to reflect the number of adults in a household and the number of telephone lines reaching the household as well as the demographic characteristics of Minnesota based on region, sex, age, education, and race.

The distribution of party identification among likely voters analyzed in this survey is as follows:

Republican	30%
Independent	23%
Democrat	37%

In theory, in 19 cases out of 20 the results among likely voters will differ by no more than 3.9 percentage points in either direction from what would have been obtained by interviewing all likely voters in the state. For smaller subgroups the margin of sampling error is larger.

In addition to sampling error, the practical difficulties of conducting any survey of public opinion may introduce sources of error into the poll. Variations in the wording and order of questions, for example, may lead to somewhat different results.