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Gubernatorial candidate Hutchinson says Pawlenty, Hatch are ducking chance to debate

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In an eclectic process which included the use of yellow ducks, the final five gubernatorial debates emerged on Wednesday (Sept. 20).

Independence Party gubernatorial candidate Peter Hutchinson, flanked by supporters in duck suits, appeared at the Capitol to lambast his gubernatorial opponents for not debating.

Hutchinson charged that Gov. Tim Pawlenty and Attorney General Mike Hatch were skipping out on what amounted to job interviews with the voters — debates.

Hutchinson read off series of proposed debates that never took place.

At each mention, the ducks, labeled "Tim id Tim" and "Mad Mike," tossed a symbolic small plastic duck on the floor.

But Hatch campaign spokesperson Leslie Sandberg said Hatch wanted to debate Pawlenty. "This campaign is about his (Pawlenty's) job performance," she said.

With less than 50 days to Election Day, there has been two gubernatorial debates — one at Farm Fest in August and the other at the Minnesota Chamber of Commerce last week.

Hutchinson was generally credited with performing well at the Chamber debate.

Late Wednesday afternoon the Pawlenty campaign published a list of five debates governor Pawlenty has agreed to attend.

The first, sponsored by Debate Minnesota, will take place next Wednesday (Sept. 27) evening at 7 p.m. at Ted Mann Concert Hall at the University of Minnesota.

On Oct. 5, a debate is scheduled at the Rochester Chamber of Commerce with two televised debates — KSTP-TV/League of Women Voters on Oct. 29 and public television's "Amanac" on Nov. 3 — scheduled.

The final debate is expected to take place on Sunday, Nov. 5, on Minnesota Public Radio.

Late Wednesday, Hutchinson, in a statement, lamented only a handful of debates remained.

"If he (Pawlenty) gets his way, the people of Minnesota will have only seven opportunities to evaluate the candidates for governor," said Hutchinson, including the first two debates.

"He doesn't want to face the people of Minnesota, and the people are the ultimate voters," said Hutchinson.

The Pawlenty campaign did not respond to an e-mail for comment.